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Literacy and Italian L2 Learning in Low Educated Adults

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CONTENTS

Foreword.....	III
1. Literacy.....	1
1.1. What does illiterate mean?.....	1
1.2. Different kinds of literacy: an international definition.....	1
1.3. World literacy today.....	3
1.4. Adult education and literacy in Italy.....	8
1.4.1. Italian “literacy courses” for immigrants.....	8
1.4.2. Lifelong learning path in Italy.....	9
1.4.3. A few data on immigration and literacy in Italy.....	12
1.4.4. The situation in the Brescia area.....	13
1.5. Teaching adults.....	15
1.5.1. Motivation.....	16
1.6. Literacy issues in the L2.....	19
1.6.1. Adult pre-A1 literacy levels.....	21
1.7. Alphabetisation approaches.....	22
1.8. Pre-literacy.....	26
2. The study.....	27
2.1. The context.....	27
2.2. Aims of the research.....	27
2.3. Instruments for data collection.....	30
2.3.1 Anecdotal form.....	30
2.3.2. Exercises.....	30
2.3.3. Questionnaire.....	31
2.3.4. Interview to the CTP teacher.....	32
3. Didactic module.....	33
3.1. Didactic aims.....	33
3.2. Didactic plan.....	33
3.3. Educational aims.....	35

3.4. Elaboration of the activities.....	35
3.5. The learning unit.....	36
3.5.1. Shop signs and symbols of public places.....	36
3.5.2. Inside the supermarket.....	38
3.5.3. Shop notices.....	43
3.5.5. Products.....	45
3.5.6. Timetables.....	47
3.5.7. Final test.....	48
3.5.8. A visit to a supermarket.....	50
4. Final observations.....	53
4.1. The CTP course and the students.....	53
4.1.1. The class setting.....	53
4.1.2. The class composition.....	54
4.1.3. The class activities.....	54
4.1.4. Participation to the class activities.....	55
4.1.5. Specific activities for illiterate people.....	56
4.1.6. The subjects.....	57
4.2. Observations after the learning unit proposed by the researcher.....	60
4.2.1. Attendance.....	60
4.2.2. Motivation.....	61
4.2.3. Answers to the students' needs.....	62
4.2.4. Problems faced during the activities.....	64
4.2.5. Employment of literacy skills in a real everyday context.....	66
Conclusion.....	68
Appendix: Interview to the CTP teacher.....	69
Bibliography.....	74

FOREWORD

“A educação problematizadora, que não é fixismo reacionária, é futuridade revolucionária. Daí que seja profética e, como tal, esperançosa. Daí que corresponda à condição dos homens como seres históricos e à sua historicidade. Daí que se identifique com eles como seres mais além de si mesmos, como “projetos” como seres que caminham para frente, que olham para frente; como seres a quem o imobilismo ameaça de morte; para quem o olhar para traz não deve ser uma forma nostálgica de querer voltar, mas um modo de melhor conhecer o que está sendo, para melhor construir o futuro. Daí que se identifique com o movimento permanente em que se acham inscritos os homens, como seres que se sabem inconclusos; movimento que é histórico e que tem o seu ponto de partida, o seu sujeito, o seu objetivo. O ponto de partida deste movimento está nos homens mesmos. Mas, como não há homens sem mundo, sem realidade, o movimento parte das relações omens-mundo. Daí que este ponto de partida esteja sempre nos homens no seu aqui e no seu agora que constituem a situação em que se encontram ora imersos, ora mersos, ora insertados. Somente a partir desta situação, que lhes determina a própria percepção que dela estão tendo, é que podem mover-se. E, para fazê-lo, autenticamente, é necessário, inclusive, que a situação em que estão não lhes apareça como algo fatal e intransponível, mas como uma situação desafiadora, que apenas os limita.

[...] Desta forma, aprofundando a tomada de consciência da situação, os homens se “apropriam” dela como realidade histórica, por isto mesmo, capaz de ser transformada por eles.

O fatalismo cede, então, seu lugar ao ímpeto de transformação e de busca, de que os homens se sentem sujeitos.

[...] Por isso a alfabetização não pode ser feita de cima para baixo, como uma dádiva ou uma imposição, mas de dentro para fora, pelo próprio analfabeto e apenas com a colaboração do educador. Ninguém educa ninguém, ninguém educa a si mesmo; os homens educam-se entre si, mediados pelo mundo” (Freire 1970)¹.

Freire, one of the main pedagogists who dealt with the problem of illiteracy, reminds us of the social function of education and literacy

¹ “L’educazione problematizzante, che non è un cristallizzarsi reazionario, è probabilità rivoluzionaria di futuro. Quindi è profetica e per questo capace di speranza. Corrisponde alla condizione degli uomini come esseri storici e alla loro storicità. Si identifica in loro come esseri che vanno oltre se stessi, come “progetti”, come esseri che camminano in avanti, che guardano in avanti; come esseri che l’immobilismo minaccia mortalmente; per i quali guardarsi indietro non deve essere una forma nostalgica di voler tornare, ma un modo per conoscere meglio ciò che stanno divenendo, per costruire meglio il futuro. Quindi si identifica col movimento permanente in cui gli uomini sono inseriti, come esseri che fanno di essere inconclusi; movimento che è storico e ha il suo punto di partenza, il suo soggetto e il suo obiettivo. Il punto di partenza di questo movimento si trova proprio negli uomini. Ma, poiché non esistono uomini senza mondo e senza realtà, il movimento parte dai rapporti uomini/mondo. Cioè il punto di partenza si trova sempre negli uomini, nel loro qui e nel loro adesso, che costituiscono poi la situazione in cui si trovano ora immersi, ora emersi, ora inseriti. Solo a partire da questa situazione, che determina anche la percezione che ne hanno, essi possono muoversi. E per farlo autenticamente è necessario, fra l’altro, che la situazione in cui si trovano non appaia loro come qualcosa di fatale e insuperabile, ma come una sfida, che solo li limita.

[...] In questo modo, approfondendo la presa di coscienza della situazione, gli uomini se ne “appropriano” in quanto realtà storica, cioè in quanto realtà suscettibile di essere da essi trasformata.

Il fatalismo allora cede il posto all’impeto di trasformazione e di ricerca, in cui gli uomini si sentono soggetti.

[...] Pertanto l’alfabetizzazione non può essere fatta dall’alto in basso, come un dono o una imposizione, ma da dentro a fuori, attraverso il proprio alfabeto e con la sola collaborazione dell’educatore. Nessuno educa nessuno, nessuno si educa da solo, gli uomini si educano insieme, con la mediazione del mondo” (Freire 1970, trad. it a cura di Linda Bimbi).

issues. His observations are still very topical as, even though in different terms with regard to the context in which he wrote (the 1970's in Brazil), the literacy issue is still there. Even in the so-called developed Countries we can find phenomena as the relapse into illiteracy of people who attended school but are not fully able to manage language skills, and as illiteracy of people (mainly adult immigrants) who had few years of schooling (or no schooling) during childhood.

Our work focuses on these second subjects, in particular on illiterate foreign people who are learning Italian as their L2; although they represent a minority even in the immigrants' communities, it is not rare to meet people with these problems in Italian L2 courses, who take into the class specific issues that need to be taken into consideration in a school that aims at including and not at excluding individuals. School at adult age represents a chance for these people to overcome their limits and to take finally a more active part in society.

In spite of that, the majority of teaching programs do not mention illiterate people as a weak category and only a few materials dealing with these subjects can be found even in L2 learning theories; for this reason we decided to investigate on this subject, trying to apply to a course with illiterate people some of the main glottodidactic theories on L2 learning and teaching.

1. LITERACY

1.1. *What does illiterate mean?*

At a first impression “illiterate” seems a simple concept to define. For the Oxford Dictionary (2010) it is “a person who is unable to read or write” or, extensively, “ignorant in a particular subject or activity”, but if we look at it from a didactic point of view, the concept becomes more complex.

Writing ability consists of knowing the series of graphemes and phonemes that compose a language alphabet², being able to draw the graphemes, being able to join graphemes together to compose a word, being able to match the word sound to its written transposition, being able to discriminate words in the speech continuum. A second aspect of writing ability concerns the composition of a written message: being able to build texts that achieve effective communication is a fundamental skill. Texts have to express the intentions of the writer and be comprehensible for the reader. The writer has to be able to use an adequate text scheme depending on the content, the communicative context and the presumed reader (for a thorough examination of this subject see Minuz 2005). All these abilities are acquired during a process that can take different lengths of time and a person that is commonly defined “illiterate” may possess some of these skills and not possess others.

1.2. *Different kinds of literacy: an international definition*

A more detailed definition of literacy has become necessary for political and statistical reasons before educational ones in a worldwide context where schooling is considered a fundamental factor for economic development and social equality. International organisations became increasingly interested in this field during the 1950's, UNESCO in particular played a leading role in developing international

2 This statement refers to alphabetic language systems, where symbols (graphemes) correspond to specific sounds (phonemes). The case is different for logographic systems, in which symbols mainly correspond to concepts.

policies on literacy. International conferences on this topic were organised to focus on the issue, but there was often a gap between the rhetoric of literacy policy statements and the actual literacy programmes³.

In that period, UNESCO supported the idea of a “fundamental education”, centred mainly on reading and writing skills, which led to the 1958 statement: “A literate person is one who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on his or her everyday life” (UNESCO 2011). This kind of literacy was also called *baseline literacy*, differentiated from the later concept of *functional literacy*, which concerns everyday life. Indeed, according to the definition, a *functional illiterate* is an individual

unable to carry on all the activities for which the elimination of illiteracy is necessary to the good performance of its group and its community and also to enable him to continue to read, write and calculate, for its own development and of that of its community (UNESCO 2003).

This definition marked a distinction from previous traditions that assigned the minimum requirement of literacy to the ability of writing one's own signature and it implied the fact that the notion of functional literate can change according to historical and social changes that require different levels of reading and writing abilities.

These concepts about literacy, which are still valid and used by international organisations, come from the synthesis of two different tendencies in adult literacy which underlie UN interventions. The first one was widespread during the 1960's and it consisted in the thinking that adult education was useful for developing professional skills for an international market system that was taken for granted in western societies. It focused mainly on national economic development objectives and not on the learner's needs in his/her socio-cultural and linguistic context and it was applied in the Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP), promoted by UNESCO from 1965 to 1974. The second one came from Paulo Freire's theories developed during the 1970's - and later elaborations carried out during the 1980's (see UNESCO 2006) - and saw literacy as a fundamental mean to promote the

3 For a thorough examination of this subject see UNESCO, 2006, chap.6.

social development of communities through the growth of social consciousness and political awareness. Freire was a Brazilian educator and philosopher, winner of the UNESCO prize in 1975, whose teaching method focused on literacy as the way of developing self-awareness in the lower classes. He criticized the teacher-student dichotomy and the traditional conception of the student as an “empty box” that had to be filled by the teacher, promoting, on the contrary, an active way of learning. According to Freire, education had to lead learners to take action in socio-political change, become able to criticise institutions and claim rights to improve their condition. These were the main ideas of his critical pedagogy.⁴

The didactic consequences of these definitions - that are in close relation with the Human Rights Declaration principles - are that every adult involved in a formal education system should be first considered as a social actor who has the right to claim his/her own well-being and who holds rights and bears duties towards the community⁵.

1.3. *World literacy today*

According to 2010 data collected by UNESCO, around 16,3% of the world population is illiterate⁶. As we can notice in figure 1.1, the lowest literacy rates can be observed in sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia. We can find adult literacy rates below 50% in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Haiti, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone (all sub-Saharan countries). In Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, the average adult literacy rates are greater than 90%. However, it is important to note that regional averages can hide disparities between one country and another. This is most evident in sub-Saharan Africa, where the adult literacy rate ranges from 26% in Mali to 93% in Equatorial Guinea (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2010).

4 For a thorough examination of Freire's theories and practices see his book *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, 1970.

5 See Alberici 2002.

6 Following the 1958 definition of illiterate.

For what concerns the gender gap, although the literacy rate is gradually decreasing, women are still less literate than men: around one third of the world illiterate are women, with peaks in Arab States, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia (see figure 1.2).

The survey does not take into consideration North America and Western Europe. Literacy (at least baseline literacy) is not considered a problem by international organisations because a small amount of people (less than 2%) has literacy problems in these countries, if related to other areas of the world. However, considering the notion of *functional literacy*, two literacy issues have been emerging in Western countries during the last decades: one is the relapse into illiteracy (people who became literate but later partly lose their literacy because of scarce use of reading and writing abilities) and the other is immigrants' literacy (both in their mother tongue and in the L2 of the host country). While some attention on the first issue has started since the 1980's, scarce attention has been paid to the second issue until recent years, considering illiteracy a problem of the immigrants' countries of origin. Although the problem may be considered of little relevance as far as numbers are concerned, the kind of subjects involved and their possible exclusion from participating as citizens in the country where they live are key aspects that cannot be undervalued.

Both relapse into illiteracy and immigrant's illiteracy are linked with the growing necessity of reading and writing skills in different fields of industrialised societies that recently induced, for instance, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) to carry out studies on people's ability to “apply their knowledge to real-life situations and [...] full participation in society”.⁷ Two survey programs are being carried out:

a) For young people, the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), started in 1997 and repeated every 3 years, aims to evaluate education systems worldwide through testing 15-years-old students all over the world with tests that

are not directly linked to the school curriculum and provide context through the background questionnaires which can help analysts interpret the results. The tests are designed to

⁷ *Program for International Student Assessment*. For a thorough examination see: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/>

assess to what extent students at the end of compulsory education, can apply their knowledge to real-life situations and be equipped for full participation in society.

b) For adults, the ALL (Adult Literacy and Life skills Survey) in the 1990s and IALS (International Adult Skills Survey) in 2003-2006 now evolved in the PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies), created in 2011, which is currently in progress to collect data on people's application of literacy skills in everyday life.

PIAAC assesses the level and distribution of adult skills in a coherent and consistent way across countries. It focusses on the key cognitive and workplace skills that are required for successful participation in the economy and society of the 21st century. PIAAC also gathers a range of other information including the antecedents and outcomes of skills, as well as information on usage of information technology and literacy and numeracy practices generally.⁸

IALS results were discouraging as they showed that of the 20 countries examined (mainly Eastern and Western Europe and North America), 14 have a 15% rate of people who are at the lowest level: they are not able to find out useful information for everyday life from a written text. In Italy, this percentage increases to 34,6% (OECD 2000).

1.3.1. Lifelong Learning and European policies

As seen above, the literacy issue is a complex phenomenon. Even in the so-called “developed countries” the literacy situation is stratified and variable. Moreover, learning throughout life has become more and more necessary in present society, as the context where a person has to live changes continuously because of technological innovation and other phenomena linked to globalisation (like, for example, immigration, emerging Countries, changes in international equilibriums), causing a continuous need of knowledge. In this situation, Lifelong Learning,

8 OECD, *Higher Education and Adult Learning*, <http://www.oecd.org/edu/highereducationandadultlearning/moreaboutpiaacprogrammefortheinternationalassessmentofadultcompetencies.htm>, retrieved on January 2013.

theorised at the beginning of the XXth century by Lindeman (1926), has become a basis that undergoes policies on education.

The value of education during life has been increasingly considered also by European institutions. In 1993 the *White Paper* published by the European Commission lead by Jacques Delors highlighted the importance of an increase of people's knowledge and competences in highly technological economy contexts. In accordance with the international community statements seen above, the White Paper asserts (Commission of the European Communities, 1993: 133):

Education and training systems are expected to solve the problems of the competitiveness of businesses, the employment crisis and the tragedy of social exclusion and marginality - in a word, they are expected to help society to overcome its present difficulties and to control the profound changes which it is currently undergoing.

Four “pillars of education for the future” were set by Delors in his *Report to UNESCO* as chairman of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century (1996):

- a) *Learning to know*: handling learning tools rather than acquiring structured knowledge;
- b) *Learning to do*: training people according to work needs, including ability to innovate, to find new solutions and to adapt one's own learning to future work environments in a world that changes quickly;
- c) *Learning to live together and with others*: becoming able to enact peaceful conflict resolution, knowledge of different people and cultures, community work, economic resilience and social inclusion;
- d) *Learning to be*: educating people for a balanced fulfilment of their own self, mind and body; train them to develop their independent and critical way of thinking and judgement to take action in society.

Based on these principles, in a perspective of wider exchange among education systems in Europe, in 2006 the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) was created by the European Parliament to gather together all the cooperation initiatives on education and training. Four sub-programmes were created:

- *Comenius* for schools
- *Erasmus* for higher education
- *Leonardo da Vinci* for vocational education and training
- *Grundtvig* for adult education.⁹

1.4. *Adult Education and Literacy in Italy*

The Italian education system for adults is characterised by public education managed by regional institutions and additional courses provided by private associations. Public institutions offer a range of courses which goes from basic literacy to foreign languages and Information Technology. Private associations provide similar kinds of courses to increase what is already offered, in particular, courses for cultural development or especially addressed to deprived people (CEDEFOP 2008).

1.4.1. *Italian “literacy courses” for immigrants*

Behind the label “*corso di alfabetizzazione in lingua italiana*”, commonly used by governmental institutions, we can find a wide variety of courses addressed to immigrants who have different mother tongues, bilingualism, different levels of schooling, etc.. The way this label is used in official documents is too generic: it seems to underlie the idea that a person is totally illiterate in a language he/she does not know. According to this conception language systems are closed and there are no contaminations between languages, multilingual expressions or compensation strategies that the learner can use to communicate. It seems to ignore the fact that language use entails the use of metalinguistic competences, strategies and general knowledge too. For example, according to this classification, in an Italian L2 course of basic level both a graduate and a person who does not know how to read and write would be considered illiterate as both do not know

9 For a thorough examination of this subject see the LLP Italian website: http://www.programmallp.it/index.php?id_cnt=30 and the European website on education and training: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm (retrieved on January 2013).

Italian. On the contrary, we can presume that their awareness of language systems, their general knowledge, their study method, their learning strategies and consequently the time they need to learn a new language and/or a new writing system would be considerably different¹⁰.

The term “*corso di alfabetizzazione*” recalls a first phase of teaching in the Italian education system, carried out until 1997, where literacy classes for immigrants were conducted together with literacy classes for illiterate Italians. These courses aimed at giving the possibility to get a basic instruction to people who had not attended school during childhood and where therefore illiterate or weakly literate. In 1997, education policies changed thanks to the recognition of the value of lifelong learning after international meetings described in par. 1.3. From that point onwards, adult education started to be not seen merely as a compensation of low schooling in childhood, but as the necessity and opportunity to learn continuously during life. In spite of this, a certain ambiguity still surrounds public discussion on adult literacy. Ministerial documents, although handling specific L2 teaching for social and linguistic inclusion of immigrants, still compare these courses to the literacy ones for Italians, considering scarce knowledge of the L2 like illiteracy in the L1 and not taking much into account the peculiarity of the immigrants’ situation (see MIUR 2003). This conception is also made clear by the fact that Italian L2 courses for immigrants in the CTPs are often carried out by teachers qualified to teach Italian to mother tongue learners and there are not specific requirements to select teachers yet.

10 Venezky (1990) stated that an individual should be considered illiterate only in reference to his/her native language, or to a language that he already speaks. Referring to English as an L2 for immigrants in the USA, he stated that illiterate “is not a functional label for those who neither read nor speak English, primarily because their illiteracy results automatically from their inability to speak English. Instruction of spoken English is a critical step in their acquisition of literacy” (Venezky 1990: 13).

On the influence of previous knowledge on language learning, Cummins (1982) elaborated the CUP (Common Underlying Proficiency) model which states that while learning a language, a person acquires a set of skills and implicit metalinguistic knowledge that can be used then to learn or speak other languages too. L1 and L2 skills are interdependent and learning a language helps improving also the performance in the languages a person already knows. He suggests the image of an iceberg with two tips emerging above a surface and a common mass below the surface. The tips represent the known languages, which are apparently separated, but under the surface they are supported by shared concepts, knowledge derived from learning, experience, cognitive and linguistic abilities acquired by the learner throughout his/her whole learning experience.

1.4.2. Lifelong Learning Path in Italy

“*Scuole popolari*”, the first courses for adults in Italy, were created in 1947 to promote basic literacy. Indeed, until World War II, a large amount of people was still illiterate or weakly literate, especially in southern regions and in rural areas. During the 1970's compulsory schooling for children rose to “*scuola media*” and evening courses called “*corsi 150 ore*” were introduced for workers who wanted to further their training or complete their basic educational path. Wider changes took place in 1997, with the birth of the CTP (*Centri Territoriali Permanenti*- Permanent Territorial Centres). These centres were created to improve and reorganise adult education, giving an answer to the ongoing social and economical changes in Italy, particularly due to the adjustments of the industrial economy and to the growing immigration (EAEA 2011). The documents issued by the *Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione* (Education Department)¹¹ promoted evening courses and asserted the right of adults to have a suitable education and vocational training system for their specific situation.

In 2000, an agreement between the government, regions, provinces and mountain communities (*Conferenza Unificata del 2 marzo 2000*) reorganised and empowered adult education. The agreement was influenced by the results of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education organised by UNESCO in Hamburg (1997), where the member states asserted the growing importance of lifelong learning.

Gradually, the competences on adult education in Italy have been transferred to regional authorities. The *Decreto Ministeriale 25-10-2007* programmed the transformation of the CTPs into CPIAS (*Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti* - Provincial Centres for Adult Education), in order to reorganise their activity and management. The implementing regulation of CPIAS became effective only in October 2012 with a decree by the President of the Republic (DPR 04-12-2012) and

11 *Ordinanza del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione 455/1997 and Circolari Ministeriali 7809/1990 and 305/1997.*

the new system will start working from 2013-2014¹². However, even in this last modification of laws concerning adult education, people with literacy problems are not mentioned. The decree enunciates (DPR 04-12-2012):

Percorsi di alfabetizzazione e di apprendimento della lingua italiana: i percorsi di alfabetizzazione e di apprendimento della lingua italiana, realizzati dai centri di cui all'articolo 2 e destinati agli adulti stranieri di cui all'articolo 3, nei limiti dell'organico assegnato, sono finalizzati al conseguimento di un titolo attestante il raggiungimento di un livello di conoscenza della lingua italiana non inferiore al livello A2 del Quadro comune europeo di riferimento per le lingue elaborato dal Consiglio d'Europa.

Reading the quotation given above it can be supposed that the decree has been written by people not expert in the L2 literacy field. Indeed, the word “*alfabetizzazione*” is there, but to indicate simply basic L2 learning, without distinctions. The text only refers to the A2 level of the CEFR, not mentioning lower and higher levels that foreign people may need to reach before or after the A2. This reference is probably due to the fact that current Italian laws on immigration (DPR 04-06-2010 and DPR *Accordo di integrazione n.179 14-09-2011*) ask to pass an Italian language exam at A2 level in order to get a permit of stay for immigrants with a duration of more than one year (*Permesso a punti*).

The decree's vagueness has been criticized by a specialistic magazine for teachers called “*Tuttoscuola*”, which has estimated that in Italy illiterate immigrants are around 200,000 (Tuttoscuola 2012). Also trade unions like FLC-CGIL (2012) and CISL Scuola and boards of teachers like the faculty board of Reggio Emilia CTP¹³ and the *Rete dei CTP Toscana*¹⁴, have highlighted some critical points both for didactic and organisational aspects in 4th October 2012 Decree. They agree in claiming that foreign adults have the right to attend even courses of levels different from the A2; particular attention should be paid to people who have low literacy, to promote the gradual acquisition of the L2 starting from the lowest levels and the inclusion of these people in society. After that, even people who already have an educational qualification should be allowed to participate in courses for middle or high school to promote personal cultural development, better integration and

12 *Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica Italiana, 4 ottobre 2012, Regolamento per il riassetto organizzativo e didattico dei Centri per l'Istruzione degli adulti.*

13 *Collegio Docenti 30-11-2012.*

14 Document of 22-01-2013 by Patrizia Martini, coordinator of the Tuscan CTPs.

competitiveness in the labour market. The educational syllabus should provide a wide range of courses, from literacy to C2. Finally, they ask that, to set the CPIAS operating principles and review the highlighted critical points, institutions should consult the centres involved before starting to enforce the law.

Another issue criticized by educational organisations and trade unions is the statement that the fulfilment of the aims has to be reached as far as possible with the current staff and with no additional costs for public administration. This raises doubts about how innovations can take place without any investment by the public authorities.

1.4.3. A few data on immigration and literacy in Italy

Taking a look at the Italian situation on literacy, the scenario is encouraging: the illiteracy rate has decreased during the last 10 years, passing from 10.9% average

	Foreigners			Italians		
	Male	Female	Average	Male	Female	Average
Academic Degree	8.6%	9.4%	9.0%	6.8%	6.1%	6.4%
Postgraduate	2.3%	3.9%	3.1%	0.7%	1.2%	1.0%
High-School Diploma	25.3%	30.2%	27.8%	26.6%	25.1%	25.8%
Middle-School Diploma	34.5%	31.4%	32.9%	33.6%	26.8%	30.1%
Primary School Certificate	13.5%	11.8%	12.6%	23.0%	28.2%	25.7%
Literate Without Qualification	13.4%	10.7%	12.1%	8.3%	10.8%	9.6%
Illiterate	2.4%	2.6%	2.5%	1.0%	1.8%	1.4%

Table 1.1: Resident population over 6 years by citizenship, gender and education level. Source: ISTAT data.

of immigrants and 2.5 % of Italians in 2001 to 2.5% average of immigrants and 1.4% of Italians in 2011. (ISTAT data). Nowadays, when speaking about illiterate people, the common thinking mainly refers to foreign women. This is also what has emerged from the researcher's experience, indeed, all the illiterate/semi-literate people met in class were foreign women (see chap.2). In spite of that, these national and regional statistics show that this idea is not realistic. According to

ISTAT 2011 census, illiterates in Italy are almost the same rate in the male and female population, and there is less a gender gap among immigrants than among Italians (see table 1.1). The average rate hides some exceptions. Indeed, as can be observed in figure 1.3., groups of immigrants coming from some specific countries have quite high gender gaps. The most evident case is Morocco, with 13.1% of illiterate men and 21.5% of illiterate women, followed by China, with 7% of men and 11% of women, India with 8% of men and 11% of women and Egypt with 1.4% of men and 4.10% of women.

1.4.4. The situation in the Brescia area

The statistical data collected by ORIM (*Osservatorio Regionale per l'Integrazione e la Multietnicità*) and CIRMIB (*Centro di Iniziative e Ricerche sulle Migrazioni – Brescia*) (in Besozzi, Colombo, 2012) concerning the Brescia area, where the present research was carried out, show average rates similar to the national ones. Indeed, the *Annuario CIRMIB* highlights that in 2011 almost the same rate of men and women among immigrants were illiterate (4.4% of men and 4.7% of women). Moreover, if we look at higher education (secondary school and university qualification), foreign women overtake men with 57% of female graduates against 49.3% of male.

Some information about Brescia was found out from the data on foreign adults enrolled in L2 courses for the project “*Certifica il tuo italiano*”, promoted by the Lombardy Region¹⁵. In 2010-2011 1.7% of the men and 2.1% of the women enrolled were illiterate or had no previous school experience. In 2011-2012 the number rose to 7.9% of men and 6.7% of women, showing an increasing interest of immigrants in adult education. In general, there has been an increase of 56.5% of immigrants attending these courses. As regards CTP courses in general (scuola media, L2, etc), the number of people enrolled in 2010-2011 was about 5,400 with a balanced participation of women and men (49.7% women, 50.3% men). The majority of them enrolled in L2 courses to get the final certificate called CILS

15 *Certifica il tuo italiano* is a project financed by the Italian Ministry of social solidarity and promoted by the Lombardy region. For a thorough examination of this subject see: <http://www.certificaituoitaliano.it/>

(*Certificazione Italiano come Lingua Straniera*) which is useful for the *Questura* exam to get long term permission, only 5% of them attended short-term courses for a basic knowledge of Italian and 40% enrolled in courses for *scuola media*, to get an educational qualification in the Italian education system.

It is not possible to know how many of the people enrolled in CTPs of the Brescia province were illiterate or weakly literate because in the available data they are assimilated to students attending A1 courses. However, the CTP teacher involved in the research - who has been carrying out Italian lessons in the area involved in the current research (Carpenedolo, Montichiari and Calvisano, under the CTP of Calcinato) since when CTP courses were created there - collected some data on the students and stated that during the last 3 years, illiterate/weakly literate students enrolled in his courses were 9 in 2010-2011 out of 64 students, 16 in 2011-2012 out of 62 students and 6 in 2012-2013 out of 49 students. These numbers can give an idea of the small amount of students with literacy problems who attend courses. However, as the teacher highlights, there should be “positive discrimination” towards them as a disadvantaged category, dedicating more attention to them. An interesting point to be noticed is the fact that 85% of students attending A1 courses in the area were women, against only 15% of men. This fact can be due to different reasons. The first may be the larger amount of time that women may have because many of them do not work or have just part-time jobs. Indeed, the data collected by ORIM and elaborated by CIRMiB show that 25% of women are housewives, 11.5% are part-time workers and 10% are unoccupied. If we sum these rates, we will see that 46.5% of women, almost half of the total, are supposed to have more free time to dedicate to study. Another reason could be the fact that the course was proposed in the morning (but the time was set by the CTP basing on immigrants' requests and enrolments, so it would have been possible to change it if more workers had asked to attend it in the evening). The final reason that may be hypothesized is that man are less disposed to admit their need of education and their illiteracy than women, maybe due to the leading role they are supposed to have in many patriarchal societies.

1.5. Teaching adults

The specificity of the learners who are the subjects of this research is, besides their low literacy level and the fact of being immigrants, their condition as adults. Balboni (2008) states that there are some specific aspects which influence adults' learning process because an adult differs from a young person from a relational and psychological point of view and for other social elements:

- a) an adult can decide autonomously and assume his/her own responsibilities, he/she has already formed his/her set of values. The teacher's task towards him/her becomes therefore not to educate, but to instruct, since the teacher and the student are socially equal;
- b) another difference is the investment of time and money that an adult carries out and for which he/she expects to see results in the shortest time possible. Therefore, students need to agree with the teacher on the objectives and times of the course;
- c) methodological principles of teaching need to be negotiated with adult students because for him/her it is difficult to question previous knowledge and ideas when these are in conflict with what he/she has to learn;
- d) adults normally acquire language more slowly and less steadily than young persons;
- e) adults have a great need of rules and grammatical structures of reference to learn. This aspect is not present in children.

1.5.1. Motivation

Motivation is defined in the psychology field as an internal state or condition (sometimes described as a need, desire, or want) that activates behaviour and gives it direction, a desire or want that energizes and directs goal-oriented behaviour and an influence of needs and desires on the intensity and direction of behaviour (see Kleinginna and Kleinginna 1981). Franken (2006) provides an additional component to this definition: the arousal, direction, and persistence of behaviour.

Since the 1970s different studies have been conducted on motivation in language study, both in Italy and abroad (for a thorough examination of this subject see Balboni 2008a). We will handle the theories that are significant for the purposes of our work:

- a) Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) defined *instrumental motivation* as the desire to learn a language to achieve specific utilitarian goals (such as getting a job, getting a certificate, etc.). On the contrary, *integrative motivation* is, according to them, the desire to learn a language in order to communicate with people of the culture where that language is spoken. This kind of motivation shows an affinity with the target language group and it is generally stronger than the first one. Indeed, the instrumental motivation can end when the learner thinks to have fulfilled his goal, while integrative motivation is an internal positive attitude of the learner towards the L2 (and towards its speaking community) that lasts longer;
- b) *Krashen's affective filter hypothesis* refers to three affective variables in foreign language acquisition: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. These variables can prevent an input to reach the part of the brain which elaborates information, raising what he calls "affective filter"; or on the other hand, when the affective filter lowers, they can facilitate this process. For example, if a person has low motivation towards what he/she is learning, low self-confidence and high anxiety levels due to the teacher's behaviour, the affective filter raises, blocking the acquisition process. In this case, the teacher should try to find all the ways to lower the affective filter, using humanistic-affective approaches (see Balboni 2008b, Luise 2006), for example, he/she should propose to students activities that are near to their interests, group works and self-assessments instead of oral tests where a single student has to stand in front of the teacher;
- c) Dörnyei's studies put in evidence the importance of the context of the didactical action: the course (relevance of the didactic materials, interest towards the activities, appropriateness of the didactic strategies), the teacher (personality, behaviour, adopted procedures) and the group (cohesion, behaviour, attitude). These aspects, together with personal features and attitude towards the language learned, contribute to success or failure in learning, the teacher should then take them into consideration while programming and carrying out the activities.

If we relate these theories to the subjects of our work (adult immigrants that are learning the language of the Country where they are living), there are many aspects to take into account with respect to motivation.

We can suppose that adult immigrants are mainly moved by instrumental motivation: they want to learn the language in order to get a job, to interact with Italian public institutions (their children's school, the municipality, etc.) and to get the A2 level certificate that they need for the long-term permit of stay. These aspects should be considered by the teacher, for example when choosing the topics of the lessons, the variety of language and the kind of communicative functions to develop during lessons.

Some of the learners may be also moved by integrative motivation, which is mainly an internal attitude, but that could also be stimulated by introducing aspects of the local culture and peculiarities of the L2 that could help the students feel nearer to the local population and more interested in learning the L2 through personal interest.

For what concerns the affective filter hypothesis, adults may have had a previous negative experience with schooling (and with reading and writing in general) that has lowered their self-confidence and has prevented them from learning easily up to the present. The teacher should try to carry out exercises (for example play-like activities) that are different from the traditional ones, to help the students concentrate on language without feeling inadequate or too anxious. This would lower the affective filter and facilitate learning.

The teaching context too should be adapted to the kind of students involved. Indeed, as mentioned above (see par. 1.5), in a class of adults the relationship between teacher and student is different from the traditional one, because the students and the teacher are socially equal. The teacher becomes therefore like a trainer, who helps the students to improve the skills they need for their needs. His/her behaviour should be different, as well as the teaching materials he/she employs and the kind of exercises he/she chooses should be suitable for the learners.

The relationships and interactions inside the group of students are other variables that can influence their school work significantly. In courses for adults class composition varies considerably, as attendees can belong to different age groups

(they can range from about 20 to about 50 years old), come from different Countries, speak different mother tongues, be at different L2 levels, have different instruction and literacy levels, different religions and cultures of reference, different social status in the ethnic community they belong to, etc.. The teacher should try to include all the people in class, paying attention especially to the weaker individuals, and to promote collaboration among students.

1.6. Literacy Issues in the L2

The definition of a “literate” person becomes even more difficult when analysing foreign adults learning an L2. Indeed, in addition to the elements that have been considered in par. 1.1. to classify all kind of illiterates, other issues characterize adult literacy in the L2 (Casi 1998):

- a) *knowledge and use of the mother tongue writing system* (alphabetic or logographic): a person who already knows and uses a writing system, even if different from the target language one, cannot be considered completely illiterate as his/her previous knowledge can help him/her to learn the new system. Indeed, some language mechanisms (like grammatical structures or the process of matching sounds to specific symbols) are already familiar to him/her¹⁶. Not being able to write and read in the mother tongue does not automatically mean to have cultural or intellectual weakness. Indeed, there are oral cultures in which a person can reach a high cultural and intellectual level without reading and writing. However, in many cases, not being able to read and write means a lack of scholarship (or a discontinuous school path) in a context with meagre intellectual solicitations. A person grown up in a context like that may have, anyway, a wide human asset that he/she wishes to express overcoming his/her own illiteracy. For these reasons when meeting an illiterate person it should be ascertained whether:
- He/she lived in a culturally and intellectually stimulating context;
 - He/she had a negative school experience;

16 See note 14 on Cummings' CUP model.

- The causes of his/her dropping out of school;
 - The reasons why he/she wants to start a literacy path in the L2;
 - He/she wish to employ reading and writing abilities only for a passive or also for an active use (only to understand messages coming from outside or also to express his/her own personality);
- b) *sound matching ability*: an illiterate person has no familiarity with matching sounds with symbols. This operation, which is automatic for a literate person, requires a big effort for an illiterate person. It involves visual memory, sound memory, the ability to pronounce the letters of a word and to understand the word meaning; it normally takes longer to be acquired by an adult than by a child;
- c) *manual dexterity*: this is another ability that requires a considerable effort for a person who did not practice it in the past. Twenty minutes of writing are already a demanding task for these learners, and they need specific exercises to guide their manual dexterity;
- d) *habit to reflect on language structures*: in a normal school path children are guided to reflect on language structures they have already acquired implicitly in oral speech when they were very young. Adult students who learned their L1 system at school have acquired a mental map of the L1 structure and grammar rules. This helps them to learn L2 rules, using the L1 mental map as a lever, noticing analogies and differences. On the contrary, with illiterate people, a traditional lesson based on grammar will lead to little results because they have no previous knowledge in the same field to base themselves on;
- e) *oral knowledge of the L2*: the learner's knowledge of the L2 has a fundamental role. An oral competence in the L2 is necessary for learning how to read and write in that language, as normally happens to children, who learn how to read and write in their mother tongue after having learnt it orally. The ability to discriminate distinctive sounds of an idiom, the knowledge of its words and structures is the basis on which a person can start to memorize the written signs of that language. An oral competence in the L2 would surely simplify the teacher-student interaction, allowing the latter to make the didactic path clearer. On the other hand, when a learner lacks even a basic oral knowledge of the L2, he/she has to overcome this hurdle before starting to learn how to read and write (see Venezky 1990);

- f) *oral knowledge of any language in addition to the learner's mother tongue*: this can be helpful for the oral learning of the target language. Indeed, a person who already knows more than a language has a wider ability to articulate sounds that can help him/her to learn the sounds of the new language;
- g) *elaboration of a study method*: literate students normally acquire an occasional or systematic study method during their school path, which fits personal aptitude and the specific school work they have to carry out. For this reason, they will be able to use the elaborated method(s) in case of need. Illiterate students, instead, are not autonomous because they do not have a study method. At the beginning of a course they will find it difficult even to understand the instructions given to carry out an exercise. They will not be able to practice autonomously at home without the help of an Italian-speaking person.

Considering the mentioned issues, adult learners can be divided in these main categories, that have to be taken into account while planning teaching activities (Minuz 2001: 47-54):

- a) *pre-literate*, when the learner's mother tongue has no writing system and the society where he/she lives does not use writing;
- b) *totally illiterate*, if the learner's mother tongue has a writing system, but he/she never learned it because of no schooling or for other reasons;
- c) *weakly literate*, if the learner has only a few years of schooling;
- d) *literate in non-alphabetic writing systems*, if the learner knows for example a logographic writing system. The learner can possess even a high literacy level in the other system;
- e) *literate in an alphabetic system* different from the Latin one;
- f) *literate in the Latin alphabet*, regardless of the writing system of the learner's L1.

The complexity of the phenomenon should be taken into account as far as possible by a teacher who aims at carrying out a “literacy course”. People who belong to categories “d”, “e” and “f” have already followed a school path and manage a writing system of any kind; this will allow them to learn the L2 much faster than people belonging to categories “a”, “b”, and “c”, who will need a slower and more

gradual learning programme, even though all the students hypothetically start from the same level of knowledge of the L2.

In many cases teachers may find all the mentioned categories of students mixed together in the same class, for this reason they should always pay attention to:

- complexity of the language structures proposed;
- extent of the lexical set proposed in each lesson/didactic unit;
- comprehensibility of the instructions;
- frequency of review needed on a topic.

1.6.1. Adult pre-A1 literacy levels

In her work Casi (2004: 148-149) highlights that the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages has the fault of taking for granted the literacy of all learners, even at the lowest levels. Casi's experience showed that people who are between A1 and B1 level of the Framework for oral production, comprehension and interaction, might not reach A1 level in writing and reading skills. For this reason, she created a model of “literacy levels” that a learner can pass through before becoming an A1, indicated with the acronym ALF (for “*alfabetizzazione*”):

- ALF 1: The learner can write his name. He can copy in a readable way letters and simple words. He can recognise some words in a list. He can identify the letter corresponding to the sound. He can choose the word he hears from the teacher among a list of (bisyllabic) words;
- ALF 2: The learner can write (even with errors) some personal data (name, surname, age, country of origin). He can read disyllabic words. He can choose the word read out loud by the teacher inside a group of words (of 3 syllables each);
- ALF 3: The learner can write some personal data (name, surname, age, country of origin, telephone number). He can read (with errors that don't compromise the meaning) words with 3 syllables and simple sentences dictated by the teacher;

- ALF 4: The person can answer in writing to questions about personal identity and fill in a simple form with personal data (name, surname, age, country of origin, date of birth, address, profession, telephone number). He can read a simple text of 2 sentences related to his daily life. He can explain the meaning of the text orally or answer a written multiple choice questionnaire. He can write a shopping list. He can write a message to communicate or remember an appointment.¹⁷

1.7. *Alphabetisation approaches*

Two main models have been facing each other in the literacy field and in reading and writing didactics:

a) *top-down*, which starts from the text as learning material and focuses on key words that help understanding the meaning. According to this model the actual rules of the language will be "passively" learned and confirmed while the students become more expert. It was elaborated starting from Smith's and Goodman's studies in psycholinguistics during the 1960's-70's. As Goodman (1967) states:

Reading is a selective process. It involves partial use of available minimal language cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the reader's expectation. As this partial information is processed, tentative decisions are made to be confirmed, rejected, or refined as reading progresses. More simply stated, reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. It involves an interaction between thought and language. Efficient reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time. The ability to anticipate that which has not been seen, of course, is vital in reading, just as the ability to anticipate what has not yet been heard is vital in listening.

b) *bottom up*, which attributes great importance to efficient basic abilities. According to this model, the reading process starts progressing from single letters to decoding a word, to understanding then the meaning of the whole text.

¹⁷ Translated by the author.

Reading is the product of two factors: decoding and comprehension (Gough 1999), but the starting point is decoding. The good reader has automatized the decoding process in such a manner that he/she doesn't need to resort to the context, because it is faster for him to identify every single word in order to understand the meaning. This model spread during the 1980's (see Oakill, Beard 1999).

Some teaching methods were elaborated starting from these models (Casi 1998):

a) *global*, also called look-and-say approach, focuses on the immediate recognition of whole words, starting from the input of a significant sentence and passing only later to the single elements that compose a word (letters). It is linked with the Gestalt principle on perception, which states that the first perceptive phase always starts from a global view of a complex reality and only later goes to analyse the details. In literacy courses following this method, sentences given by the students are used as reading material. It is necessary that the words used are part of the students' vocabulary (see Freinet 1977, 1979; Decroly 1965; Dottrens 1931, 1936, 1957; Mialaret 1966).

Critical issues of this method: The significance of the input is important both for children and adult learners. Nevertheless, the latter normally have very different previous experiences and the L2 lexicon they already know can be consistently varied (for instance, a caretaker and a bricklayer will presumably know very different words related to their respective jobs). For this reason, with adults at starting levels, it will be very difficult to use the students' spontaneous oral productions for lessons. It will be more fruitful to use sentences prepared by the teacher, always followed by an image that will help students to understand and remember the meaning. The teacher can try anyway to submit significant sentences based on the kind of students the class is composed of;

b) *analytical-synthetical*, which is based on the development of the ability of matching sounds with written words, decoding written sequences and recombining letters to form new words. It is associated with learning the writing system, as the grapheme-phoneme connection is analysed both in coding and decoding processes. The starting input is given by a "key word", which is learnt following 3 phases: syncretic (the word is perceived globally), analytical (the

phonemes composing the word are analysed), synthetical (the analysed phonemes are resynthesized in a unit: the word sound).

Critical issues of this method: it is generally very effective with foreign adults because it allows them to concentrate on quite a simple element (the word), which is comprehensible enough with the help of a corresponding image. The presence of an explanatory image is fundamental to give meaning to the exercise, which would be otherwise a mere training on sounds;

c) *alphabetic-syllabic*, is the more traditional one, in which the initial input given is a letter pronounced as an isolated sound and then linked to words which starts with that sound. Generally it proceeds presenting vowel sounds first, to be combined then with consonants as far as these are presented.

Critical issues of this method: it activates low motivation because it is more concentrated on sounds than on meanings. Work on syllables can be useful if it is based on significant topics to activate motivation.

Research on reading in the mother tongue carried out in psycholinguistics and neuropsychology fields has not lead to a unique psychological theory of reading and writing. In spite of this, some theories have been generally accepted and acquired by contiguous research fields and they have been inserted into literacy approaches for teaching both adults and children. One of these is, for instance, that in an alphabetic language familiar words are read globally by a literate person while unfamiliar words are decoded starting from single graphemes converted into phonemes and then synthesized in the articulation of a word. This last process is the same used by learners at starting levels of literacy. Another reading strategy is by analogy of two words, like “sasso” and “tasso”, made more simple between words with rhyme. Finally, also reference to the context helps to hypothesize what is written in a text. Learning the correspondence between graphemes and phonemes is a fundamental requisite for reading. Also fast identification of words and automatization of this process are key aspects for an efficient reading and for a consequent better understanding of the text (Minuz 2005).

Teaching strategies for basic literacy have been influenced by both models given above and nowadays teachers mainly use a combination of the two, elaborating models that differ according to the element that they take as the basis for the analysis: the phoneme, the syllable or the word. Methods based on the analysis at

phonemic and syllabic levels are often associated, as syllables are easier to perceive and they can be used in a short time of practising to form sensible words. These two methods give great importance to phonological awareness in order to learn how to read and write. Phonetic analysis of words has been declared by the supporters of these methods to be essential in alphabetic languages, especially in a language like Italian, which has an high correspondence between pronunciation and spelling. For adult L2 learners this awareness is more difficult as they have to discriminate sounds of a phonetic system that they have not completely acquired yet. To support motivation in a difficult process like this, the focus given to phonological awareness is therefore combined with what has been stated in the didactics field, developing basic reading and writing abilities in a context that has relevance for the learner, adopting a central foundation of meaning-oriented methods (see par. 1.5).

The global method, on the other hand, aims at teaching to read and write starting from whole words. It is based on meaning-oriented theories even if it cannot be completely assimilated with them. It consists of visual memorization of whole written words and relies on the ability to foresee words starting from the text. It works on significant and comprehensible texts (often produced by students) upon which learners carry out extensive reading activities. This method is more difficult for adults, as they remember long sequences of letters with difficulty. As Fernanda Minuz (2005) reports, it is hypothesized that adopting this method risks delaying the development of grapheme-phoneme mapping that is necessary in alphabetic languages. In its “radical” application it presumes that reading is acquired spontaneously, like speaking, with no need of metalinguistic reflection. This would make it not suitable for adult learners, as they need more rational learning and more transparency in the aims of the learning path. On the other hand, some recent research (Kruidenier 2002, Scholace, Willis 1995) on adult literacy learning have argued that phonological awareness comes together and not before learning to read. According to them, knowledge of phonemes before knowledge of words weakens the initial reading ability. The issue is still under discussion, but studies on illiterate adults, and especially on adults learning an L2, are still too scarce to lead to concrete results.

1.8. Pre-literacy

As mentioned above, a person who is at least partially literate in his L1 and has even a low schooling level knows that words and texts communicate meaning. This awareness of writing as a semiotic system is not granted in a person who has absolutely no schooling and literacy. This is why Minuz (2005) suggests that, before starting to analyse the writing system, students need to acquire some prerequisites. She claims that, at first, it is important to carry out exercises to develop awareness of the correspondence of symbol (logos, signs, words) and meaning, manual dexterity to write letters and words, acquisition of directionality of writing and reading. This last element has a strong cognitive and cultural impact that can be undervalued by people who have acquired literacy during childhood while it requires a big effort for illiterate adults. Every language is made of conventions that need to be made clear to a person who is not used to that system. Each learner's situation needs to be valued singly and the teacher should lever on a person's previous abilities to develop new ones (for example a person who is good at drawing may have fewer difficulties in acquiring a writing ability).

2. THE STUDY

2.1. *The Context*

The present research focuses on a group of 6 women: 1 totally illiterate and 4 weakly literate¹⁸ who were attending an Italian L2 course for immigrants at A1 level in Carpenedolo (province of Brescia) organized by the CTP of Calcinato, in a class of 18 students. Their learning and behaviour was analysed using the ethnographic method and mixing different observation instruments in order to get more detailed data. The period of observation in class lasted about two months. At first, the researcher observed the women inside the class environment to get an overview of their specific characteristics. She was introduced as a trainee teacher and she stayed in class to take notes during the lessons. This phase lasted about 2 weeks (4 lessons). From this first analysis, and from the forms that the students had filled in at the beginning of the course with the CTP teacher, some information about each learner was drawn. After that, it was possible to start the second part of the research: the researcher created a learning module and carried out lessons of half an hour each for about one month reserved only for the 6 women who had literacy problems.

2.2. *Aims of the research*

The researcher's purpose was to concentrate on the illiterate/weakly literate students in class. The first part of the research was therefore an observation that focused on the students' behaviour and on the learning setting.

The researcher wanted to analyse:

- a) the setting where these students learned (room, materials, activities, group of students, etc.);
- b) whether the CTP course answered to foreign illiterate/weakly literate students'

¹⁸ For a complete definition of literacy levels see chap.1.5.

needs;

- c) whether they took part to the class activities or they stayed on their own;
- d) what activities were carried out during the part of the lesson reserved to illiterate/weakly literate people.

After having observed the actual setting where the students learned, the second part of the research focused on the activities that were proposed only to illiterate/weakly literate people during the last part of the lessons, that was reserved only to them, while the other students left the class. The researcher wanted to propose literacy activities on topics that she supposed to be nearer to the students' needs, according to the observations she had made in the first phase of the research. Through these activities she wished to find out:

- a) whether it was possible to carry out lessons on authentic topics, in order to enhance motivation, with learners at low literacy levels who were still learning how to read and write;
- b) whether the activities answered to the students' needs;
- c) whether play-like activities interested and motivated students more than traditional ones;
- d) whether play-like activities lead to better learning/performing results than traditional ones;
- e) what the most common problems that students faced at this stage of learning were;
- f) whether the students could use in a real context skills developed during the class activities.

The second part of the research aimed at verifying whether some of the principles of humanistic-affective approaches (see Luise 2006) could be applied also to teaching to people at low literacy levels.

2.3. Instruments for data collection

2.3.1. Anecdotal form

The students were observed directly by the researcher, who wrote a diary of the activities carried out in class and of the students' reactions. At the end of each lesson the researcher filled in an anecdotal form, following the model elaborated by Coonan (cit. In Luise 2003) to register the students' attitudes and participation (see chart 2.1) and adapting it to the adult education environment.

2.3.2. Exercises

The exercises created for each learning unit were themselves means to collect data:

- a) to get an overview of the students' abilities (see pre-reading and pre-writing skills in chap.3) and of their autonomy (whether they were able to complete the exercises on their own or whether they needed the teacher's or the classmates' help, whether they collaborated in group activities or not, etc.);
- b) to get some information on the students' attitude towards the kind of activity and the means used (like pictures, cards, objects, sheet of paper, stickers) observing how the exercises were carried out by each individual;
- c) to test the efficacy of the didactic unit through an halfway test and a final test.

2.3.3. Questionnaire

The parameter that was most difficult to collect data on was the motivation and usefulness of the modules. Indeed, the people involved were not used to self-assessment or self-thinking. The kind of exercises that might seem usual for a person who has attended school since childhood (at least in the western education

system) are quite difficult for someone who has never written anything about herself/himself. Questions that ask the students' opinion on the kind of activities or the usefulness of the exercises in everyday life are quite strange for learners that think of school as a place where they have to learn what is right and what is wrong and they are not asked to express their own opinion. The researcher tried to submit to the students a very simple questionnaire to test their reaction (see chart 2.2). The questionnaire was structured, composed of 5 questions: 3 were yes/no answers, one was a multiple choice and one was a 1 to 3 bipolar scale. To make the questions more comprehensible for them, the text was written in capital letters and words were associated with drawings and colours. Red and green were chosen to represent the two opposite yes/no. Yellow was used for the neutral answer in the scale and drawings were used to ask the students which topics they would like to deal with in the lessons. Each question was divided from the following one by a line, to mark the distinction between one and the other. Questions were read out loud and explained by the researcher.

2.3.4. Interview to the CTP teacher

The last instrument used to evaluate the activities was an interview to the CTP teacher. As he has about 15 years experience in CTPs, he was asked about the course structure in general and about his point of view on the illiterate people he met in his job. His answers were integrated with the researcher's findings to reflect on the research (see the whole text of the interview in the appendix).

3. DIDACTIC MODULE

3.1. *Didactic aims*

The main aim of the class activities programmed by the researcher was not to teach the women involved how to read or write, as this process normally takes a considerable amount of time to be acquired and it was not possible to get complete data in the short period available for the research (this could be considered the long-term goal of the CTP course even in more than one year). Rather, the researcher tried to stimulate the acquisition of some pre-reading and pre-writing abilities that are fundamental for subsequent literacy acquisition (see par. 1.7.) and of some logical strategies that may be immediately useful for the students in their everyday life. This way of facing literacy could give them more motivation as the input would appear more adequate to their level. They may see some results of their work in a shorter period of time and acquire abilities that they may need during their whole life-learning process, in order to be able to read and write efficiently.

3.2. *Didactic Plan*

The exercises were created focusing on the acquisition of the following competences:

a) *pre-reading*:

- Observe and recognise symbols;
- Connect symbols to meanings (abstraction ability);
- Discriminate words (for example recognise a word known from others or distinguish two words that are similar but not identical);
- Identify the same word written in different fonts and style (e.g. capital letters, cursive script, italic, bold, etc.);

- Identify the syllables that compose a word and their sounds;
- Identify a specific letter inside a word and its sound;

b) *pre-writing*:

- Circle words/syllables/letters;
- Link up two elements by drawing a line (e.g. logos with corresponding words, images with words, etc.);
- Respect the spaces given for writing on a paper (lines, dots, slots, etc.);
- Copy letters (for example complete the missing letters of a word copying from a model given);
- Copy a whole word;
- Write one's own name.

The researcher's purpose was to improve the skills above by verifying whether the creation of activities nearer to the learners' environment could motivate their learning or acquisition. The selected topic around which all activities developed was Shopping. The researcher looked for the main written words and symbols that the people involved could normally find in public places, starting from the environment around them (signs of public places photographed in the town where the course took place), entering then in an imaginary supermarket to handle the typical words of this field and the names of products found there. The didactic module was divided into single Learning Units (LU) that corresponded to specific subtopics (signs, notices, timetables, supermarket objects, etc.). The work always tried to follow the Gestalt perception order: global → analytical → synthetic and the bimodality and directionality principles (for further information about the psychological and neurolinguistic principles in didactic planning see Balboni 2008b) both in the topic as in the kind of exercises proposed.

3.3. *Educational aims*

The underlying educational aims of the activities were:

- a) promote autonomy in everyday life through the ability to carry out everyday tasks;
- b) understand the Italian living context;
- c) become able to integrate in the Italian living context;
- d) find connections between class activities and authentic life;
- e) develop powers of observation;
- f) overcome low self-esteem;
- g) overcome the affective filter towards school and reading/writing.

3.4. *Elaboration of the activities*

The Linguistic targets of reference for the didactic modules were instrumental abilities for reading and writing, that include:

- recognising and decoding images and symbols;
- combining symbols and images with words;
- recognising two identical words;
- recognising the syllables that compose a word;
- finding a syllable in a group of many, starting from the sound;
- rebuilding a word starting from syllables;
- discriminating two different sounds compared;
- finding a word in short texts;
- finding a syllable inside words;
- finding a letter inside words;
- finding the missing letters in a word, using a complete word as model.

The duration for which the activities was created was 8 lessons.

3.5. *The learning unit*

3.5.1. *Shop signs and symbols of public places*

The first activity aims at introducing the topic that will be handled during the didactic unit. For this activity the best materials are photos of authentic places of the local area that the students are supposed to have already attended or at least seen during their everyday life in the area. When not possible, even pictures taken from the internet can be used.

3.5.1.a. *Exercise 1: “Conosci questo posto?”*

The teacher prepares a set of pictures taken in places that students may attend in the town where they live. For the kind of students considered, mainly supermarkets and shops or other public places where foreign women may usually go and where they could observe an ensign or a symbol (for example pharmacy, town hall, school, hospital, first-aid, greengrocer, baker, Islamic butcher and proper names of supermarkets). The teacher, using a computer or printed images shows them a symbol and the learners have to guess the right place it corresponds to. After they express their hypothesis he/she shows them the picture of the real place, to check the answer or give them a visual help if they do not know the symbol. While showing the pictures some additional questions can be asked, as: “Have you ever been to this place?” “What do you do there?” “Do you usually go there on your own or with someone else (your husband, a friend, your son/daughter)?”. This allows the teacher to acquire additional information about his/her students: whether they know the context where they are living, whether they are autonomous in their everyday life or who are they accompanied by during their everyday activities.

3.5.1.b. *Exercise 2: Memory Game*

This activity aims at summarizing and conceptualizing the previously seen symbols. The teachers prepares a set of cards displaying the symbols and names

of the places printed on the bottom (places that do not have a symbol were not used for this exercise) and another set displaying only the name, without images. The teacher assigns a card with a word to each student and then shows them a card with a symbol and word. The student who has the corresponding word must put up his hand and pronounce the word. After the first turn, to add some difficulty, the students receive more words together and they have to check all of them at the same time when the teacher shows the symbol. In this activity, the image has the function to remind to students of the meaning of the word, but the exercise consists practically just in recognizing two identical words in a group of many.

3.5.1.c. Exercise 3

In this exercise the words are divided into syllables after the global visualization of the words during the previous two activities. Students are given the word cut into syllables and they must rebuild it near the card with the entire word. With this process, they use their ability to identify syllables that compose a word in a group of many.

3.5.1.d. Exercise 4

The teacher puts a list of beginning syllables of the words used before on the table and gives the remaining syllables to the students. Students have to build the words. Some attention must be paid to the different levels inside the class, giving the most difficult words to the students who have a higher level of abilities.

3.5.2. Inside the supermarket

The second lesson “takes” the students inside the supermarket, to use some words of objects that are useful for shopping.

3.5.2.a. Exercise 1: global reading

Students are shown cards depicting objects that can be found inside a supermarket or used for shopping:

BORSA

SACCHETTO

CARRELLO

CESTINO

BILANCIA

MONETE

BANCONOTE

SCONTRINO

CASSA

Images are combined with words all together with the help of the teacher. After that a memory game is proposed to the students, to combine words and pictures. When a person guesses the word, he/she must pronounce it aloud.

3.5.2.b. Exercise 2: break up and compose words

Students have to compose the words divided into syllables and combine them with the corresponding image.

3.5.2.c. Exercise 3: from reading to writing

The teacher prepares a sheet of paper with the words of the lesson (see example 3.3). The first two letters for each word (sometimes a syllable, sometimes a semi-syllable) are missing. Each word is followed by the corresponding image, to help the students to remember its meaning. The teacher pronounces the words aloud and the students have to write out the word using the syllables given on top of the sheet. After that, they have to copy the whole word onto the right of the sheet. In

the word “*scontrino*” the last syllable has been removed, as the beginning “sc” or “sco” is a difficult sound to be identified by beginner students. In addition, the final “no” could be better inserted in the list of syllables on top of the paper, near to “mo”, to highlight the difference between the two sounds “n” and “m”. Indeed, each piece of 2 letters was put near a slightly different one, to induce the students to notice the contrast between them, both on their own or helped by the teacher. After that, the students were asked to copy the whole word on the right side of the paper.

3.5.3. *Shop notices*

The third lesson focuses on notices that can be found inside or outside a supermarket. This is an activity that can be helpful for foreign people to understand notices that they can find in different public places.

3.5.3.a. *Exercise 1: an example of shop notice*

The teachers shows a picture of an authentic supermarket door and then a picture of the timetable on it (see example 3.4) and asks to the students to observe it carefully. He/she can guide the observation asking some questions about what they can see, what the logo on the left means, what the names and the numbers in column mean, what the symbols mean. The students who are partially able to read can contribute more to this activity, explaining that the names in column are the days of the week, that on the bottom of the column with the times “*mattina*” and “*pomeriggio*” is written etc.. Another useful exercise can be to observe the warning signs on the bottom of the notice and discuss their meaning (why it is forbidden to introduce dogs inside the supermarket, why it is forbidden to smoke, etc.. The symbols related to the various methods of payment that appear on the notice are ignored saying just that they indicate ways of paying by credit card or other kinds of cards from the bank).

3.5.3.b. Exercise 2: Recognise Words on Real Notices

During the first exercise some words will emerge: “*orario*”, “*chiuso*”, “*aperto*”, “*entrata*”, “*uscita*”. In the second exercise, these words are displayed on a set of cards prepared by the teacher, combined with an image that symbolizes the concept. After a first short memory game played with the cards, the teacher shows the students some pictures of supermarkets or shops displaying notices. He/she gives each student a card with a word and in turns they have to find in which pictures the word given appears inside the notices (see example 3.5).

Obviously, the exercise becomes more difficult when inside a notice there are more than one word and some students may find it difficult to identify a word if it is among many others or not evidenced (e.g. the word “*aperto*” in picture 1, example 3.5).

3.5.3.c. Exercise 3: “*quale parola inizia con...?*”

The teacher puts the cards with the words used before on the table and pronounces a vowel aloud: students have to identify which word starts with the specified sound. After that, she puts only the beginning letter of the words on the table and students have to build the word with syllables.

3.5.4. Halfway test

The exercises in lesson 4 try to verify what has been done until this point, assigning activities that should be carried out individually.

3.5.4.a. Exercise 1

The aim of this exercise is to verify the students' ability to recognise a word from others. A list of 10 words in two columns is given (see example 3.4). Students have

to find and circle the word given among the ones inside the list. Each list is composed of some words that are similar to the one to be found (they may differ by only one letter), and some others that are completely different. Some of them are words used during previous lessons, some others are new.

3.5.4.b. Exercise 2

The second exercise aims at verifying what the students remember of the symbols and words seen during previous lessons and whether they can activate strategies to carry out the exercises, like recognise words written in different formats, or at least the beginning letters of the words that they can find also in some shop logos (see example 3.5). Students have to link with a line the words on the left to the symbols on the right.

3.5.4.c. Exercise 3

This exercise tries to reproduce in an individual activity the exercise usually carried out as a whole class activity. The teacher gives to students a paper with 4 words from the ones seen during the lessons (one disyllabic, one trisyllabic, one quadrisyllabic, one composed of two disyllabic words written on it). The words chosen are: “*chiuso*”, “*entrata*”, “*ospedale*”, “*Penny Market*”. The same words were also broken into syllables on small adhesive papers. Students had to build each word and stick it near the identical one written on the paper.

3.5.4.d. Exercise 4

The last exercise focuses on the ability to discriminate different vowels. The students are given a paper where some words appear without the first letter. The images used during previous lessons appear near the word, to suggest its meaning

to the students. The teacher pronounces the words aloud and the students have to choose the right letter or syllable between the two options given. The discriminating letters are always vowels, to allow also the less literate students to focus on sounds that they know well.

3.5.5. Products

The fifth lesson is organised around an activity that tries to reproduce a situation that can really happen to the students going to a supermarket: the necessity to read labels. Indeed, while normally a person that is not literate can help him/herself by simply watching or touching the product, in other cases the choice of a product among others similar makes reading necessary. To motivate the students with a more “physical” stimulus some packages of real products are used for the activity. Each has its name written on the package.

3.5.5.a. Exercise 1: shopping list

The teacher puts the products on the table, he/she divides the students in couples and gives them a shopping list. Students have to find the products listed. The teacher stays at the “counter” and when the students are ready, he/she checks whether they have found the right products.

3.5.5.b. Exercise 2: names of products

This exercise is like a memory game but played with real objects instead of images.

Students have to combine cards displaying the products' names disposed on the table with the “real” products.

3.5.5.c. Exercise 3: “per favore, voglio...”

The teacher becomes a “salesperson”. He/she puts some cards with the products names on the table and asks to students to choose one of them and to say its name to receive the “real” product. Students are free to choose among the names they have already seen in the previous exercise or among new words. After that, the students in turn become the salesperson and their classmates ask them products. As they are beginner students, the sentence they can use to ask the product can be simplified in “Per favore voglio...”, using the present indicative instead of conditional “vorrei” or “Per favore dammi...” instead of the third person “mi dia” that sounds more polite in Italian but can be difficult at this level of learning.

3.5.6. Timetables

The last topic of the didactic module is timetables. The teacher recalls the exercise carried out in lesson 3 showing students some shop timetables, but this time the activity will concentrate on the format in which timetables can be written and on the meaning of typical expressions of these notices.

3.5.6.a. Exercise 1: Reading Timetables

The teacher shows some shops timetables to the students (either on a PC screen or by printed images) and they read them together, noticing the differences between each format, like the abbreviation of the names of the names, the expression “Dal... al...”, etc. (see example 3.7). From this activity some words will be observed: *aperto* (or *apertura*), *chiuso*, *orario*, and a few from the same topic can be added, like *entrata* and *uscita*. To clarify the meaning of the words and fix them in the learners' minds, the teacher represents the concepts with some images on cards (see example 3.8) and then plays a short memory game with the students.

3.5.6.b. Exercise 2: "the shop opens at..."

After having analysed the timetables, the teacher asks students questions like: "Lunedì alle 15,30 è aperta la farmacia?", "Posso andare in tabaccheria sabato alle 16?" and they have to answer using the timetables given.

3.5.6.c. Exercise 2: Days of the Week

The teacher asks students to say the days of the week. Then, using cards that display the names of the days, he/she asks the students to put the days in order. After that, she shows them cards with the names broken down into syllables and they have to rebuild the words.

NOTE: this exercise takes the students' ability to read numbers and hours for granted.

3.5.7. Final Test

The two final lessons are focused on two different ways of testing what had been done in class. Lesson 7 focusses on written exercises similar to the ones in the halfway test, to be carried out individually in class and aims at verifying what the students had acquired during the last lessons.

3.5.7.a. Exercise 1

The aim of this exercise is to test the student's ability to understand a shop timetable. The student is given a paper with a timetable and he/she has to answer some close-ended questions. Questions consist only in indicating a day and an hour and students have to mark whether the shop is open or closed at that time. The test can be slightly differentiated for students who are at different levels, giving

a clearer timetable to the students who have more difficulties (see example 3.9) in reading and logical thinking and a more synthetic one (that needs more reasoning) to the others (see example 3.10).

3.5.7.b. Exercise 2

Exercise n.2 tests the ability to recognise words written in different formats, as they appear on products labels. Students have to link up words written in a standard font and in capital letters to the corresponding ones written in different characters.

3.5.7.c. Exercise 3

In this exercise students have to copy the name of the product that they see written in the picture below the image. To do this, they are supposed to be able to distinguish the product's name among the words that appear on the products' label.

3.5.8. A visit to a supermarket

The final “live lesson” takes place at the supermarket and it is like a field test. The aim is to see whether the activities carried out during the lessons can be used by the students in an authentic setting. Some exercises are given to each of them to test if they can achieve the task.

The skills tested are:

- a) Ability to find two identical words;
- b) ability to identify the beginning letter of a word;
- c) ability to identify a word among others;
- d) ability to identify identical words written in different characters;
- e) ability to identify a word inside the graphic of the product label, that normally displays also the company logo and some additional information;

f) ability to distinguish among similar products if a specific characteristic is given.

The achievement of each task is written down in a chart like the one below (table 3.1). Each slot corresponds to a single request in each exercise. The teacher will write a \checkmark if the task is achieved, an x if it is not achieved and a P if it is partially achieved (with the help by the teacher or by the mates). At the end of the activities it is possible to notice the tasks that students were able to achieve autonomously and so to value their autonomy degree in carrying out this kind of activities.

	EXERCISE 1			EXERCISE 2		EXERCISE 3		EXERCISE 4	
Student A									
Student B									
Student C									
Student D									

Table 3.1.

3.5.8.a. Exercise 1:

The teacher gives to each student a list of 3 fruits and vegetables. The students have to find the name on the price tags of the greengrocery section and write the number to which it corresponds in the supermarket scales. When they have found all the product numbers, they check with the teacher pressing the corresponding numbers on the scales that will print a sticker with the product name.

3.5.8.b. Exercise 2:

The teacher gives each student a different letter, they have to find 2 products whose name begins with the given letter and put them in their trolley.

3.5.8.c. *Exercise 3:*

Students have to find two products that are on offer and put them in their trolley.

3.5.8.d. *Exercise 4:*

Each student is given the name of a product, they have to find it among others similar (e.g. "*riso basmati*" in the rice shelf) and put it in their trolley.

4. OBSERVATIONS ON THE COLLECTED DATA

4.1. *The CTP course and the students*

4.1.1. *The Class Setting*

The CTP lessons were carried out at the local primary school, in a room that was part of the caretaker's ancient house. The tables for the students were some old teacher desks around which they sat in groups of 4-5. There were 4 tables disposed in 2 rows for about 18 people. This organization was not very comfortable for the students, who did not have much individual space for writing. The teacher did not use a desk. He just put the teaching material on a small table to the right of the blackboard and he stood for most of the time in front of the students, near the blackboard, or moved in the class space to check what the students were doing. Next to the class there was another room where some volunteers looked after the babies of some of the women attending the lessons. Normally there were around 5 children between 1 and 3 years old. Some of these children were very lively and it was difficult for the volunteers to keep them inside the room. The children often came and went from the class, disturbing the lesson. When the children cried their mothers would get them and it became therefore difficult for the women to follow the lesson and especially to write. Sometimes children also tore the photocopies that their mothers were using for the lesson, or they took their mother's pens. When there were not many children to look after, one of the volunteers entered the class and moved around helping the students. The noise produced by the primary school children at the time of the school break was another disturbing element: they played under the class windows shouting and running, making it difficult for the people sitting near the windows to hear the teacher.

4.1.2. *The class composition*

In the class there were 18 students, aged from 21 to 53 (but the most part of them

was between 25 and 35 years old). This was the maximum number of those attending, but the number could vary from day to day. The vast majority of learners were women (16 out of 18: 89%). The countries of origin were different: Macedonia, Pakistan, India, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Ghana, Morocco (see figure 4.1). The only two men attending the course were a Senegalese and an Indian. There was not a dominant ethnic group, but the class was mainly divided in two blocks: African people and Asian-Macedonian people. Pakistani and Indian learners often grouped together. They used to sit in the second row along with the two Macedonian women. They interacted in English or in their native language, in Italian with the Macedonian people. They were the best students and they often intervened during the class activities. They attended the lessons regularly. Another group was composed of African francophone people (Senegalese and Burkinabe), who often interacted in French or in their native language. They sat in the first row together with the Ghanaean, Nigerian and Moroccan students. People of these latter nationalities, as they had no classmates of the same origin, interacted with the others in Italian. They were the weaker students and they attended the lessons less regularly.

4.1.3. The class activities

The most part of the activities was carried out with the teacher in front of the students, but the tables formed like little groups of 4/5 people. Students interacted mainly with the people sitting near to them and they had not much space to move. They moved only when the teacher asked them to go in front of the others to do a role-play or to write on the blackboard. During these activities they showed a certain satisfaction and amusement at being called out by the teacher. It seemed that their motivation grew while carrying out this kind of activities and their affective filter lowered (see par. 4.2.1. on motivation and par. 4.2.3 on the affective filter) as they were not shy to participate. Although the reduced space in class imposed mainly a fixed position of the students, the teacher often presented the lesson work as play-like activities, telling funny episodes, asking the students about their experience. The teacher had learned words in different languages during his 15 years experience in CTP courses and he used these words in class to attract the

students' attention, to compare foreign words with Italian ones or to make a concept clearer when students did not understand an Italian term.

Some lessons were taken as a sample and it was noticed that more than half - around 60%- of the activities carried out were oral against about 40% of writing and reading activities. The CTP teacher carried out balanced lessons with exercises that aimed at developing all the language skills at A1 level, but reading and writing in class was often too difficult for the illiterate/weakly literate women as the difference between them and the other students' abilities in this field was high. For this reason, even before starting the research, the class teacher himself had programmed an extra-half hour dedicated only to people who had literacy problems and for the same reason the exercises created for the research focused mainly on reading and writing abilities for this group of people.

4.1.4. Participation to the class activities

The illiterate and weakly literate students normally took part to the class activities as the other students, (as described above). This happened except for written activities, that were a bit difficult for some of them and too hard for others. During written activities, the illiterate people confined themselves to copying from the blackboard or from the classmates. Even though a simple transcription exercise may have been useful to them to develop their manual dexterity, this was not the ideal context to practice it: they wrote often without understanding the words, the other students were faster and soon the words written on the blackboard were erased, making the work very difficult for the illiterate ones.

4.1.5. Specific activities for illiterate people.

The situation varied during the part of the lesson reserved only for people with literacy problems. In this situation the number of students decreased to a maximum of 6 persons, who occupied the first row of the class and often sat around one table. All the people attending this part of the lesson were part of the African block of the class (3 Senegalese, 1 Burkinabe, 1 Moroccan, 1 Nigerian) and they were all

female. The main group was the francophone one (4 out of 6) who interacted in French (or in Wolof with the Senegalese). The other people had to interact necessarily in Italian. The 2 most literate of the small class group were francophone (1 Senegalese and 1 Burkinabe) and they helped the other learners or explained the exercises instructions when they were not clear to the others. The women who brought their children with them had to look after their children during this half hour, because the volunteers went home at the end of the main lesson. Normally there were 2 or 3 children. The teacher used to sit together with the students at the table and so the distance between learners and teacher was reduced. He used the alphabetic-syllabic literacy method with these students. Exercises focused mainly on pre-reading and pre-writing worksheets, games with plastic letters to identify sounds, sheets with exercises on syllables, reading of syllables using the syllabic table (see figure 4.2). Some students, even though not fully literate, were at a higher level than the others, so sometimes they were given different exercises. They also started to use a book, while the others only worked on photocopies or three-dimensional letters. The teacher mainly followed the weaker learners, trying to keep an eye also on the others from time to time. It was not simple for him to organize the path for this group as some learners' attendance was very discontinuous. For this reason he normally prepared different activities depending on who was present. The teaching material was usually created by himself, mixing exercises taken from books (both for adults or for children) and photocopied. The activities did not deal with specific topics that could attract the students' interest (for example in the words choice) but simply focused on the literacy acquisition process.

4.1.6. The Subjects

The subjects involved in the activities were:

- a) Hafida, Moroccan, 53 years old, in Italy for 15 years. Mother tongue: Moroccan Arabic. No previous school experience. She is illiterate even in her mother tongue and has problems of graphism. At the beginning of the didactic unit with the researcher she had just started to learn vowels and a few consonants in the

CTP course. She shows some typical specific problems of Arab-speaking people in learning Italian (cf. Della Puppa 2006): distinction of /e/ vs /i/, /o/ vs /u/, /p/ vs /b/, pronunciation of [tʃ] [tʒ] before /i/ and /e/. Probably because of her complete illiteracy, she developed some logical strategies to remember and understand words.

- b) Soukeye, Senegalese, 35 years old, in Italy for 6 months. Mother tongue: Wolof and French. She has a little previous school experience in French. She is the most literate of the group: she can recognise the majority of letters in different formats and she can read words, even though slowly and with some errors.
- c) Arimatou, Burkinabe, 27 years old, in Italy for 3 years. She is weakly literate. Mother tongue: Mooré and French. She already attended the L2 course during the previous year, where she learned how to read and write basically. She still has some problems in matching some graphemes to the corresponding phonemes (/f/ /s/ /z/).
- d) Mercy, Nigerian, 38 years old, in Italy for 10 years. Mother tongue: Yoruba and English. Weakly literate. She can read basic English, but this creates serious problems for her in reading Italian, as she automatically matches Latin letters to English sounds (for example she has difficulty in associating sound [tʒ] to Italian /ci/ /ce/, sound [s] to /s/, sound [z] to intervocalic /s/, sound [k] to /chi/ /che/, she does not separate Italian from English phonetic system). She has problems in logical thinking and uses very few strategies to achieve a goal.
- e) Kharr, Senegalese, 31 years old, in Italy for 2 years. Mother tongue: Wolof and a little French. Semi-literate. She can read Italian with some errors. She joined the group halfway through the didactic unit, for this reason less data were collected on her.
- f) Ngom, Senegalese, 49 years old, in Italy for 2 years. Mother tongue: Wolof. She had already attended the Italian L2 course during the previous year discontinuously and her literacy is still very low. She has problems in remembering graphemes and in putting them together to read a word. She also

has problems in logical thinking and uses few strategies to achieve a task.

From this data it was possible to observe that the vast majority of the learners were not completely illiterate, but they had a very small and discontinuous experience in school that had not given them complete competence in reading and writing. Although the people involved were small in number, there were differences between each one's level due to the mother tongue or to other languages spoken, school experience, logical abilities etc. The majority of them already knew another language, at least orally, in addition to their mother tongue and to Italian. Hence, their experience with a second language had started far before meeting Italian. An interesting aspect to be considered is the fact that the majority of them (5 out of 6) had a mother tongue that is normally spoken but not written: indeed Yoruba, Mooré and Wolof are African languages, widespread in West Africa, that did not have a writing system before colonisation of the respective areas. The writing system was introduced there only in the 17th century by Arab Muslims, using the Arabic alphabet for a new system, called *Ajami*, which transliterated phonetic sounds typical of African languages that were not present in Arabic. Later, during the 19th century, these languages were transcribed by Christian missionaries using Latin characters, but the languages introduced by European colonists (English and French) became the languages used for official written communications and taught in schools (Shillington 1995). Up to now, although there is a little amount of literature written in the local mother tongue, the native languages are mainly used orally, while in school children learn French or English. Only the Moroccan dialect can be distinguished from this situation, as it mainly comes from Berber and Arabic, both languages that have an ancient writing system on their own. However, in many rural areas of Morocco, a person can still live without knowing how to read and write (Durand 2004).

All the women had at least a basic knowledge of Italian, from which it was possible for the teacher to start the alphabetization process in this language (see the considerations on the need of oral knowledge of the L2 in par. 1.6.e.). Their level in listening and speaking could be classified as near to an A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)¹⁹. On the contrary, for

19 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, is a guideline used to describe

what concerns reading and writing skills, their level could not be classified in the CEFR. Indeed, even at A1 level -that is the lowest one- the CEFR takes for granted that students should be literate. Thus, the women involved in the research were actually at a pre-A1 level. To define their situation they were then classified following the alphabetisation scale proposed by Casi (see par.1.6.1). According to her benchmarks they were between ALF1 and ALF3 at the beginning of the lessons.

To be able to observe them from a closer point of view and to focus the students' efforts on some specific abilities, the researcher created a didactic module composed of 6 learning units (see chap. 3) containing activities that aimed at developing the learners' reading and writing skills (actually pre-reading and pre-writing) using Casi's scheme of reference. Less attention was paid to listening and speaking skills as these abilities were already practiced during the "normal" class activities in the larger group of students

4.2. Observations after the learning unit proposed by the researcher

4.2.1. Attendance

In the first phase of observation it was noticed that attendance was one of the main critical factors of the illiterates group; for this reason the researcher decided to create activities aimed not only at developing the literacy abilities of the students, but also at motivating the students in order to try to increase their participation. To create the activities, the researcher decided to use a context that was supposed to be part of the women's everyday life. The researcher's purpose was to combine the acquisition of the abilities mentioned in chap.3 with an exploration of the specific vocabulary that may be interesting and useful for the women's daily activities and

achievements of foreign language learners. It was created by the Council of Europe as the main part of the project "Language Learning for European Citizenship" between 1989 and 1996. Its main aim is to provide a method of learning, teaching and assessing which applies to all languages in Europe. In November 2001 a European Union Council Resolution recommended using the CEFR to set up systems of validation of language ability. Its six reference levels are widely accepted as the European standard for setting an individual's language proficiency (from <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/>).

could for this reason motivate course attendance. She tried to identify the aspects that the women had in common and therefore the reasons of their scarce attendance:

- a) *motherhood*: most of them were mothers with little children and they had to respond to their family duties before their school duties. Therefore, if their children were sick or did not go to school for any reason, they would not attend Italian lessons. Some of them, who had children under 3 years old took them to the course. Only one of them had children over 15 and one had no children;
- b) *no work*: all the women were housewives and therefore they had far less occasions to meet Italian people than the men. They mainly had contacts with Italians only through their children at school or in other public places (shops, hospital, etc.);
- c) *discontinuous school experience*: during childhood they had not been used to constant diligence in school and they had not developed a study method;
- d) *slow acquisition of writing and reading due to their adult age*: to confirm this fact, the two elder women (respectively 49 and 53 years old) were the weaker learners;
- e) *need of Italian for basic everyday activities*: shopping, meeting their children's teachers, helping children with their homework, interacting with Italian speakers in public offices, hospitals, etc.

Although some of the women did not attend lessons regularly, the fact itself of participating in an Italian course showed a certain intrinsic motivation, linked to their needs, as they decided to enrol voluntarily. The CTP teacher pointed out that since the A2 level of language has become compulsory to get a long-term permit of stay (*carta di soggiorno*), many immigrants attend Italian courses with the main purpose to get a certificate to show to the *Questura*, therefore with an extrinsic instrumental motivation²⁰. This could be the case of some of the women involved, who had arrived in Italy a few months previously, but not of others who already had the *carta di soggiorno*. The eldest of the learners was even getting Italian citizenship in a few months time and she declared her will to learn Italian better to

20 For a thorough examination of the kinds of motivation see chap. 1.5.1

show some knowledge of the language during the ceremony of the oath of citizenship. She was probably moved by an intrinsic motivation to get social redemption and approval and to not give a bad impression to the Italian authorities after many years of residence in Italy.

The women's attendance increased during the researcher's lessons, while after the end of the experience (that lasted until the beginning of Christmas holidays) the CTP teacher ascertained that in January 4 out of 6 students gradually stopped attending the course. This may mean a decrease in motivation after the end of the experience, with the restart of "normal" lessons, but it could be also due to other personal reasons, because, as said before, discontinuous attendance is normal in these courses.

4.2.2. Motivation

As mentioned above, the group involved was composed of people who had a similar condition: they were all foreign women who had come to Italy for family reunification. From this condition derives the main part of their long-term motivation: integrate into Italian society (integrative motivation) and be able to carry out everyday activities autonomously interacting with the Italian speaking community (instrumental motivation). The women can be divided into two sub-categories according to their social and familiar condition: four of them were under 30 years old, they had little children and they had been in Italy for a few years (from 6 months to 3 years), while two other women were older (over 40 years old) and they had been in Italy for more than 10 years. From the questionnaire it emerged that the younger women preferred topics like children and school, while the eldest ones preferred topics related to work and public places. Both the groups stated anyway they were interested in the topic that was dealt with during the researcher's lessons (shopping) and in house keeping and cooking, which are presumably part of their daily environment as housewives. The students' levels were different, as one of them was totally illiterate and the others were weakly literate with different literacy levels: one was ALF 1, another one was ALF 2 and two were ALF 3 (for a further description of literacy levels see chap. 1.5). The use of authentic materials allowed the researcher to work at different levels without appearing too banal to the

most literate students in the group (for example, when analysing words spelling for the weaker students the exercise was mainly training on letters and sounds, that could be done with any other word, while for the ones who already knew letters it was an analysis of the specific lexicon of the topic we were dealing with), The non-sequentiality of levels of authentic material that could be a problem from a certain point of view, in this case became a resource. For example, in an exercise that consisted of composing words starting from given syllables, the easier words (the disyllabic ones) were given to the less expert students, while the most difficult ones (words with three or more syllables) were given to the most expert participants.

4.2.3. *Answers to the students' needs*

It has not been simple to analyse the students' needs objectively through an interview or a questionnaire because they may have been easily influenced by the good impression they wanted to make on the teacher (and on the researcher). At first, language needs were analysed through direct observation in class and through questionnaires given to the students by the CTP teacher when they enrolled in the course and filled with his help. The elements observed were taken into consideration while programming the activities. Other needs emerged during the lessons (through students' comments or questions they asked) and at the end of the lessons the researcher tried to submit to the students a very simple questionnaire even though with some doubts as to the effectiveness of the results. Some questions were actually too difficult for the students, and they stated they would not understand their meaning (in particular question n.2: "*Secondo te gli esercizi fatti possono servire nella vita quotidiana?*" and n. 4: "*Ti piacerebbe fare altre lezioni dello stesso tipo?*"). The other questions, on the contrary, were very useful to get an evaluation of the experience seen from the students' point of view and while filling the questionnaire in some observations emerged even orally by the learners.

Following Balboni's indications (2008a), needs have been divided in:

a) *future pragmatic needs*: that depend on the context in which students live and on which communicative competences are necessary for them. These needs

change continuously and therefore they are linked to point below. In the case of the women involved, the main pragmatic needs they may have had at the beginning of the activities were linked to the necessity to communicate with their children's teachers or with other Italian people they may meet in public places (doctors, employees, etc.) both directly or through written messages (e.g. written communications by the school or by the municipality), to help their children with their homework, to be autonomous in simple tasks like going shopping. Another need they expressed was to learn the language to be able to look for a job (at the time none of them was working);

- b) *need to learn how to learn*: at the low literacy level of the people involved it is represented by the acquisition of basic abilities (like manual dexterity, management of the book/copybook space, etc.) that will allow them to manage writing and reading as a first step towards autonomy in learning; the activities took into account also the need to analyse elements that may not be present in the original culture of the people involved, like iconic representation of reality, abstraction, Euclidean geometrical conception of space;
- c) *present needs*: it emerged that the proposed activities answered the students' perception of needs partly. In the questionnaire given at the end of the experience, they expressed the will to do more oral exercises. They felt more urgent to develop their oral abilities to interact in Italian. Actually, in the part of the lesson dedicated to them the attention was focused on reading and writing for the reasons explained in chap. 2.3, and they may have noticed that the activities were imbalanced. Maybe the intent of the activities was not clear enough to them. The activities were deliberately dedicated to reading and writing in order to develop abilities that have a significant importance in a society where many messages are written, even if the students may not feel a strong immediate need of this as they rely on the help of their relatives to carry out some communicative functions. Moreover it has to be emphasized that the request for more oral activities came from the most literate women of the group, who may not have felt such an urgent need of literacy as the less literate did. A following project should anyway take into consideration these requests and deal with the topics asked by the students.

4.2.4. Problems faced during the activities

During the tests and the written exercises that were conducted it was observed that the students' main problems were about space management, tasks comprehension and affective filter mechanisms:

- a) *Space management*: 3 out of 6 students had problems in managing space. They did not write letters in the right gaps, putting them under the dotted line given, or putting two letters in the space for one (see Example 4.1). Different exercises had to be divided by a line, otherwise these students confused an exercise with the following one even if there was some space between them;
- b) *comprehension of the tasks*: it was not always clear to the students what had to be done. Some of them did not often understand the instructions given, they confused what had to be done and they understood only after a few examples by the teacher or by imitating their mates (see example 4.2).
- c) *affective filter towards written activities*²¹: it was noticed that there were different levels of achievement reached on a same topic while carrying out play-like activities instead of written activities. For example, Hafida, the less literate in the group, showed that she was able to use good logical reasoning to recognise same words written in different characters in a role-play, while she had much more difficulty in carrying out the same task on paper. She could recognise many of the products given on a list by comparing the words written in the shopping list and the ones printed on the product label (see exercises in chap. 3, lesson 5), while, when she had to face a similar exercise that was written (she had to link up words written in capital letters and standard font to the corresponding ones written in different characters, as they appear on products' labels, by drawing a line), she had much more difficulty and made many mistakes.

During the lessons, on many occasions it was noticed that the use of authentic materials, role-play and cards made the students activate all their abilities more than a merely written activity. Play-like activities raised motivation and reduced the

²¹ For a thorough examination on the affective filter hypothesis see chap.1.5.1.

affective filter that was probably linked with the students' previous negative experiences in the school field and consequently with the world of books and written messages in general. 4 out of 6 students got better results in play-like activities than in more traditional written activities on the same subject, while 2 students (the most literate in the group) carried out all kind of activities indifferently, without any problem. These were the ones who presumably had already overcome a negative relationship with school as one had already attended a CTP course and the other had attended school in Senegal and was basically literate in French. Although the experience showed that play-like activities had a good impact on students, some activities were also carried out on paper, as the students had to start facing the page space too (see Minuz 2005). The students were not asked to use a book as the materials were created by the researcher herself. The activities gave the students the possibility to come into contact with a piece of paper that is very close to that of a book and therefore to begin to understand the rules that must be followed in that space. For future activities it may be useful to create a little book with the students' activities instead of giving them single sheets.

4.2.5. Employment of literacy skills in a real everyday context

One of the aims of the activities was to improve literacy for hands-on application. The exercises carried out during the final "field test" (see chap. 3.8) have been useful to see the women acting in a real everyday context: a supermarket. Some of the tasks given were necessarily a bit artificial because the aim was to verify whether the students could use reading skills and not only compensate with the images or the real objects they saw (for example, in exercise 2 they did not have only to find a product - like for example rice -, but a particular kind of product among other similar ones - like basmati rice - and therefore to analyse all the words on the product label). The main difficulty faced by the students has been initially to understand the instructions, as they were not used to carrying out educational activities in a supermarket and probably it was a bit strange for them. In this experience too it emerged that the students participated more - and often performed activities with better results - in play-like activities than in traditional lessons. The majority of participants carried out the tasks without any problem; just

on a few occasions two/three of them needed the teacher's help to understand the instructions better (the CTP teacher was willing to help students if they had problems in carrying out the activities), but they finally achieved the goal.

CONCLUSION

From the results observed it can be stated that carrying out lessons on everyday topics with authentic materials is not only possible with adult learners at low literacy levels but also advisable as it makes the activities more motivating for them. Indeed, to these students illiteracy means that they are not independent in carrying out their everyday tasks, in a society that gives great importance to writing in all its forms, moreover in a place where these people's mother tongue is not spoken. The urgent need to improve language and communicative skills to answer to contingent needs clashes with the slowness of the acquisition process in illiterate people at adult age. This makes the choice of significant topics that can involve the students in activities that could be otherwise boring (like repetition, transcription, words composition, etc.) fundamental.

Even if reaching full literacy in adult age often requires a long time, the fact itself of going back to school after many years and of overcoming little by little the hurdles that these people have amassed during life is very significant for them. It was striking the fact that they often thanked the teacher and the researcher at the end of the lesson.

Even a gender issue underlies this educational practice: indeed, if we consider that the vast majority of people attending the courses are women, emancipation in education could mean (for them more than for men) emancipation in their social role in the community and in the family and recovery of their educational role as mothers.

Play-like activities are a good choice in this context as they help to overcome the affective filter; they put the student in direct contact with a different kind of teaching and of schooling that is more similar to the schooling their children are experiencing in Italy.

Obviously, the essential condition for the development of these kinds of activities is the possibility of being able to carry out lessons dedicated only to learners at low literacy levels, as these people need attention and specific programs and as such cannot be assimilated to students who are attending courses at A1 level of the L2. They need to be protected as a weak minority group, singled out as such in education programs, and for whom more specific teaching materials should be developed to facilitate the teachers' work.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW TO THE CTP TEACHER

Diego Bodei, the CTP teacher involved, is a primary school teacher who since 1997 dedicated his work to adult education, initially in courses for convicts and for illiterate Italians and then in L2 courses for immigrants for about 10 years. He has been interviewed by the researcher at the end of the experience in class.

1. Quali corsi propone il vostro CTP agli adulti immigrati?

“Nel CTP di Calcinato si svolgono corsi A1 e A2, quelli che in passato venivano chiamati corsi di alfabetizzazione/base e corsi di livello Intermedio. Nel CTP “Foscolo” di Brescia, il più grande della provincia, si svolgono da tempo anche corsi di livello B1 e B2. Da noi talora s’è fatto qualche corso B1, affidato per lo più a colleghi di lettere delle ex 150 ore /Scuola media serale, ma attualmente non si svolgono corsi di questo livello. Chi ha già superato il livello A2 in genere viene indirizzato più che altro verso i corsi di scuola media, che gli danno la possibilità di avere anche un titolo di studio conseguito in Italia, che può essergli utile ai fini della ricerca di un posto di lavoro”.

2. Come si avvicinano gli immigrati al CTP? tramite passaparola o avete altri canali per coinvolgerli?

“Da sempre c’è il collegamento, anche discretamente istituzionalizzato, tra la sede del CTP (ospitata presso l’Istituto Comprensivo di Calcinato) e le scuole d’ogni ordine e grado, gli Assessorati-Uffici scuola dei Comuni a cui fa riferimento il CTP: quelli che vanno dal basso Garda (Desenzano) fino alla bassa bresciana orientale (Remedello). Certo poi anche il passaparola tra gli appartenenti alle varie comunità etniche ha il suo peso; ad esempio, volantini prima dell’inizio delle attività didattiche li distribuiamo anche nei negozi etnici che sono man mano nati nei Comuni dove operiamo”.

2. Mediamente le persone che si presentano ai CTP sono in Italia da quanto tempo (qualche mese, qualche anno, molti anni)?

“I corsisti che di solito si presentano per frequentare i corsi base (A1) sono in Italia

da pochi giorni fino a un paio di anni; quelli che sono in Italia da più anni chiedono di frequentare corsi di livello intermedio (A2, più di rado B1). Non mancano eccezioni sia in un senso che nell'altro: cioè persone in Italia da molti anni ma poco o nulla alfabetizzate e quindi carenti come competenza linguistica inseriti dunque in corsi base, oppure persone altamente scolarizzate e con esigenza di "bruciare le tappe" che chiedono da subito di frequentare i corsi più impegnativi".

3. Perché si iscrivono ai corsi? (Per superare l'esame A2 della Questura, per lavoro, per sviluppare competenze da spendere sul territorio...).

"Diciamo che da pochissimi anni è necessariamente aumentato il numero di coloro che desiderano/devono conseguire certificazioni richieste dalla normativa vigente sull'immigrazione. Da sempre la molla principale per cui una persona immigrata si avvicina ad un corso di lingua del paese ospite è la speranza che permetta di trovare più facilmente un lavoro, come anche il bisogno di socializzare maggiormente con la comunità ospitante, per molte donne-mamme il desiderio di seguire meglio i propri figli nel loro iter scolastico".

4. Di quante ore è costituito un corso annuale A1?

"Mediamente di 100-110 ore annue (di solito due incontri settimanali da ottobre ai primi di giugno), ma talora, nei paesi dove non riusciamo a organizzare continuamente corsi, teniamo anche corsi quadrimestrali di circa 50-60 ore".

5. Le ore che svolgi con chi ha problemi di analfabetismo sono aggiunte per vostra iniziativa o vengono previste dalla struttura del corso A1 (dato che non c'è un percorso specifico per i pre-A1)?

"In questi anni la struttura, l'organico docente dei CTP (nei casi ottimali: 3 docenti alfabetizzatori e 5 docenti di scuola media inferiore impegnati con i corsi delle ex 150 ore/scuola media serale) è stato investito, data la vastità del territorio di pertinenza e l'entità del fenomeno immigratorio nella nostra provincia, da una quantità tale di richieste di frequenza ai corsi che il peso dei numeri ha imposto le priorità: molti corsi di livello A1 con parecchi frequentanti, diversi corsi di livello A2 con un numero medio di frequentanti didatticamente più adeguato, il fenomeno crescente dell'inserimento di corsisti stranieri (per lo più già transitati nei corsi

base-intermedio di lingua italiana) nei corsi di scuola media serale. I corsisti analfabeti o semianalfabeti sono quasi sempre un problematico sottogruppo dei corsi base, rarissima la possibilità di organizzare un corso tutto per loro quando si opera in paesi di piccola e media dimensione, per cui ogni insegnante cerca di ritagliarsi, compatibilmente con il suo monte ore, piccoli spazi, frazioni orarie aggiuntive per operare con loro in modo individualizzato. In circa un quindicennio di esperienza come alfabetizzatore ricordo di esser riuscito, cinque-sei anni fa, ad organizzare due forse tre corsi quadrimestrali con gruppi-classe “omogeneamente” composti da soli analfabeti-semianalfabeti. In alcune rare situazioni fortunate, se ci sono dei/le volontari/e che affiancano l’insegnante, si può far supportare il singolo analfabeta durante lo svolgimento della lezione nel gruppo- classe di livello A1”.

8. Come si pone il CTP rispetto a questo tipo di alunni? Sono considerati una componente a cui porre attenzione o, essendo una piccola percentuale, non rappresentano un grosso “problema” per il centro?

“Come detto, purtroppo, la forza dei numeri ha portato in molti CTP, compreso il mio, (anche se eccezioni lodevoli qua e là in provincia ed in giro per l’Italia non mancano), a dare la precedenza alla richiesta massiccia di apprendimento dei rudimenti base della lingua della sopravvivenza con corsi affollati di neo-arrivati o quasi che vogliono abbastanza in fretta acquisire competenze da spendere sul mercato occupazionale. Ultimamente la giustificata definizione di livelli standard d’acquisizione delle competenze (correlati al *framework* QCER per le lingue) ha portato l’attenzione a privilegiare il raggiungimento di certificazioni richieste dalla normativa sui permessi di soggiorno, ciò è necessario per muoversi con maggior omogeneità nazionale e comunitaria, ma porta i CTP (se pressati da esigenze burocratiche del Ministero degli Interni che paiono prevalere su quelle educativo-didattiche, che dovrebbero essere maggiormente tutelate dal Ministero dell’Istruzione) a rischiare di diventare troppo simili a un “esamificio” e, a maggior ragione, a “dimenticare” i casi di apprendenti che necessitano di interventi didattici lunghi, costanti, certificabili solo a distanza di tempo con attestazioni di livelli di competenza comunque modesti”.

6. Secondo la tua esperienza, perché gli analfabeti si avvicinano ai corsi di italiano

(spinti da familiari, per essere più indipendenti, per esigenze lavorative/di documenti, per un riscatto dal mancato percorso scolastico da bambini...)?

“Ci sono tutte le ragioni che sono espresse nella domanda in un mix diverso per ogni singola situazione personale, ma certo per un adulto (dopo probabili precedenti episodiche esperienze di frustranti insuccessi) impegnarsi in un percorso di apprendimento in una lingua che non è la tua lingua madre è cosa estremamente difficile, che per la sua delicatezza andrebbe adeguatamente supportata sia didatticamente che psicologicamente”.

7. Perché poi la loro frequenza è spesso scostante (perdita di motivazione, insuccessi, altri impegni, ambiente di studio,...)? Sono generalmente più scostanti degli altri alunni o questo altalenare è tipico dei corsi rivolti in generale ad adulti?

“Il tasso piuttosto elevato di incostanza nella frequenza è caratteristica abbastanza abituale dei corsi di italiano L2 per adulti, basti pensare al fatto che si tratta di adulti pressati prioritariamente da problemi di precarietà abitativa, di lavoro, dagli impegni familiari.

Nello specifico degli analfabeti-semianalfabeti il fenomeno è forse leggermente ancor più accentuato, anche se non ne ho mai fatto una rilevazione statistica precisa e certo il di più è dato dalla maggior difficoltà a mantenere alta la motivazione e l'impegno, tenuto conto che l'attenzione che la scuola riesce solitamente ad offrire loro è alquanto modesta”.

8. Quando si avvicinano ai corsi dichiarano di essere analfabeti/semi-analfabeti o è un aspetto che si scopre durante la frequenza?

“Dipende da caso a caso, per alcuni -direi i più maturi anagraficamente- l'analfabetismo è un handicap da celare con mille piccole “simpatiche” arguzie. Per altri, i più giovani di solito (che riescono anche ad apprendere più celermente), la cosa appare meno pesante, ma per tutti trovarsi a poter condividere con qualcun altro questa condizione di inferiorità è motivo di incoraggiamento reciproco, di maggior speranza e fiducia nell'affrontare la nuova esperienza formativa”.

9. Quali aspetti potrebbero migliorare le istituzioni nell'offerta formativa per dare risposta alle esigenze di queste persone?

“Come già detto, queste persone, già di per sé difficilmente nelle condizioni/capaci di offrire perseveranza nella motivazione e nell’impegno, necessiterebbero di impegnative proposte formative: corsi più lunghi ma anche con incontri più frequenti di quelli standard dei CTP. La possibilità di lavoro sull’orale congiuntamente ad altri corsisti con competenza linguistica maggiore può risultare una buona opportunità, ma con loro è sicuramente necessario lavorare molto per piccoli gruppi, con interventi personalizzati. In estrema sintesi, occorrerebbe attuare nei loro confronti quella che, in letteratura pedagogica, viene felicemente definita “discriminazione positiva” (investire di più verso chi ha meno, chi parte da posizioni di svantaggio socio-culturale)”.

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