Degree Project
Master’s Degree
The Making of My Own Future

Student-centred education for African adult students in a CPIA in Verona, Italy

Author: Nadia Ricci
Supervisor: Lars Berge
Examiner: Lars Berge
External Examiner: Nadja Lebedeva
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Abstract

With the institution of Provincial Centres for Adults’ Education in 2015, Italy has created a new system for adults’ and especially adult migrants’ education, responding to the needs for language alphabetization, higher education for immigrants, and a response to scholastic dispersion. These Centres offer courses for the obtainment of middle school and high school diplomas, and certifications for language proficiency following the regulations of CEFR. Dealing with a strong and majoritarian immigrant population, and the delicate themes of cultural diversity, adult age in education, and the needs for professional training, CPIAs have to respond to necessities that are peculiar to schools for adult education and immigrant students.

This research aims at discovering and defining which student-centred approaches are implemented and regulated in CPIAs, in order to sustain an education that promotes cultural diversity as a resource and agency for adult students; the study will explore which class practices are utilized to enhance students’ autonomy and respond to their motivation, by listening and rendering public the voices of African students directly receiving education and second language acquisition courses from the CPIA in Verona. The thesis will advocate for a regulation of school practices that have proved to result as effective, and an implementation of measures taken by teachers and encouraged by the school system in order to enhance students’ motivation, autonomy, and agency.
To all students and teachers of CPIAs,
for an improved perspective on how to
enhance students’ personal choices in
making their own future.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Preface
The school year 2014/2015 has marked the beginning of a new State project in the Italian context of efforts in dealing with immigration and education, specifically the one designed for adults. The creation of Provincial Centres for Adults’ Education (from now CPIA), heirs of the previous system of Permanent Territorial Centres (from now CTP), represents a crucial change in the path for the improvement of migrants’ conditions and integration in Italian society; the Centres constitute autonomous school institutions, with their own logistic and didactic structures, teachers, principal, and secretary office. CPIAs are meant to provide education to adults in general, with “adults” meaning people who are over 16 years old, and who need to either acquire a diploma for the first level of Secondary School, or to achieve specific level of Italian proficiency. The word “Adults” defines a wide range of people to whom this education is dedicated, and it reflects the diverse composition of classes in terms of age, gender, provenance, and cultural background; the recent augmentation of the migration fluxes to Italy has strongly changed the amount of immigrant students who sign up for Italian as a second language courses (under the rules of language proficiency defined by the CEFR, of which the CPIAs are in charge in Italy) and Secondary School courses. Of this majority if not totality of foreign students enrolled in Secondary School courses, and clearly in Italian language courses, the most numerous group is composed by migrants from the African continent.

My involvement with one of the CPIAs in Verona, Northern Italy, has begun in the fall of 2021, accompanied by curiosity and will to learn more; after teaching as a substitute in English classes, I have had the opportunity to follow three Italian teachers of the centre in their numerous classes, participating in lessons and bonding with the students. The aim of my research was that of rendering public the experiences of students in CPIAs, specifically regarding Italian as a second language learning and teaching, through my personal observation of lessons and activities, the confront with teachers and their personal takes, and as a central mean the listening of the students’ voices regarding their educational path in Italy, especially while learning Italian as a second language, and what this learning path means to them in terms of aspirations and personal realization. What has interested me the most, especially after studying and discovering more about how language schools for adults work in other countries, is the rapport between teachers and students, which is inherently different than the one that unfolds in other grades of school, due to many factors such as age, multiculturalism, solid life experiences, different goals and mind-sets,
and the relevance of the migration experience in most of the students’ lives. In this school system, the centrality of students is at a different rate than in regular schools, as these learners are adults, who have usually chosen to embark in a migration process, and therefore have very diverse cultural, professional, social and political background. How this school could deal with this dense presence of diversity is what has pulled me the most into the class experience, and verifying students’ perception of their educational choices and their scholastic journey has become one of the central scopes of this study.

Objective
The aim of this research is to describe how the CPIAs deal with the themes of diversity and agency for African students in a student-centred educational approach, utilizing the study of multicultural education and the andragogy approach.

Research Questions
- How do the curriculum and teachers in CPIAs deal with multiculturalism and diversity in their classes?
- How do the curriculum and teachers in CPIAs promote the reinforcement of African adult students’ agency?

Methodology
The following research has been conducted through qualitative method, with the use of a case study, observation in classes, semi-structured interviews to students and informal interactions with teachers as primary sources; secondary sources consist in bibliographical research and theories that sustain the employment of the two approaches that will help analyse the use of multicultural and agency-enforcement practices in classes, additionally to previous studies regarding the institution and characteristics of CPIAs.

The observation of classes and of the whole social and cultural environment of CPIAs courses (conducted between the months of April and June of 2022) has lasted for two months and a half, at the end of which I have conducted the interviews with students who have offered to participate, or who have accepted my request to participate. During the observation period I have followed the courses of three Italian teachers at this CPIA: the first one teaching Italian for the A2 level, the second one for the B1 level, and the third one teaching Italian literature and History for the Secondary School diploma’s course, which is categorized as “First Level” course within the CPIA’s framework. I have chosen to follow these three courses, and not the Italian course for A1
proficiency level, because of the limitations that language disparities could provide, which were actually still present with some of the students, but to a smaller extent than it would have been with students who do not possess the lower level of Italian proficiency, at least for the oral communication part. Deciding to investigate the theme of agency, I have deducted that the basis for empowering agency in teachers’ programs is a moderate oral level of a common communication language, which in this case has to be Italian, therefore I have chosen to follow moderate and high level courses, in order to verify the activities that can empower students the most, and interact with people who could communicate with me without feeling too constricted by language barriers. Dealing with the multicultural theme, as well, has pushed me to choose higher level of Italian proficiency in courses, assuming that with higher competences teachers had more freedom to tackle more sensitive and complex themes, rather than focus solely on grammar notions.

During observation, I have first only assisted at lessons, sitting on desks close to students, and I was presented as a researcher and support teacher that was there to benefit from the experience of assisting and participating to these courses. My observation has become later more participated, as aside from taking notes, I have assisted teachers in preparing class activities, and supported students during said class activities, helping the ones who needed particular assistance or conducting class discussions.

In total, this study will use as primary sources the interviews to 10 students who have migrated from African countries; of these students, 5 were following the B1 level course, 1 was following the A2 course, and 4 were participating in both the A2 course and in the First Level classes.

Out of the 10 African students, 6 of them are from Morocco, 2 of them from Senegal, and the other 2 are from Côte d’Ivoire. These are the 3 most common nationalities not only among African students, but among students I have met overall, equalled only by Indian students. These data reflect only slightly the national framework of foreign residents composition on the national territory: in fact, the two most represented ethnicities in foreign residents are Romanian, then followed by Moroccan in 2022, and this data was the same in 2021. (Istat Report, 2021). In 2022, the most represented continent in Italy is Asia, with the 31% of Asian residents out of all foreign residents, closely followed by Africa with the 30%. While considering data regarding overall foreign residents in Italy, it is fundamental to verify the migration fluxes of the one to two years previous to the study, for students who are in need of language certifications are the ones who have most recently arrived. In fact, 8 out of the 10 African students I have interviewed had arrived in Italy in 2020 or 2021, 1 year or less prior to their participation in the CPIA courses. While the migration flux from Morocco has been stable for a long time now in Italy, migrants from West African countries
(namely Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria and Senegal) have risen in the year 2021, following a recent trend, and therefore reflecting the composition of the classes I have met, where African students were the majority, as they are the majority of recent arrivals, together with migrants from Pakistan. (Istat Report, 2021-2022)

Students were therefore chosen both for their national representation as data reports for communities in Italy, and, as aforementioned, for their participation in higher proficiency courses and subsequent better oral competences; within these classes, participation to interviews was voluntary.

Secondary sources such as bibliographical research and documents have been employed in order to provide historical and institutional background to the creation of CPIAs, and to provide a theoretical framework for the approaches that will be utilized to analyse class practices and their aims. The use of previous research or documents regarding the institution of CPIAs will be deployed in Chapter 2, as they create a background for the path that has led the Italian Ministry of Education to institute the new education centred, leading from the previous institution of CTPs.

Theories regarding multicultural education and andragogy will be presented in the Theoretical Framework section, and then employed as tools to analyse class practices implemented by teachers, in order to define which principles of these theories can reflect effective class practices and their reception from students, and whether these theories could be more deployed in programming curriculum and didactic units in CPIAs.

Source Materials

As previously stated, interviews and researcher’s observation provide the primary sources for this study, employed to describe class practices that encourage multicultural education and agency promotion in adult immigrant students.

The questions that have been formulated in order to guide the interviews do not intend to clearly demand students’ opinions about their freedom in the learning process, or their direct perception of agency or of their own motivation, but aim at, first, letting the interviewees feel comfortable with talking about themselves, their background and their interests, and then express feelings about their expectations and motivations behind their educational path at the CPIA. The conditions of my study have proven favourable for students to open up more easily about sensitive matters, or their personal history, as I have participated in the classes, helping the teachers in conducting activities in class and accompanying students personally through some tasks; with most of them I have built a bond of affection, which can represent both a researcher’s bias, and an advantage in getting
personal insights without the barrier that conversations with an external and unknown researcher could have been present.

The recordings of interviews are present on my laptop and on a separate cloud, and they have been taken with previous agreement with students regarding questions that were going to be asked and agreeing on anonymity of students in the thesis.

The presentation of students participating in interviews is present in the Appendix, following this research.

I have taken several notes during my observation, appointing what I noticed were interesting lessons and approaches to topics in classes, even though much of the observation has been mostly participated, therefore notes reference lessons and practices, but do not contain whole transcriptions of lessons.

**State of Research**

Second language learning has been researched for several decades, and the studies have intensified, especially in Europe, given the growing attention that the public opinion is giving to changes of migration flows towards Mediterranean and Central Europe, particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa. The importance of age is relevant in many of these studies, and numerous factors such as life experiences, work experience and cultural background have been explored as fundamental variables in the process of second language learning for migrants and refugees, especially in adult age. These factors have been investigated mostly under the lenses of the didactic and linguistic disciplines, in order to verify whether teaching practices result effective in classes of adult migrants who need to learn a second language for their integration and admission process in their destination or transit countries.

An anthropological and sociological approach to second language learning for migrants, though, has been adopted already, and regarded several times as the most appropriate in order to give the necessary relevance to sociolinguistic factors that influence and sometimes determine the process of second language acquisition in adults. (Ahearn, 2001; Pavlenko, 2016)

The most used theoretical framework is that of Bourdieu, who has defined the opposition between agency and structure, and the unconscious perpetration of symbolic violence in teaching and learning processes; these concepts come as naturally important in analysing power structures and rapports in education, specifically if this educative relations happen in the migration framework (Norton Peirce, 1995 Flowerdew and Miller, 2008; Rind, 2016).

Flowerdew and Miller (2008) have conducted a case study research on adult immigrant learners and their balance between work life and education, supporting the need for investment in this kind of
education; the authors conclude by maintaining the necessity for a more student-centred education when dealing with adult learners, by enabling students to express themselves in the second language, and empowering their background skills in order for them to capitalize them for new learning processes.

One of the most complete analyses of sociolinguistic factors in second language acquisition for immigrant adults through case study is the research from Zachrison (2014), who advocates for multicultural teaching approaches in Swedish as a second language teaching, and denounces the employment of assimilationist policies and ideologies in teaching Swedish to immigrants. The author investigates, through the voices of students, the feeling of otherness that second language acquisition for immigrants can create in schools for adults by promoting the idea of “good Swedish” and not investing in student-centred education, but a unique culture-centred one.

Choi and Nunan (2018) have conducted a case study as well, regarding adult learners of English as a second language, researching the modalities of class approaches in order to find new solutions other than frontal lessons; they advocate for the use of multimodality, out-of-class activities, and the need for teachers’ negotiation with students and the institution to adapt didactic programs and techniques to the needs of students, supporting an increasingly student-centres educational approach.

As Ferguson, Kozleski and Smith (2001), Zachrison (2014), Cornejo Torres and Rosales Ubera (2015), Lange et al. (2015), and Flowerdew and Miller (2008) have maintained, the fundamental need in second language education for refugees and migrants is a student centred education, that could use social and cultural elements from foreign students’ habitus in order for them to not experience a strong clash with the new habitus, and to create more effective teaching practices for language learning, instead of focusing solely on the linguistic need for integration of migrants.

Given these conclusions and intents, I will investigate whether the CPIA through its curriculum promotes this student centred education and multicultural environment rather than assimilation practices, and if teachers adhere or not to the curriculum and how they put it in practice; I will then investigate the motivations that have led CPIA’s African students to invest into this educational project, and whether the school structure support these motivations and promote the realization of personal objectives for students.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Multicultural Education**

Multiculturalism is a broad concept, which has led to the creation of a movement that advocates for equality, awareness and acceptance in regards to the variety of cultures increasingly encountering,
born after the Civil Rights movement in the United States. It implies the need for deeper knowledge of cultural diversity, which was first intended as regarding only cultures based on ethnicity or national identities, but after decades of critical discussions the notion of diversity has come to involve other social characteristics, such as gender, class, ability or disability, age, sexual orientation (Banks, 2009). A deeper knowledge and a more acritical look to these factors would lead therefore to a more articulate awareness of diversity between cultural practices and concepts, and to more inclusive social practices, such as education. Education plays inevitably a central role in Multiculturalism, as it represents the beginning of a multicultural society building process, making an effort to root multicultural processes in future communities; this approach aims at dealing with diversity in benefiting terms for societies and their students, in order to enhance diversity as a resource and to utilize the advantages of cultural and language diversity in classes (Nieto, 2010: 3).

Thus, multicultural education tries to embody the principles of equal opportunities and freedom to learn for all students, encompassing differences in race, gender, age, class, ethnicity or religion; it advocates for equal education for every individual, regardless of their cultural characteristics, and it encourages acceptance, awareness and knowledge of these differences (Arslan, 2013: 15). Its goals comprehend: fostering the affirmation of all cultures, developing skills that enable to live appropriately in a multicultural environment, deepening knowledge of different cultural practices and characteristics, increasing tolerance and acceptance, and building awareness for the individual’s cultural heritage in order to help constructing one’s personal identity. These principles have been well accepted in the education and school communities, but the issues lay in the implementation of practices and policies that encourage and actually build these capacities in students (Arslan, 2013: 17).

Banks (2009: 15) has divided multicultural education into five dimensions, that are still nowadays strongly taken into consideration when tackling this topic; these dimensions are meant to be guidelines for school practitioners, in order for them to articulate teaching methods that actually empower students from different backgrounds and leads them into multicultural practices. These dimensions are: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy and an empowering school culture. These dimensions will be further discussed and employed in Chapter 4, when evaluating the application of multicultural education practices in class activities.

Multicultural education cannot be considered a mere study of others’ cultures, but multiple studies of a wide variety of practices, relative and depending on contexts; it is not an object or an idea, but it needs to be intended as a process (Ladson-Billings, 2003: 51). And the discussion about the idea
of culture itself is a process, as stated by various authors who have defined the issues around which debates have been developing; as the concept of multiculturalism was first born around discourses of race in the US, the notion has expanded, encompassing different dimensions of human beings, and including gender, social class, sexual orientation, ability and many other fringes of humans’ lives and socialization (idem: 55-57).

Cultural Capital, Structure and Agency
One first fundamental concept that needs to be defined in order to understand sequent ones is that of capital, and in particular, cultural capital. Bourdieu’s definition of capital extends its notion as power and assets to a conception of capital that can be social, cultural or symbolic; these types of capital can be accumulated and transmitted from one environment to another, and they define the shaping of societal power relations (Navarro, 2006: 16-17). Cultural capital plays a central role in defining power structures, for it can represent a wider box for including symbolic capital as in education and knowledge matters, which can then be transformed into social and economic capital (Pavlenko, 2016: 283).

Habitus is, subsequently, the place and space through which power and power relations are transmitted, that is to say tendencies or norms that are imposed through the social system; these tendencies or norms are the ones that guide individuals in how they behave and how they think. Habitus, the types of capital and symbolic violence are theorized by Bourdieu in Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (1984).
Every habitus is constituted of structure and agency, defined in Bourdieu’s Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977) as a strong dichotomic system, in which structure is represented as the most influential element in individual’s decisional power, and that can be identified in the cultural, social, economic and political context in which a person socializes. On the other hand, agency is in this period still identified as free will, through which the individual is free to make their choice not depending on what the external environment influences them towards; in Bourdieu’s work, structure appears as the fundamental pivotal direction in which people are moved in their everyday and life choices. Bourdieu’s work Distinction is particularly focused on this theme, employed in analysing how taste and trends change depending on people’s class; educational capital and social origin are by him defined as the strongest factors in shaping people’s decision making processes.
The agency and structure dichotomy has been since then often employed in analysing power structures in educational environments, where, moreover, it has been re-theorized and adapted to the educational research field; the relation between school structure and the students’ agency is what has interested the most educational researchers in the last thirty years circa.
Norton Peirce in 1995 deepened the research on the factor of motivation, theorizing for a more complex concept, that he deemed to be too simplistic when described solely as an innate value in individuals. The author’s new conceptualization of motivation, in the context of second language students, is strongly inspired by Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, where motivation becomes more similar to investment, as it represents the student’s will to learn a second language in relation to the cultural and symbolic capital the said language brings. Motivation is no longer a fixed personality trait, but it is directly proportional to how much the learning outcome can increase the value of the student’s cultural capital, and therefore their social and economic capital (Norton Peirce, 1995: 17-18).

McKay and Wong have then stressed the new conception of motivation as investment sustained by Peirce, underlining the importance of students’ needs, desires and negotiations as the very fabric of students’ lives, and not merely side themes. Learners, this way, are conceived as complex beings, whose decision-making processes can vary depending on multiple factors, and on their agency; the authors have strongly expressed, in fact, how important students’ agency is in analysing their learning processes (McKay and Wong, 1996: 579). Norton Peirce’s and McKay and Wong’s deeper conception of motivation is strongly central to this thesis; the research, in fact, takes as a prerequisite the consideration of sociolinguistic factors in second language learning processes for adult students, and studies their motivation as influenced by many factors, but mostly as their driving force in their language acquisition and integration process. Students’ motivation is central to this research, since it directly involves their agency in language learning, and in shaping their own future through acquiring education in Italy, and strengthening their social, cultural and economic capital.

In 2001 Ahearn’s work has proven to be substantial for the critique of the concept of agency in minorities and migration studies, which includes educational research on second language learning; in her paper, the author remarks how important the idea of language as social action in anthropological research, and why the concept of agency is so crucial yet controversial in linguistic anthropology. Ahearn then proceeds to list approaches to agency in migration studies who she accuses of being too simplistic, or simply inexact in their meaning. The conception of agency as simple free will is deemed to be anachronistic, while agency as a synonym for resistance in migration or minorities contexts is also considered as approximate. The author criticizes Foucault’s treatment of the conception of agency as only relevant when it is absent, therefore when structure is predominant and power relations are extremely asymmetrical (Ahearn, 2001: 14-16). The author provides a provisional definition of agency, which is “the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001: 112); this definition implies directly the presence of mediation of social and cultural
influences in the ways individuals act, refuting the original and simplistic view of agency as total freedom from social and environmental ties in people’s choice of action. Many studious in the field of sociolinguistics have adopted this “provisional definition” (Miller, 2010: 466; Huan and Benson, 2013: 12), admitting its temporary nature and the need for deepening, but yet demonstrating its usefulness for further sociolinguistic analysis of agency. In her conclusions, Ahearn (2001) does not suggest the correct way to employ the concept of agency in migration studies, although she maintains the importance of defining agency in research, avoiding using the word as a simple synonym for free will or resistance, and considering the different types of agency in order to have a more precise base concept for anthropological research in language.

Finally, the most relevant theoretical work for this research is that of Pavlenko, who has summarized how the concept of agency in second language learning has changed overtime, and how the changes have proved agency to be more and more central in analysing learning processes for adult immigrants. Language is first affirmed to be an important site of identity construction, and therefore integrant part of symbolic capital; the author wants first and foremost to maintain the centrality of poststructuralist approaches in second language learning (Pavlenko, 2016: 284-285). Second language learners in this research are presented as broader and more complex beings, compared to Bourdieu’s viewpoint, whose multiple and diverse identities change over time; poststructuralist approaches are therefore more indicated to analyse second language learning processes, for they depict students as individual agents, whose identities are more complex than the ones of first language or other discipline learners, because of their already constructed identities in adulthood (ibid: 292). The notion of second language learners as autonomous beings with multiple changing identities, in continuous movement and with compromising or clashing habitus, is central to the present research, that is going to comprehend the newer concepts of agency in language learning in order to analyse how the CPIA school system in Verona promotes agency for adult immigrant learners.

**Structure of the Thesis**

The first introductory chapter comprises a Preface, the Objective and Research Questions of the thesis, then the Methodology section, Source Materials and a Theoretical Framework that provides a background for the theories of multicultural education and andragogy, which will be employed in later analysis.

Chapter 2 is considered a background chapter, defining the historical path and conceptual and pedagogical factors that have led to the institution of CPIAs in Italy.
Chapter 3 is the presentation of the case study of the CPIA in Verona, divided in smaller sections in order to describe the structures and the students who have participated in the study and that follow the courses I have been observing; the second section is furthermore divided in common themes and patterns that I have noticed in the adult students’ population at CPIA in Verona.

Chapter 4 will define if and how multicultural education approach is regulated through the CPIAs’ Guidelines, and how teachers propose multicultural education practices in classes, through observation and students’ interviews.

Chapter 5 will still employ observation and interviews in order to verify how agency enhancement practices suggested by the andragogy approach are regulated and deployed by teachers in courses in order to support adult migrant students in their personal, educational and career choices.
Chapter 2: The road to CPIAs in Italy

Provincial Centres for Adults’ Education, CPIAs from now on, have officially started functioning for the school year 2014/2015, after a reformation process that has lasted for almost six years. The system that has preceded them in teaching adults with day and night courses for workers, that is the one of Permanent Territorial Centres (CTPs), had been employed for the previous 16 years. CTPs have been legally defined with the Ministerial Decree number 455/97, which was a natural consequence of what 1996, defined the “European Year of Lifelong Learning”, had tried to spread in countries parties of the European Union. The Decision n. 2493/95/EC of October 23rd 1995, established that 1996 would be dedicated to the discussion and tackling of the main themes concerning education in its various forms, and in its conception of a mutable and diverse journey that needs to be offered along every moment of the individual’s life. Article 2 of the Decision cites the eight themes chosen to be central for the year dedicated to education: importance of high quality education offered to everyone without any kind of discrimination; promotion of vocational training in order to smooth young people’s paths to working society; promotion to continuing education and training; motivation of individuals towards lifelong learning and its importance to social groups; further cooperation in education and training between school and the economic world; raising of awareness for social partners of lifelong learning, and raising the same awareness for parents and family systems; and finally, the development of European spaces and cooperation in education, in order to promote a mutual approach and understanding of education and training and related mobility in European spaces (Official Journal of European Communities, n. 256/45: 2).

Italy’s Education Ministry has then decided to get in line with the latest European tendencies by emanating the Ministerial Decree that in 1997 has instituted CTPs, which were meant to provide evening courses for adults, and Italian courses that would lead to language certifications for immigrants. The centres were projected to reflect the principles of lifelong learning promoted by the European Union, offering literacy courses, specific vocational training, and cultural education for adults (Bochicchio, 2021: 26). CTPs were created in order to reflect what Cornacchia defines as the three pillars of adults’ education promoted by the European Commission’s Decision in 1996, which are: the process and goal of “Europeanisation”; the principles of autonomy and subsidiarity; and the concept of an integrated school system, based on the union of formal and informal education (Cornacchia, 2013: 72-74).

The long reform ended in 2014 meant to institute a new system for adults’ education and literacy for immigration has started from the will to modify the system of CTPs, and has then ended with the incorporation of CTPs into CPIAs. Cornacchia has delineated a series of motivations trying
to explain why CTPs were not considered anymore sufficient in fulfilling their role. The first reason is deemed to be the excessively diverse realities, given from the relevance of the territorial aspect of these centres; the schools had to respond to local needs, and administrate with local sources as well, which can vary strongly depending on different factors, such as the deep difference in resources between North and South within the Italian territory, and between urban centres and rural areas. A second and extremely relevant reason for a needed change in the CTPs missions, is that of providing literacy courses for immigrants and the access to language certifications according to the CEFR; between 1997 and 2014, the years of activity of CTPs, the immigration routes and fluxes towards Italy have changed significantly, and the need for Italian literacy courses and language tests has strongly increased due to the higher numbers of immigrants, from different areas of the world. Cornacchia more subjectively expresses a third reason why the CTPs required reformation, and it is the need for public debate regarding pedagogy and in particular education for adults; the CTPs, the author admits, have fulfilled a “frontier role” that has not been noticed and talked about enough (Cornacchia, 2013: 70-71).

Colosio deepened the research and delineated more structural and complex needs for which the previous system of the CTPs was not fulfilling the social needs that was required to fix, in some way: lack of human capital for the job market; the demographic challenge that Italy is facing now more than ever; social mobility, that for Italy is deemed to be at the lowest level in Europe; school dropout, in constant increase in percentage on the number of young people in Italy; the economic crisis; and the need for technological advancement and research (Colosio, 2015: 15-29).

The new Centres, then, needed to be reformed in order to remedy for the previous centres’ deficiencies, given mostly by the quickly changing social needs.

2012 marks a significant year for the education of adults: two important laws were approved to renew the whole lifelong learning system in Italy. The first one is Decree 92/2012 for the application of Permanent Learning, and the second is the creation of CPIAs with the DPR (Republic President’s Decree) n.263 of October 2012. The official Guidelines have been published as Interministerial Decree on the national Gazzetta on the 15th of March, 2015, and constitute the definitive act of the institution of CPIAs in Italy.

CPIAs constitute an autonomous school system, divided in local webs operating together with institutions on the territory, with their own didactic and organizational structure (Porcaro, 2021: 88). CPIAs institutional autonomy is regarded as probably the main novelty of the reform for lifelong learning projects and their role in certifying Italian proficiency for immigrants. These centres constitute a net of structures spread on a territory that they are supposed to cover in order to include all the resident individuals who need access to the school system.
The new Centres have two additional functions compared to the previous ones; the first one is providing education in detention and re-education centres (Supplemento n.26 alla Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2015: 17-18), and the second function is that of Centre of Research regarding Adults’ Education, mirroring the values of the “triangle of knowledge”, tripartite in the elements of education, research and innovation (Colosio, 2015: 55).

The two main needs that have driven the CTP’s reform towards the building of the CPIAs system are the need for work training and competence acquisition, and the need for integration in communities. The two poles, on one hand training and profession, and on the other hand active citizenship and personal growth, are therefore the two dimensions that the adult student needs to cover and discover, and consequently the two levels that the school system for adults has to take care of. The school system is thus articulated onto three levels, that are built in order to cover the training needs of adult students: administrative, didactic, and educational. The administrative unit provides Italian literacy courses and first level school courses for adults. The didactic one regards the institutional net that needs to be created with other secondary schools, in order to propose different training paths to adult students who attend the Centres, in case they want to proceed with their secondary school education and obtain a diploma, which gives them access to university as well. Finally, the educational level is the one that takes care of the contacts with other agencies of the territory, in order to involve both public and private local institutions for creating a net that integrates different types of training and education in the learning processes of students. These three levels are meant to cover the aforementioned double dimension of adult students’ needs, that is to say education and training, and integration and active citizenship (Bochicchio, 2021: 28-29).

On the Ministry of Education and Merit’s (MI.M) official website, the page that present Provincial Centres for Adults Education delineates the categories to which the service of CPIAs is offered: the categories comprise adults (people over 16 years old) both Italian and foreign who need to conclude their first cycle of secondary school, adults, both Italian and foreign, who need to finish the second cycle of secondary education, foreign adults who intend to attend literacy courses for Italian language, and students over 16 years old who prove they are impeded to attend secondary school’s lessons during the day.\(^1\) The offered courses are then presented in terms of hours of lessons and programs, even though singular CPIAs follow a series of guidelines received from the instalment of the Centres’ system in 2014 plus their updates, rather than a precise national program for didactics. The First Level courses program comprehends 400 hours of lessons, and can be incremented up to some more 200 hours in class, and leads to the obtainment of a first cycle of

secondary school’s diploma. A subsequent didactic period can lead to the obtainment of a certificate for basic competences necessary to complete the mandatory school cycle in the Italian school system. Alphabetization courses for Italian language can vary in their length, and lead to the acquisition of language certifications not inferior to level A2, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The course for A1 level is composed of a total of 100 hours of lessons, as the one for the A2 level and certification; 90 hours are dedicated to effective class activities, while 10 hours comprise the welcoming activities for new students, when teachers define the planning of the Personalized Formative Agreement. The B1 level course offers a total of 80 hours of lessons, while the B2 courses, which are less common as the B2 certification is not requested for residence permits or citizenship applications, have a varying structure.\(^2\)

Educational paths for the obtainment of the second cycle of secondary school’s diploma are various and usually divided in three didactic periods, spread on a period comprised between one and three years; the lessons are imparted with the cooperation of the Provincial Centre and local high schools that can provide professional and technical training, leading to professional or technical superior diplomas, according to the Italian division of secondary schools in the fields of training.\(^3\)

CPIAs, as part of the public school system administrated by the Ministry of Education, do not require fees for enrolment, and their teachers are selected through public applications and rankings, according to the academic preparation they need for secondary school teachings. After the institution of the Centres, a new class of course for teaching Italian to foreign students has been established, known as class A23, for which is needed a one year master in pedagogy of teaching Italian as a second language.

The OECD Report on adults’ education in the time period between 2018 and 2022 clearly shows the necessities that CPIAs are intended to fulfil; almost 37% (36.96%) of adults between 25 and 64 years old do not have education that goes beyond the primary one, which means this percentage of adults do not own a high school diploma, but a middle school diploma, or a superior school or professional centre diploma at best. This percentage is equalled by other southern European countries such as Spain, Greece and Portugal, while central and northern European countries data on adults education differs significantly. This data has had a significant decrease overtime: in 2012 the percentage of adults with attained education below upper secondary was of almost 43%, while in 2002 it was of more than 55%. Italy proves to have been and still being over the OECD average data on adults education: the OECD average in 2002 was in fact of 33%, the

\(^3\) https://www.miur.gov.it/istruzione-per-gli-adulti-centri-provinciali-per-l-istruzione-degli-adulti
average for 2012 was of over 25%, and the average data for 2022 is of a little below 20%. (OECD Data on Adults Education, 2022)

This data reports prove one of the main concerns of the design of CPIAs, which is providing quality and professional training in the field of adults’ education; the goals are declared as reading the educational and training needs of the territory and its people, construction of adults’ profiles built on necessities that the territory and the social context express, interpretation of the formative needs of the adult population, welcoming and support in future plan orientation, and finally, improving the quality of the service of adults’ education (Supplemento n.26 alla Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2015: 13).
Chapter 3: The CPIA in Verona

The scope of this chapter is to provide a description of the context in which I have been able to conduct my observation, in order to have a more thorough understanding, first of the spaces and tools present in the teaching of the one district of the CPIA in Verona that I have known, and second of the people I have met there, specifically the ones that have participated in the interviews after my observation period.

The Centre and its Structures

The Provincial Centre for Adults Education in Verona consists of one central headquarter and nine associated locations, where the educational and professional services are granted. Every associated site provides the Centre’s services on a specific territory, and can be articulated on more locations; the one associated site I have attended provides courses in three different locations, of which two are respectively the buildings of a high school and a middle school that lend their spaces to the CPIA for evening courses, and the third one is a building owned by a catholic foundation, where the morning classes are provided.

Overall, the teacher involved in the CPIAs activities in the territory of Verona were 88 for the school year 2021/2022, and additional personnel was composed of 37 people, including technicians, helpers and administrators. The students enrolled in Alphabetization courses or First Level courses were overall more than 4500.

The first site is the building of a secondary school, second grade, which grants diplomas for professional training in agrarian sciences, and it is an associated site for the provision of secondary school diploma as well for students who desire to continue their education after the first level courses and diploma acquisition. In this building, Italian literacy lessons for the acquisition of CEFR level B1 were held between 18.00 and 21.00, and were mostly frequented by students who had jobs that kept them occupied during the day. The school had a separate entrance for the CPIA students, and they technically did not have access to all the spaces within the school, for example they were not allowed to go to the vending machines room for buying snacks and drinks; the teachers themselves allowed them to go and did not agree with this rule, evidently imposed from above. The classroom was provided with a laptop and an interactive multimedia whiteboard, which was used at every lesson.

The second site was a middle school building, in which first level lessons and Italian literacy courses were taught in the evening, and just as in the previous case, the students were workers, and mostly people aged over 20 years old and under 60. The classes were held between 17.00 and
20.00, with obvious tardiness or anticipated exits from students who came right after work, or had to take the last bus to go home. Students and teachers would enter from the same entrance as every other attendant of the building, and in the same hours some afternoon music courses were taught at middle school students in other classrooms. The two classrooms conceded to the CPIA courses were both provided with laptops and interactive whiteboards.

The third and last location of my study was a building that hosted various services, such as a private preschool, dance classes from a sports association, and a recreational centre for people over 65. Within these services, one floor was entirely dedicated to the CPIA courses, their students and the personnel; in total, the floor was provided with four classrooms and a study for teachers, plus the toilets for both students and teachers. All the classrooms included a laptop and an interactive multimedia whiteboard, but the classes were relatively small for the amount of students, who were often a little squeezed. The building did not have an elevator, and the only solution for students and teachers with physical issues was to climb the stairs; clearly no student with permanent mobility limitations could attend these courses, therefore I guessed that if there were any, they would have been forced to attend evening classes, for they were the only ones held in an accessible building. This building hosted morning classes, for first level courses and literacy courses for the attainment of A1 and A2 certifications. The majority of the students frequenting this site was under 20, for they only were attending school and not working, and there was also a considerable group of housewives, aged between 30 and 60.

**The Students**

Even though the courses are equally open to Italian and foreign adults, the complete totality of the students I have met in this associated headquarter of the Centre of Verona was foreign. I have As aforementioned, the CPIA students from the African continent I have interviewed are 10 in total; they come from 3 different countries of Africa, and they encompass 3 different age groups. Interacting with them during observation and the interviews I have noticed some patterns in their social characteristics, and therefore I will utilize them to outline the range of peculiarities of these students, doing my best not to generalize, but to use what can be labelled as categories, as a mean to better understand the various, but sometimes common realities of these adult immigrant students.

**Age Groups**

The most relevant age group in terms of number is the one of students under 20; coming from Morocco, Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire, 5 out of 10 students were aged between 16 and 20. This group was mostly composed by girls, and every student belonging to this group had arrived in Italy in a
period shortly previous to their starting attendance of the school courses, in a period range between 1 year and 8 months previous to the observation and the interviews, except for one student who had been in Italy for 4 years already at the observation time. These young students shared a similar migration pattern; in fact, they all moved to Italy together with a relative, and joined another relative (usually the father) who had already been in Italy for a longer period of time, at least 3 or 4 years. The relative who had arrived in Italy previously always has a stable job, and other relatives have jobs too, with some exceptions for female family members, who sometimes do not have an occupation. These students live with their family, even if composed each one in their own different way, and speak their native language at home, while they only practice Italian in school, as they do not work and usually do not have other social environments where they can speak Italian. They tended to interlace friendship relations that would extend to outside of school with other students of the same language and cultural background, therefore they would still communicate in their native language with some of their classmates.

The second age group is the one between 20 and 30 years old, and 4 out of 10 students pertained to this group; one of them lived with her close family and arrived in Italy with at least a relative, while the other three were migrants who moved by themselves, usually thanks to connections to less close family members, friends, or acquaintances. The three students who migrated by themselves, were still living autonomously with flatmates, usually of their same nationality, and they all had jobs that they found thanks to the same connections that led them to Italy, and more specifically to that area of the province of Verona where they attended school. These students tended to be less socially active after class, confronted to the younger students, but said to have more connections outside of school thanks to the workplace.

The remaining student is the only one out of the 10 who is over 40 years old, and she evidently shows different characteristics from the other age groups, which will be mentioned shortly later.

Motivations behind migration
As aforementioned, the younger students all came to Italy to reconnect with a family member who had already been living in Verona for at least 3 years, and already had a job and some social connections; they all seemed to have lived their migration process as a decision that their parents or other family members made for their own good, and the sake of the family’s wealth and stability. They all mentioned feeling homesickness for their native country, in different degrees, but each one of them recognized the improvements they could already notice in their family’s lifestyle, and especially in their own educational path. Most of their families, in fact, presented receiving education in a European country as a very big upgrade and opportunity for these young students,
and they all recognized the importance for them to receive good education and therefore having access to more employment opportunities in the future.

The older students, in which I include both the student over 40 and the remaining age group, present for obvious reasons more accountability and autonomy regarding their decision to move to Italy, even when very often influenced by other people in their lives. Better life conditions and more numerous job opportunities were regarded as key factors for their decision to migrate, and safety was also mentioned in the case of students who then led some of their family to live with them in Italy.

In all these cases, economic and social factors are recalled to be the most relevant components of the decision making processes towards migration from the native countries. Education is also mentioned, especially by younger students, and will be tackled in one of the central chapters.

Connections
A general observation on the importance of connections needs to be made, both as a pull factor to migration, and as a factor in the students’ lives in Italy.

Whether they moved to follow a family member or reconnect the whole family nucleus, or they decided to migrate thanks to a friend who offered them a job, or a family member who had a place to stay, all these 10 students spent time talking about who in their families or within their friends or acquaintances had suggested or promoted their journey to Italy and sequent connections for houses and occupation opportunities, signalling the fundamental presence of connections in the migration process.

These connections have often remained along their new life, joined by new connections created in Italy; most of the times, family groups or individual migrants tend to connect more easily with people from the same area and the same linguistic background, easier relations and exchanges, translations, concrete help for bureaucratic and legal matters, and sometimes celebrating religious festivities together, helping the feeling of cultural nostalgia. This tendency surely helps migrants with their transitional period, in which it proves to be very important to still maintain links with the native culture, that tend to last for the rest of the stay in the new country; however, families and small migrant communities are sometimes at risk for social and cultural isolation, for their members often end up communicating in Italian only in school and on the workplace, and then not having other opportunities for practising the language and getting to know more local communities and realities made of Italians, and migrants from other geographical areas as well.
**Language Proficiency**

Most of the students following these three courses have a good degree of Italian proficiency, especially regarding oral fluency; therefore, despite some obvious variability between peoples’ levels and some uncertainty in their expression, most of them have agreed to participate in the personal interviews at the end of my participation in the courses, towards the conclusion of the school year.

Based on what I have perceived during my observation and interviews, I have delineated some patterns that have influenced language learning and oral proficiency for these students. The first and most noticeable relation, is the one between the oral capacity and the opportunities that the single students have to speak Italian outside of the school environment: often unrelated to the knowledge of grammar, students who are obliged to speak Italian on the workplace or at home are more likely to be fluent and more confident in their speaking abilities, even if not perfectly correct in their structural composition of phrases.

The level of education acquired in the home country, connected to age and therefore how long ago was the last school year of students, is also connected to the speed and facility with which a student can learn new notions; specifically, students that have received education in their native language and a second language, seem to learn Italian with more ease, depending also on which languages they have knowledge of. Spanish-speaking students from Southern America, the Romanian-speaking student, and the French-speaking students from West Africa, have clearly been facilitated thanks to the closeness of sounds between their native Latin language and Italian; this ease, though, still comes after the level of language education they have received in their home country, and usually regards oral fluency, and not specifically grammar knowledge.

The length of the students’ stay in Italy is clearly another relevant factor in their level of language knowledge, but this is connected to the spoken area of language knowledge. The older students I have interviewed have all been to Italy for an extended period of time, in between 11 and 19 years; they all have had jobs or have had children in Italy, who they now speak Italian with, because they have been to Italian schools from a young age. Some of them still must obtain a B1 level of Italian proficiency to obtain longer visas or to demand the Italian citizenship; some others need the middle school diploma with the aim of accessing to a course that qualifies them for health worker jobs. Two of the students over 50, specifically, have been working in Italy as health workers for several years, and now, since some regulations regarding these jobs are changing in the country, they need to follow this course to be enabled to continue working; in order to access this course, they must have a European recognized middle school diploma, and they both have studied in higher education but their diplomas are not recognized in Italy or other European countries. These students have
often a fairly good knowledge of the spoken Italian language, but find difficulties in grammar constructions and written productions, that are both parts of exams to test Italian language proficiency. Being over 30 or even over 50, their educational path was clearly some years ago; despite someone’s obtaining of high school diplomas, their learning processes can be traced to a long time ago, and many teaching methods have changed over the years.

A few students have even studied Italian from their home country before coming to Italy, knowing in advance about their families’ plan of moving to Italy and staying there.

I have been able to conduct all the interviews in Italian, only stopping every now and then for repeating some terms, explaining them a little more in depth, or even translating some words in English to students who speak English well since they have studied it in their home country.
Chapter 4: Multicultural education in CPIA’s classes

This chapter will investigate the modes of dealing with diversity in the classes of the CPIA in Verona, and if multicultural education approaches, as many education experts have advocated, are utilized by teachers in order to deal with language and cultural diversity. First, the chapter will describe how the matter of diversity is tackled in the guidelines from the Italian Ministry of Instruction and Merit and in the CPIA curriculum for Italian teaching. Then, it will outline with which approaches the three main factors of culture, age, and educational background are dealt with in the classes of CPIA; this will be discussed through the sources on multicultural education, and the observation of classes I have conducted, with the support of some written sources I have collected during the participation in class, such as book pages and exercises the students have received during Italian classes.

The Need for Multicultural Education in its Multi-Factor Approach

Multicultural education has been defined as an “antidote” to racism and cultural assimilation in schools (Payne, 1984: 124).

It has been a strongly discussed theme, especially until the early 2000s, and it keeps on posing new doubts and questions, as migration flows change and increase in certain areas due to environmental, economic, political, and religious reasons. Multicultural education, in fact, is proving to be a necessary approach in today’s schools in several areas of the world, and it regards all levels of education; the CPIA, being a school for adults’ education with the majority of immigrant students (in the case of my case study, even the totality), clearly needs an articulated multicultural approach in order to deal with the various fringes of diversity in schools, in order to render the language acquisition process more inclusive, and therefore supposedly more effective. Cultural diversity does, in fact, influence learning processes, and especially language acquisition processes, as language acquisition involves cognitive and cultural aspects of the self, in order to put the individual in relation to something new, that is to say a foreign language, with its set of cultural practices and implications (Raamlan and Maarof, 2014: 290-291).

Much criticism has been expressed in the intellectual debate around multiculturalism, as the notion of culture can mean different things to different individuals and in different contexts. The risks are deemed to be simplification of the concept of culture, the exclusion of certain aspects of individuals because they do not pertain to the traditional framework for the notion of culture, the risks for a focus solely on race matters (Ozturgut, 2011: 2-3). Moreover, Banks has defined the paradigms, intended as the problematized factors, to which multicultural education is supposed to propose its
solutions; these are the cultural difference paradigm, the language paradigm, the ethnic additive and self-concept development paradigm, the culture deprivation paradigm, the cultural ecology, the protective dis-identification, and the structural paradigms (Banks, 2009: 21-26). What Banks and other studious have tried to do within the debate, is to find common grounds in order to permit critical discussions to continue, as they are active part of the multicultural process, but also to promote a shared conception of a teaching and learning joint of processes and methods. Teachers are particularly targeted as elements of the school system to educate while looking forward to a more complete multicultural approach (Aslan, 2022: 103). Several authors have, in fact, argued for the need for complex and adaptive communication for teachers, who have to respond to necessities of compromise and adaptation within the classes, negotiating learning tasks and adapting communication in order to be effective and inclusive in multicultural environments in schools (Ellis, 1989: 90-91).

Banks’ proposition and statement (2009) is the need for a multi-factor paradigm, which encompasses all the aforementioned ones, and summarized the complexity of problems that minority students deal with in various national contexts; the common axis is, in fact, the objective of proposing equal educational opportunities to students of all ethnicities, nationalities, ages, genders, religions and social classes. Thus, the holistic model conceives school as a whole system, comprehensive of structure, values, staff and teachers, students, environment, policies, materials, community (Banks, 2009: 26-27).

The five dimensions of multicultural education have been delineated by Banks (2009: 15) in order to function as school practitioners’ guidelines for actualizing multicultural practices.

“Content integration” regards the use of content and examples from various cultures in the classroom, at the use of teachers. It can come out as challenging when regarding scientific subjects, but proves to be central and necessary for social and humanistic studies, especially the study of languages, which often imply the acquisition of knowledge regarding cultural practices tied to the foreign language.

“Knowledge construction” is the dimension that deals with the encouragement to understand and investigate how preconceptions, background and bias can influence the ways knowledge has been built and transmitted. It implies a strong participation from students in helping to build common knowledge, and at the same time deconstructing it when needed.

“Prejudice reduction” focuses on the efforts made through teaching towards changing and critically understand students’ racial and cultural attitudes; students are then expected to adopt a critical but positive attitude towards cultural diversity.
“Equity pedagogy” is put in practice when teachers adapt their methods of communication and contents to the students’ needs, in order to render knowledge fruition accessible to everyone. It involves different teaching techniques in order to encourage learning for everyone, to develop student potential and to create an empowering class environment (Banks and Banks, 1995: 155). Finally, “Empowering School Culture” is the idea of creating an environment that structurally supports students and empowers them, promoting equity regardless of gender, race, class, religion or ethnicity matters.

If some modalities and conceptualizations are still object of debate, the common ground is then represented by the social and cultural challenges that multicultural education responds to in the school environment; one of the main issues tackled by multiculturalists around school systems is the assimilationist ideology and practices that teachers adhere to in teaching in a multicultural environment, and this applies strongly to second language teaching. Smagorinsky (2022: 82) ties this aspect particularly to Western cultures and their needs for cultural assimilation in order to create and stabilize a common cultural ground for the building of nation-states; the author proceeds to maintain how state schools in western countries can often represent a challenge for multicultural practices, as they fight back for the opposed sentiment of cultural assimilation.

**Is Multicultural Education in the CPIA’s Guidelines and Curriculum?**

Didactic programs for the CPIA of Verona, which can easily be found on the institution’s website, present four different sections, namely: Objectives, Topics, Activities, and attached Documents that report a long and articulated list of vocabulary that the students are supposed to have learnt at the end of the specific level course. Every course is divided in Learning Units, which are developed by teachers on a timeline during the period in which classes are held, and every Learning Unit has as a central theme one of the topics of Italian communication that will be tested at the end of the courses, in order for students to obtain their certification of Italian language following the CEFR parameters.

For the A1 and A2 levels, the didactic programs present a strong focus and grammar, and some topics tackled during classes are common to the two courses: presenting oneself, speaking about one’s family or house, job opportunities, food, and the school environment. The A2 level then presents more articulate topics such as health, the environment, and an approach to Italian geography and culture named “Travelling through Italy”. The B1 level integrates the base topics with even more articulate matters, such as controversies in the workplace and how contracts work,

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4 cpiaverona.edu.it
5 https://www.cpiaverona.edu.it/index.php?idpag=1939&idSezioneDidattica=2&idComponente=15
6 https://www.cpiaverona.edu.it/index.php?idpag=1939&idSezioneDidattica=2&idComponente=16
protests and strikes, communication media, cultural places such as museums and libraries, sustainability, healthy lifestyle, security in the workplace, and a more specific look at Italian cultural practices such as regional cultures and dialects, folklore and territory.

All of these themes, even if in more direct or indirect modes, involve matters or discussions about culture, which, as previously discussed, does not refer only to national or ethnic culture, but includes a more individual approach to it, in which family, education, nationality and ethnicity play variable and central roles. Even solely focusing on African students, it is striking to notice how cultural practices and implications change even within communities from the same country, even if the homeland community often keeps an important role for immigrants in the country they moved to, and this has proven to be even more central in African students from my interviews. In a strongly diverse environment, it would therefore be relevant to mention and encourage specific approaches to diversity in classes.

Nonetheless, the official National Guidelines for CPIAs do not mention specific multicultural approaches to Italian as a second language acquisition, referring only to Italian language teaching and apprehending for students, without leaving much space for the multicultural matter in the classes of CPIA. The 2015 Inter-ministerial Decree that establishes the institution of Provincial Centres for Adults’ Education defines the judicial and administrative matters around the centres, and describes on a more concrete scale the functioning of the schools and the changes related to the precedent Territorial Centres. The Decree presents an important element from the educational tools that the CPIAs would utilize when established, namely the Personal Training Agreement (*Patto Formativo Individuale*, from now on PFI); “enhancement of cultural and professional heritage of the person starting from their personal history” is defined as “the innovative element” of the new schools (Supplemento n.26 alla Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2015: 14). This first mention only determines the existence of this document, and its role in defining the student’s formal, informal and non-formal knowledge and competences, acquired in previous education or in professional life. The definition of the PFI and the recognition of the student’s previous training are later defined in the text of the Decree, and will be later tackled when approaching the theme of agency defining and enhancing in CPIAs.

Another document that can be referred to for the Verona CPIA’s guidelines is the Action of Address of the school’s director, which is the same for all the smaller territorial entities comprehended in the provincial institution, published in November 2022, presenting the Three-year Training Plan (*Piano dell’Offerta Formativa*, from now on PTOF) for the school years from 2022 to 2025 for the institution in Verona. This is a document that is redacted by the Council of teachers, together with

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7 https://www.cpiaverona.edu.it/index.php?idpag=1939&idSezioneDidattica=2&idComponente=17
some representatives of students, based on the actual needs expressed from the learning community and the territorial environment. These guidelines are therefore temporary and personal to the teaching and learning community of the territorial environment, and they define the objectives on a plan that lasts three years, considering past and present issues, and future perspectives. These guidelines do not mention any approach to multiculturalism in classes, despite the majority of attending students being immigrants, and only mentions cultural background for the enhancement of previous training of students, which will also be tackled later, in relation to agency encouragement for students (Prot. N.4687 of November 4th 2022, CPIA of Verona).

In conclusion to this section: didactic programs define what topics are to be covered by teachers in terms of grammar norms, oral and written expression in Italian, and cultural topics that complete the range of expression in the second language of students. The national guidelines published in 2015 at the establishment of the CPIA institution do not mention teaching approaches, even though they present the new instrument of PFI, which gives space to the cultural background of the student; nevertheless, this tool is not intended to act during classes, but is an instrument at the use of teachers in order to more particularly define the needs and objectives of the single student, and does not create interaction within classes during courses. The last published guidelines for the CPIA of Verona, provincially and territorially defined, do not specify or tackle any type of learning and teaching approach either, focusing on future objectives regarding the acquisition of training for students and especially the widening of the net that rotates around the CPIA, made of institutions, high schools, enterprises and local services.

Is Multicultural Education Practiced in CPIA?

As previously stated, the practices and multiple approaches that multicultural education suggests are not included or recommended in official guidelines and didactic programs, for the first focus more on administrative and organizational matters, while the latter have a stronger knowledge connotation, defining the topics that teachers should cover, but not suggesting or encouraging inclusive practices. The strongly multicultural nature of the environment, offering education to adults who have not concluded the mandatory study years, or who own training titles that are not recognized in Italy, and to adults who need alphabetization in Italian as a second language, induces to think that the approach to multiple identities, strong personal backgrounds and various educational heritage has necessarily to be inclusive, and it can be taken for granted. Thus, as I have noticed in my observation, what is (or not) specified in guidelines can be present in classes, at the discretion of teachers who can choose some dimensions of their approach; the practical area of Italian teaching in these schools can, in fact, take different directions, depending on the previous
training and some personal choices of teachers, still maintaining the learning objectives as the central priorities of schools.

In order to investigate how multicultural education approaches are put into practice during classes, I will utilize the five dimensions of multicultural education defined by Banks (2009) and analyse what class practices can be labelled under the conceptual umbrellas of these dimensions, and can be recognized as multicultural practices for their alignment with Banks’ theorization. For each dimension, the research will specifically focus on the three main aspects of cultural diversity that have come to be the most relevant in the composition of the classes I have attended: namely culture, intended as a blend of cultural practices tied to ethnicity, nationality and religion; age; and educational background, focusing especially on the amount of time previously spent in education in home countries, and the type of education the students have received.

Content Integration

Content Integration, intended as the use of themes and examples from various cultures and identity groups in the classroom, in order to promote a broader understanding of cultural practices, immediately results as a central approach in teaching a second language in an environment where the totality of students are immigrants. Out of the five dimensions, it can be deemed as the most intuitive approach when dealing with a classroom with such cultural diversity; in all the classes I have attended, this is probably the dimension that I have seen as more easily put into practice on a daily basis.

This dimension seamlessly becomes concrete when teachers encourage participation in the classroom, asking relatable and sometimes personal questions, in order to delve into cultural aspects of the students’ lives. When approaching some of the main topics indicated in Learning Units, such as expressing oneself about their living condition or their family, it comes as natural for all the teachers I have come in contact with to encourage students towards personal expression of their own cultural situation and their past relations.

Regarding their social and cultural environments, as already stated, it is natural even solely following Learning Units to encourage students to express themselves around their past lives in their home country, to compare differences and similarities between their past situations and their present lives in Italy, and therefore to share with the rest of the class some aspects of the cultural practices that connote their previous and current lifestyles. Teachers commonly show genuine interests in the cultural and religious aspects of students’ daily life, integrating lessons in which dialogue around personal cultural matters of individuals, and assigning homework or class exercises
that regard personal culture or different students’ cultural practices, making the learning of new Italian terminology around cultural aspects as part of the curriculum.

In the A2 level course, a few lessons were dedicated to the use of the different past tenses in Italian, and Teacher C asked the students in advance to send her their pictures from the past, possibly from when they were still in their home country; the first lessons were then dedicated to describing the students’ personal pictures while trying to conjugate the past tenses correctly, and asking questions about the classmates’ previous lives and habits, when living in a different place. The students from Morocco (four in this class) would relate to each other by comparing their experiences regarding family traditions, and how they keep them alive in a different country. Other students from various countries would ask each other questions, practicing how to utilize the different Italian tenses, and meanwhile learning more about their classmates’ cultural practices and past experiences.\(^8\)

During a lesson of the B1 level course, Teacher A proposed a class exercise in which students had to work in pairs, first discussing some of their daily habits and their family traditions both in Italy and in their home country, and then creating a written text comparing the two different variety of experiences between the couple of students; this exercise was meant to encourage student to practice the use of prepositions and adverbs of comparison (words like “of”, “more”, “less”, “as well”), and it created a personal and intimate environment in which students could put their own experience at the centre, in order to improve their understanding of comparison expressions.\(^9\)

In the Italian Language and Literature class of the First Level course, Teacher B has proposed multiple traditional stories and legends to compare with Italian Literature texts, particularly chosen from the countries of origin of the students in her class, or themes that interest students personally; one of them was the story of the city of Mokha, in Yemen, tied to the tradition of coffee, or some Sub-Saharan Africa or Indian religious tales. Student Il. and Student A.\(^{10}\) reported those were some of their favourite parts of the Italian literature course, even though Italian literature itself was already interesting to them, but they appreciated class discussion about similarities and differences between texts pertaining to popular culture from different areas of the world.

Around the age groups matter, content integration does not particularly find concrete implications, at least not as much as the personal cultural area; the didactic programs regarding Italian language and literature encompass the problems and differences between age groups, while teachers make efforts to adapt their topics to themes that interest the younger generations, but that are issues of the contemporary society, therefore students of older age are still involved.

\(^8\) A2 Level Course, May 9\(^{\text{th}}\), 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.
\(^9\) B1 Level Course, April 27\(^{\text{th}}\), 2022; Caldiero (VR) Italy.
\(^{10}\) Interviews on May 23\(^{\text{rd}}\), 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.
During the alphabetization courses, teachers often propose writing exercises in the contexts of technologic communication or social media, for they are common and recurrent areas of daily life where students, regardless of their age, need or want to communicate and socialize.

The diversity in educational backgrounds is not something that is particularly touched by the content integration dimension, for most of the students have same levels of Italian knowledge, or at least classes are created based on similar language levels; in both language acquisition and literature study, previous educational training can turn out as useful, for the brain often re-utilizes cognitive processes that are already known by the individual, thanks to having already created a language acquisition mechanism and a method of study. In terms of topics, it is easy to see students helping each other even during lessons when someone for some motives already knows the topic, but the content integration dimension is not particularly employed by teachers in this area of diversity.

In conclusion, the various fields of diversity present in CPIA classes are often covered in terms of content integration, even though the didactic programs do not require these practices; this comes mostly from personal initiative of teachers, and group discussions during teachers’ councils regarding students’ didactic needs. Nonetheless, the Objectives for the First Level courses’ students in humanities comprehend the knowledge of different cultures and the interrelation with these components not only within the school environment, but also in life outside of school. The use of sources from different cultural environments, the encouragement to the participation of students during lessons with their personal experiences and knowledge, and the proposal of themes of more interest to classes are the most deployed educational practices that reflect this dimension of multicultural education.

Knowledge Construction

The dimension of knowledge construction in the framework of multicultural education mirrors all the educational practices that are employed in order to encourage students towards critical thinking of the conception of knowledge and the processes that have built it and shared it through the epochs of human activity. In practical sense, it is important to remark that how we conceive knowledge and what parts of it have been transmitted are important factors in what knowledge is to us nowadays, and in a strongly multicultural environments, in terms of national cultures, age groups and educational background, it is surely a necessary challenge to try and encourage criticism on this matter. At the same time, making an effort to provide education in shorter amounts of time compared to schools for kids and teenagers, while letting many students balance between getting language certifications and working, can be tough enough to supersede on some aspects of common
knowledge construction in the school environment. I found that this is probably the dimension that finds less concrete adaptation in school practices not only at CPIA, but probably in all types of schools, but this is a theme that should be discussed further separately. The most plausible causes to this neglect are surely tied to the lack of awareness and training pertaining knowledge construction ideology and practices for teachers, and in the school environment in general. Another factor not to be underestimated is what can simply be expressed as lack of time, or different priority orders; language acquisition processes are already stretched in what seem to be very short periods of time in the courses, and most times the didactic programs are already modified by teachers when they detect different priorities in themes to be tackled, depending on the needs of their students. As mentioned in the previous section, a significant amount of time during didactic units is often utilized to adapt thematic activities to interests and educational needs of classes, therefore it can come natural to deduct that not all the educational processes, especially the ones that come with more complex structure and the need for previous training, can be practiced and employed in class.

Regarding the area of cultural diversity, the use of sources from different cultural backgrounds does indirectly encourage to build awareness around different points of view depending on ethnicity and nationality, as well as the employment of students’ participation and personal contribution regarding cultural practices in the framework of written or oral production. Despite the lack of direct intention to create critical thinking around systems of knowledge building and transmitting around cultural themes, most of the educational practices mentioned in the section dedicated to content integration bring contribution to the cause of knowledge construction, for they encourage, even if subtly, discussions around knowledge systems and they bound students to become more aware of diverse ideologies, especially when regarding different religions, which are sociologically considered as whole knowledge systems, and to relate to them in both a critical and a neutral way. This concept will be outlined further in the section dedicated to the prejudice reduction dimension.

Around age groups, the discourse is similar to the previous one and to the one regarding content integration: the contribution to generational discussions is often proposed through modern themes that regard contemporary society, and therefore challenge some older conceptions for people of older generations, but put younger student in the position of confronting their viewpoints with others as well. This area of diversity would not be particularly implemented in class practices when regarding knowledge construction, if not for teachers’ encouragement towards class discussions around social and cultural themes, that often regard generational differences. During one lesson of Italian Literature in the First Level course, Teacher B has engaged in a conversation
with the class around cultural practices in the house, specifically regarding discipline enhancement and punishments directed to younger people in households; this had become an opportunity for generational confrontation and open discussion about themes that have changed in quite a short amount of time, at least in Italy, and that encompass different areas of cultural diversity.\footnote{First Level Course, May 6\textsuperscript{th}, 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.}

Knowledge building processes could probably prove to be particularly interesting to deal with when having a class that presents strong diversity in educational background, as confrontation would deploy different ways of thinking not only depending on national or religious systems of knowledge, but also on diverse levels and variety of training that students have previously received. Nonetheless, this would prove to be challenging especially in scientific matters or other subjects other than second language studying; in fact, language acquisition does not permit for confrontation regarding previous studies, and students are already divided in classes depending on their Italian language level, therefore classes tend not to have strong diversity in previous training regarding Italian language.

Concluding this section, we can maintain that knowledge construction might be the most challenging dimension of multicultural education in CPIAs, for it clashes with the language acquisition processes, that tend to be studied as unilateral when acquiring the knowledge of a second language; this dimension proves further to be rather complex, and consequently it is probable that it gets neglected more easily, for the lack of training and time during courses.

Prejudice Reduction

Prejudice reduction refers to the enforcement of positive thinking when dealing with the various dimensions of diversity, in order for students to approach diversity as something to appreciate and welcome in almost a neutral way, suspending moral judgement, yet promoting positive and constructive discussion around it. This dimension of multicultural education needs the deployment of didactic materials and instruments from teachers, in order to encourage change in racial attitudes and phobic behaviours when dealing with diversity and stereotypes. Working with such a diverse class composition, even though didactic programs do not specify it, the freedom that learning units permit comes as rather useful for teachers to adapt their programs to what they defines as the educational needs of their classes (for example, the literature program for the First Level courses does not specify which authors have to be tackled during the year, but only what objectives need to be acquired by students through the study of Italian literature\footnote{https://www.cpiaverona.edu.it/index.php?idpag=1939&idCategoriaServizio=3&idServizio=21}). The theme of diversity in literature
is quite employed and tackled, and the use of literary texts turns out to be particularly effective, as literature, like other forms of art, involve the internal dimensions of individuals differently than mere texts or themes discussed in a more neutral way. Literary texts, in spite of them not being part of alphabetization courses, have been employed by teachers in these classes as well, when dealing with delicate human matters, because judged by them as “strongly touching and talking to the hearts and personal experiences of everyone” (Teacher C, when discussing a school activity with me)\(^{13}\).

This dimension and its linked observed educational practices will be analysed without using categories of diversity, as the dimension itself suggests a more unified approach and a broader comprehension of the conception of what diversity and culture can be.

As aforementioned, literature has been employed multiple times during lessons in order to discuss delicate themes, that regard human lives altogether. During literature classes I have assisted to lessons regarding the Italian author Giovanni Verga (1840-1922), who is regarded to be one of the most prominent representatives of literary Realism from the nineteenth century, that is commonly dedicated much space in literature programs in high schools, as he dealt with various themes around the human existence, that are considered to have shaped much of Italian social values. Verga has written numerous short stories and novels narrating the vicissitudes of poor families in southern Italy, during the century of the industrial revolution influencing much of the urban and social shape of European countries. Themes such as exclusion and fear of the diverse are always present in his work, and Teacher B during literature classes has decided to dedicate a rather ample period of time to analysing some of Verga’s texts that deal especially with diversity and loneliness. A relevant example is the tale of \textit{Rosso Malpelo} (“Evil redhead”), who tells the story of a young Sicilian boy that experienced profound social exclusion due to his red hair, and the fact that Sicilian popular tradition would say that red hair was a sign of evil of the person who had it; this tale underlines the negative power of indifference, which is what Malpelo suffers the most in his life, not having resources for moving and searching for better opportunities.\(^{14}\) The novel \textit{Vita dei Campi} (“Life in the fields”) deals with injustice and poverty in modern Sicily, when people would still live depending on other tenants while taking care of their fields for their whole lives; this story sparked discussions about workers’ conditions in the fields and in factories, as many students had such jobs, or could tell about their relatives’ experiences both in Italy and abroad.

Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) was also thoroughly studied in literature classes, especially through the reading of the short story \textit{Ciàula scopre la luna} (“Ciàula discovers the moon”); Ciàula is a young boy who is forced to work in a mine, as every other man needs to do in post-war southern

\(^{13}\) A2 Level Course, May 11\(^{th}\), 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.

\(^{14}\) First Level Course, May 2\(^{nd}\), 2022; Caldiero (VR) Italy.
Italy, and who is subjugated to the violence of older men working there, suffering from war losses and dealing with grief. The story evolves around a young person who does not lose their sense of amazement for the exterior, while dealing with suffering and pain, and with a strong depersonalization, coming from working nonstop and not being able to define his true self during childhood; the fragmentation of the self is a theme that is rather close to Pirandello, tackling the loss of identity that the First World War and poverty had caused in the population in Italy.\textsuperscript{15}

During the alphabetization course for A2 level, the students have gone on a few daily school trips, one of which was dedicated to the visit of a temporary exhibition regarding Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), considered to be father not only of the Italian modern language and literature, but of literature on a global scale. Rather than reading texts from his work, which was surely comprised in the literature program of the First Level course, Teacher C has told the story of Dante due to its closeness to all the students present in class: Dante Alighieri was, in fact, exiled, and was a migrant for a long part of his life. The teacher chose with decisiveness to use this author’s story and the museum’s visit as an opportunity for students to confront with the theme of migration seen from a different viewpoint and its relativization, while searching for contact traits of who is a migrant and what they experience.\textsuperscript{16}

Both Teachers B and C have deliberately adapted the didactic program to what they thought was important to tackle for their students, utilizing literature in particular in order to speak about contemporary and human themes in a way that comes closer to human experience, while proving that some of these experiences have been dealt with for a long time, as they have influenced human beings of the present as well as the ones of the past.

While maintaining that most school practices employed by teachers during Italian lessons have been directed towards the dimension of prejudice reduction, as discussing cultural differences is a practice for cultural awareness, I have observed that the use of Italian literature as both object of the study and a mean through which dealing with strong social themes, that involve every individual but immigrants in particular on some levels, has proved to be an effective instrument to deal with stereotypes and prejudice, which are social realities that nowadays and in the past have brought much pain, and that still touch the realities of many immigrant individuals.

\textbf{An Equity Pedagogy}

Equity pedagogy is applied when teachers modify their methods and tools in order to permit easier learning processes and academic success to all students, pertaining to the different cultural groups

\textsuperscript{15} First Level Course, April 29\textsuperscript{th}, 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.

\textsuperscript{16} A2 Level Course, May 6\textsuperscript{th}, 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.
in classes. This requires to challenge the existing knowledge systems, the power relations between teachers and students within the school structure, and the structural racist and classist mechanisms that often permeate state school systems (Banks and Banks, 1995: 153). As for the other dimensions of multicultural education that this research investigates, it is important to remark that no explicit guidelines for multicultural education has been published for CPIAs, therefore the multicultural class practices that are mentioned most of the time come from personal initiative of single teachers or group of teachers, often not backed up by multicultural theories research. Thus, as for the knowledge construction dimension, it is tough to detect educational practices that encourage the most complex functions that schools should enforce in multicultural education, which is the challenge to the school system itself, and its related limitations in terms of inclusion.

In spite of this lack of training and awareness around these themes, which commonly come as challenging to school systems in general (Banks, 2009: 17), there are some educational practices and some activities that teachers propose that can be retraced to processes of building an equitable pedagogical environment; some of them have already been mentioned and analysed under some previous dimensions of multicultural education, such as the proposition of topics that are not included in didactic programs in order to spark more interest in students, and to discuss and tackle themes that are closer to them, and more useful for their present situations. Other methods, that are more practical and tied to learning strategies, will be analysed further.

Regarding different cultural groups in terms of national and religious traditions and practices, this research maintains that the most utilized class practices to enhance equity pedagogy are the ones that include content integration from different cultural knowledge systems, in order to render learning more entertaining for immigrant students, who have the opportunity to learn more about their classmates’ cultural practices, while putting value in their own knowledge and cultural heritage, that becomes enhanced as cultural capital that can be utilized to promote the individual and their learning processes. One prime example of these practices is the approach to the final exam for First Level students, that permits them to acquire the middle school diploma, which enables people in Italy access to many professional training courses and job positions; the exam includes two written tests for the two different knowledge axes, namely the humanistic and social axis, and the scientific axis, and finally an oral exam during which students must present a “small thesis” that they have produced and assembled during the last months of school, which proves they have learnt to create conceptual links between subjects and topics, and that they are able to sustain a complex oral presentation regarding multiple issues. Students must choose the main theme of their thesis together with teachers, especially with the Italian literature and History teacher, who was the coordinator of the final exam, which is the teacher who is mentioned as Teacher B in this research;
the entirety of the students that were going to attend the final First Level exam in summer of 2022 were composing their thesis around themes that regarded their home country, or their religious heritage, or cultural background (Students A, II, Fa, and S)\(^\text{17}\). The same case was for students who were attending either the A2 or B1 alphabetization courses and that had already acquired the First Level diploma in previous years; they were encouraged by teachers to research into their personal knowledge and enhance what they already knew from their cultural background (Students Im, Os and R)\(^\text{18}\). Common topics linked to science were agriculture or energy production in the native country, for Literature it was often some chosen author from the native country that mirrored social and literary themes tackled during literature lessons, for History it was a part of the native country’s history chosen by the student, even though the History program only regarded Italian and European contemporary history.

The adaptation of learning methods for people pertaining to different age groups is also a central element, for the teaching techniques appear as fundamental as tough to choose when dealing with students used to different, older teaching methods, but also not used to studying anymore, and with younger students with faster and more internalized learning techniques but strong needs for technological support in teaching, in order to keep their attentions up. All teachers could benefit from the support of multimedia boards and the use of the internet and the projector in classrooms, which prove to be crucial ingredients for a more inclusive and interactive pedagogy. The use of pictures and videos or other multimedia sources is deemed to be extremely useful from students themselves (Student A, Fa, II, Im, S)\(^\text{19}\); it can improve the acquisition of language usage, accelerate the explanation of difficult concepts, and promote learning through different methods for all students.

Teachers do not assign homework to students, in order not to put more weight on the shoulders of the majority of students who have jobs during the day, and try to make learning more accessible during classes through interactive exercises, where they introduce a language topic first by creating experiences or making practical examples for the use of certain grammar elements, and finally they explain the language norm. This proves to be useful for all students beyond age groups, because for different reasons students of different ages have demonstrated that grammatical rules are tougher to apprehend when plainly explained, and no practical context is used to permit assimilation of language norms. One example is a lesson that has already been mentioned under the content integration dimension, when Teacher C asked students to provide some personal pictures from their

\(^{17}\) Interviews conducted on May 23\(^{rd}\), 31\(^{st}\), 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.

\(^{18}\) Interviews conducted on May 25\(^{th}\), 30\(^{th}\), 2022; San Bonifacio and Caldiero (VR) Italy.

\(^{19}\) Interviews conducted on May 23\(^{rd}\), 25\(^{th}\), 31\(^{st}\), 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.
past in order to describe them orally and then notice the grammatical changes in verb when using past tenses.\textsuperscript{20}

School trips to museums and cities like Venice do as well contribute to an equity pedagogy, for they permit the notion acquiring for students in an interactive and involving environment, not forcing individual to rely only on personal study at home in order to assimilate notions.

Equity pedagogy methods for inclusion of students of all educational backgrounds can be mirrored by some class practices that enhance the cooperation between teacher and students, and within the group of students itself; group activities, practical exercises, oral class conversations encourage students with background knowledge to share their cultural capital and exploit it both for their own academic success and their classmates’ educational and learning course.

Equity pedagogy, in conclusion, encompasses all the other dimensions of multicultural education by promoting teaching methods that put value in the students’ background and cultural capital, rendering the individual a central element in the teaching and learning processes, and not a mere object of the teaching subject. Most of the already mentioned class practices proposed by teachers are used to promote equitable learning opportunities from students of all groups, even if the ones that are sometimes left behind are the older students, as admitted by them (Student R)\textsuperscript{21}, for their difficulties in going back to studying, or the lack of education they experienced in their childhood.

An Empowering School Culture

Empowering school culture conveniently links to the main theme of the next chapter, that is the one of the promotion of agency of African students in the CPIA structure and practices. An empowering school culture must, in fact, comprehend all the dimensions of the school system and involve them in promoting the autonomy of individuals within the context of their immigration situation, of their professional lives, of their personal goals. These concepts within the framework of CPIA will be further discussed, while this section will focus on the specific class practices that encourage an empowering school culture. This dimension will be outlines without using distinctions of cultural diversity, as the concept itself encompasses all groups regardless of age, gender, nationality, religion and class, and calls for a strongly inclusive approach.

Most of class practices described in this chapter respond to the objective of students’ empowering both within the school environment, and in society. The structure and values of CPIAs

\textsuperscript{20} A2 Level course, May 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.
\textsuperscript{21} Interview conducted on May 30\textsuperscript{th}, 2022; Caldiero (VR) Italy.
themselves do affirm the centrality of the student in school, the individual’s cultural and educational heritage, their professional background and competences, and their goals for personal realization (Supplemento n.26 alla Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2015: 14). Class activities and courses’ resolution that empower students and put value on them as individuals capable of knowledge and competences include: active participation in class, encouraging class discussion and students’ participation in exercises and lessons, content integration with sources from the students’ native culture, enhancing students’ previous training and cultural capital in their final thesis for the First Level exam by letting them choose themes from their native country and personal culture.

A course activity that is specifically programmed for encouraging students’ present and future autonomy are the school trips; the already mentioned day trips to Venice or to museums in the centre of Verona are more notion-oriented, but they include activities that teach to students altogether some aspects of practical life in a new environment, such as buying tickets and managing public transportation (buses, trains) in Italy, or asking for directions in a new city. Other short school activities conducted outside of the classroom were the ones in practical places around the local territories, where students can access to services, such as the public library, the post office, the police station or headquarters, plus indications on how to ask for certain services and where to go when in need of them. This is not aimed specifically to academic success or pure notion acquiring for students, but it has the clear intention of investing on the students’ autonomy and empowerment in Italian society, without them depending on others or not being able to access to some opportunities.

Other ideological and structural elements of an empowering school culture will be further discussed in the next chapter.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, this chapter aims at defining if the CPIA’s structural elements directly states the scope of utilizing a multiculturalist approach (or a combination of multiculturalist approaches) in order to create a more inclusive school environment, considering the crucial role played by immigrant students in these centres; moreover, it sought to define in what ways multicultural class practices were applied during lessons, and how they were perceived by the students.

On one hand, neither the Official Guidelines, nor the Decree that defined the institution of the Centres, the didactic programs and the POF openly mention the State’s or the Centre of Verona’s choice for an open acquisition of multicultural education practices. On the other hand, teachers during alphabetization courses or literature classes have proved to put in practice numerous educational strategies that promote and reflect the five dimensions defined by Banks for
multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy and an empowering school culture. These practices do not come from institutional guidelines, and are often not specified as multicultural approaches during teachers’ training during the school year, but personal initiative coming from group projects or teachers’ experience in teaching in other environments do lead to the promotion of numerous and various multicultural education activities. The dimensions that are more easily integrated by teachers in class practices are content integration and prejudice reduction, for a few adjustments or some additions to the didactic units can bring students to a more participated presence in class, and an approach that includes multiple types of knowledge. The dimension of knowledge construction proves to be the most challenging at CPIA, because of the complexity of the awareness on meta-discourse about the school system itself, the lack of this approach in Italian state schools in general, and the lack of the rightful amount of time for tackling such delicate matters. The dimension of equity pedagogy is yet a challenging one, while it still suggests various approaches to school activities that are commonly applied by CPIA’s teachers. The cultural group that I have found to be more in difficulty in their language acquisition processes is the one of students over 40 years old; despite the frequent use of alternative teaching methods, the hardships of studying and acquiring language notions at a later age than the age of development can prove to be obstacles different to completely circumvent. The last dimension, the one of empowering school culture, is indeed practiced in school activities and in the school structure, as it is embedded in the system of CPIAs as well, as the next chapter will advocate.
Chapter 5: Agency Enhancement in CPIAs

As referred to in the Theoretical Framework, this study investigates the practical employment of agency encouraging ideologies, within the conceptual framework of the sociolinguistic approach to structure and agency in the context of second language acquisition.

This chapter will first define how and why students’ agency has to be considered a central value in the context of a school that takes care of adults’ education, especially regarding second language learning, as other studies have sustained. The following section will describe how is agency tackled in official documents that define the institution of CPIAs and their role in adults’ and immigrants’ education. The final section will outline in what practical ways the CPIAs system enhances the agency of students in the different dimensions of adult students’ education and the close link that their education creates with their personal lives and goals; this will be achieved through observation, but especially through the students’ voices, that reflect their perception of freedom of choice and encouragement of the motivation that drives them through the educational path as adults.

The Centrality of Agency in CPIAs

The concept of agency has been a much debated one in the context of post-structuralism social studies, and through the deepening of some of Bourdieu’s original definitions, many researchers in the field of sociolinguistic studies have stressed and questioned the concept of agency first in the educational environment, tackling the notions of social, cultural and symbolic capital, and then focusing on more specific fields, like language education, second language education, and education for adults. In these contexts, in fact, sociologists and linguistics have found deeper needs for autonomy, when combining the multiple realities of immigrant students, adult students, and the cultural and social significance of second language acquisition in terms of cultural capital and power relations; numerous studies have concentrated on second language acquisition for immigrant adults, for they combine a variety of factors strongly connoted by complex identities and complex cultural and social changes (Norton Peirce, 1995: 17-18; McKay and Wong, 1996: 579). Adult migrants need to be tackled, in fact, as complex individuals with shifting identity systems that encounter diverse realities and embark in multi-faceted cultural processes; accepting the complexity and multiple layers of societies, and the inevitable influence of cultural and social factors in human beings’ movements and choices (Ahearn, 2001: 112), individuals consequently become social actors, not embedded but included and engaged in cultural and social structural processes. Adult students encountering changing realities and different societies, embarking in their migration process, prove to have a different sense of agency, which is what have led them to choose for
migration, and therefore to choose a new educational path in order to achieve integration, personal goals, and communication standards. Thus, it is necessary to observe adult immigrant students as dynamic actors in changing social and cultural realities, moving towards the acquisition of new cultural capital (Pavlenko, 2016: 298).

The need for this new conception of agency in second language learning for adult migrants is indeed stated in one of the most prominent studies on andragogy, intended as an opposite to pedagogy, which is the “study of methods and activities of teaching”; pedagogy has always been researched in school contexts where children and kids under 18 were the students in question, therefore teaching to adults is not completely comprised in pedagogical theories and practices. Knowles (1996), therefore, defines “andragogy” as the study of teaching methods and practices for adults in learning processes. The author established a new approach based on the particular needs and interests in the context of learning of adult students, distinguishing six preconditions that diversify them from base concepts of pedagogy.

The first precondition is “The Need to Know”, which involves the awareness of the existence itself of the need for notions or language acquisition, that the adult is capable of recognizing. Teachers, therefore, must facilitate the acquisition of awareness of this need, by presenting the advantages and the practical outcomes of learning something, in order to encourage students to understand the importance of what they are learning.

The second point is “The Concept of Self”; the adult’s concept of self, in fact, is an autonomous dimension, while the kid’s concept of self depends on others. The adult individual feels the need of being recognized by others as independent, and would live negatively an experience where he would be treated as non-capable of self-govern; thus, teachers must show their consideration of adult students as autonomous and responsible subjects, within and outside of the learning context.

The third observation is the importance of “The Role of Previous Experience” in adults, which is an element that is not considered in children’s teaching processes, as they do not own previous educational or professional experience. An adult’s experience must be the starting point for one’s learning journey, and integrating their previous competences and knowledge is the only way for them to have a significant learning experience. Teachers must then capitalize this knowledge, encouraging student to utilize precedent experiences in class activities and in shared class practices, letting the students know that their experience is valued.

22 https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/pedagogy
The fourth point is “The Availability to Learn”, which tackles the need for adult students to identify specifically the practical outcomes of their learning processes, being available to invest time and energy in learning new things only when certain that it will turn out in expendable results.

The fifth precondition is “The Orientation towards Learning”; this is a reference to the importance that practical daily life competences hold in adults’ lives. Their learning processes, thus, must be concrete and oriented towards useful outcomes, and not characterized by theoretical notions tied to the subject of learning, appearing as an end to itself.

The sixth and last characteristic of adults’ learning processes, is “The Motivation”, which encompasses all the previous mentions to concrete and practical outcomes, and the willingness of adults learning to acquire competences that render them socially, culturally and economically capitalized individuals, with expendables values (Knowles, 1996: 78-81).

These six distinctive peculiarities of adults’ education show a unique focus on the individual that is embarking through the learning pathway, rendering the approach strongly student-centred, and specifically needed for adults who decide to pursue education while encountering different societies and cultural environments, namely, immigrant adults. This approach gives space to a strong centrality of the agency of students, who become the main actors both in their life goals and in their educational journey (Colosio, 2015: 43-46).

How is Agency Defined in the CPIAs’ Guidelines and Curriculum?

The D.P.R. 263/2012, which defines the official guidelines for the institution of the new system of CPIAs, mentions and describes a new didactic and formative instrument named Personal Training Agreement (PFI), that is conceived as a contract between the student and the school, where they commonly agree on the personal objectives of the student, based on the individual’s personal history and training, professional and cultural background.

“Valorization of cultural and professional heritage of the person, starting from the reconstruction of their personal history is the innovative element of the new educational system for adults”

(Supplemento n.26 alla Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2015: 14)

The Agreement is described as a shared and signed pact between the adult individual, the Commission of teachers and the director of the CPIA, formalizing the personal formative plan (Percorso di Studio Personalizzato, from now on PSP) for the period of study of the student. The pact includes the previously acquired competences of the individual, recognized as school
credits; the schedules of singular subjects and the total amount of lesson hours, agreed with the student depending on their personal needs; the amount of time scheduled for the PFI to be official and in use (Supplemento n.26 alla Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2015: 14-15). This document gets redacted after the first hours of welcoming activities for new students, who spend a few hours of the didactic schedule with teachers, in order to identify their resources, their needs, their expectations and the interests that drive them; this unfolds in three phases, namely identification, assessment, and certification (idem: 15).

The PFI surely mirrors the principles of andragogy, giving central importance to the students themselves, their motivation, their needs and their resources, stressing the responsibilities of the individual in their own learning project, and the shared agreement between school institution and person. The document aims at creating a favourable environment to learning, producing a new mechanism for shared planning, diagnosing the educational needs, and promoting students’ autonomy in utilising human resources and materials in their learning processes (Colosio, 2015: 46).

The First Level objectives for the linguistic axis states that students must acquire, by the end of their didactic schedule, expression and interpretation competences for notions, opinions, information, feelings and thoughts in Italian language; awareness of creative production through the interpretation of ideas and the actualization of cognitive production; the abilities of understanding and critically analyse texts of different genres, being aware of their meanings and utilized language instruments; utilizing with awareness and criticism the technologies of societies, and rendering them useful in daily life situations. The historical-social axis specifies the scope of rendering students able to interpret historical, geographical and social realities from the past and in the present; to identify strategies for orientation in the socio-economic world; to actively participate in social, civic and work environments, taking responsibilities as part of broader communities; participating in social and political life, knowing their rights and duties; interact with the job market logical processes of material and immaterial work (Supplemento n.26 alla Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2015: 22). These are only some of the stated objectives for students who finish their First Level courses and acquire a middle school diploma, but they are some of the most significant in terms of how students’ autonomy, concrete needs, personal goals and active social and political participation are central to the scopes of the First Level educational path. The CPIA goals aim at boosting students’ capacities in navigating life in society, making choices while being aware of the advantages and disadvantages of said choices, approaching the work environments knowing what are their responsibilities and their rights as workers.
The Learning Units’ programs for alphabetization courses state the topics that are covered during lessons, rendering them topics of discussion and opportunity of apprehending expression and communication competences about them. Common issues for both the A2 level and B1 level courses are work related matters, social and service matters around territory, food and groceries, family matters, the school environment, health issues. While Learning Units for the A2 level introduce these topics and focus especially on learning key expressions and concepts together with linguistic matters, the B1 level tackles most of the same issues, while encouraging a deeper and more complex analysis of political, social, economic and personal human realities in the society the students live in; learning terms about the job market, for example, comprehend discussing work contracts and their conditions, or tackling health linguistic elements include discussing social health issues, prevention, lifestyle, and sanitary procedures. More complex topics like travelling matters, cultural and artistic linguistic expression, and getting to know more about Italian regions, folklore and traditional cultural practices, are employed during B1 level lessons, in order to provide deeper knowledge and more instruments for discussing, expressing and critically think about matters that regard students in their lives, and their conception of the country and society they live in.\(^{23}\)

Competences and abilities specified at the end of Learning Units show indeed the strong focus that CPIAs courses are supposed to offer, enhancing the importance for autonomy and self-fulfilling functions that adult students, and especially adult immigrant students, need to acquire in order to utilize their action power in their lives, and to march towards their goals. Language acquisition is meant to be accompanied by deeper conceptual knowledge and critical thinking around daily life and societal matters for an individual living in a community, and it strengthens communication and expression competences of adults who need tools to move through complex realities and act upon them with cognition.

In conclusion to this section, the official Guidelines and the curriculum of CPIAs do present numerous elements supporting the enhancement of students’ agency, through an agreement between the school and the students’ themselves, topics and issues that interest practical needs of immigrant students, and language competences that boost autonomy for adult immigrant students.

**How is African students’ Agency Enhanced in CPIA?**

As the previous section has demonstrated, the Guidelines and curriculum of the system of CPIAs and their formative plans are inspired by principles that regard the education of adults, since pedagogical principles cannot be applied when organizing an educational system around an adult

individual characterized by previous experiences, precise goals, a distinctive motivation, and the important factor of the choice of immigration, for various reasons. These factors render the adult student a peculiar actor in the educational environment; additionally, as many sociolinguistic researchers have maintained, the cultural, social and personal elements of an immigrant person’s life strongly influence their educational process, and especially their second language acquisition journey. The adult immigrant student encounters, in fact, multiple cultural realities, which shape them, and are shaped by individuals like them; their agency, therefore, lies first in the strong personal choice they have made for their own or their family’s wellness and needs, and subsequently in the choices they are able to make in the new reality they live in, while embarking in a new educational plan that is supposed to give them tools for realizing their best interests (Ahearn, 2001; McKay and Wong, 1996; Pavlenko, 2016).

Thus, the structural elements suggest that CPIAs put in practice this agency-centred approach, supporting the student’s personal choices in education and in professional life, while helping them acquire communication tools for autonomy, and fulfilling their expectations and motivation. In order to verify in what ways teachers and the structural reality of the CPIA put in practice the principle of agency enforcing for immigrant students, this section will utilise Knowles’ (1996) six preconditions for adults’ education, which have theorized andragogy and have inspired multiple adults’ education systems; for every peculiar aspect of the adult student, the research will present concrete practices observed at the CPIA in Verona, and the perception and mirroring of the African students’ own personal choices inside the school environment.

The Need to Know
In all the African students that have participated in the study, it is clearly noticeable the awareness of their need to learn, especially for the language acquisition side. The first and most deep-rooted need that they all affirmed to have the need to fulfil, is that of communication and personal connections; most of the interviews, the students stated to have come to Italy for economic reasons, linked to the absence of a fair job market in their native countries. However, when asked, why it was important for them to learn Italian, the first answer was almost always regarding personal expression, friendship and connections (7 out of 10 students).

“I have no friends here…I like speaking and to communicate, I want to be able to speak a lot in order to have friends and talk to people”
(Student A, my own translation)\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} Interview conducted on May 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.
All of the younger students under the age of twenty years old have affirmed a strong will and need to be studying in this moment of their lives, showing awareness of the importance of education in their young age, before the intention of getting a job. This is also influenced by the families of origin, that seem to not be putting particular pressure on these students to get jobs or to finish their studies early. Actually, almost every one out of the younger students have mentioned that their family wanted to move to Italy in order to get European education for their children, additionally to reasons related to the job market.

Three of the younger female students coming from Morocco, in particular, have affirmed they have been in school until the last year of primary school, then for multiple reasons they have stayed home, since mandatory education is up until ten years of age in their native country; all of them state strongly their will to be in school, and their determination to continue their studies in order to be able to make future choices. Student Il, for example, has told me that she does not know precisely what she wants to study specifically, nor she has a dream job, but that her priority right now is to obtain her alphabetization certification and her First Level diploma, and then to study more with the scope of understanding what professional path might suit her best. She told me that she had to stay home for a year without attending school, since she wanted to apply to a private high school that, as she said, would give her better education compared to Moroccan state schools; but that for that type of schools, girls needed to be signed up only with the written and signed consensus of their fathers, and her father was already in Italy and could not come back in order to sign her subscription. Her mom, additionally, has no education, therefore she could not try to sign her up as a parent. During her gap year at home, Il. has bought herself books so she could continue her studies without “losing too much time”, as she told me, and even asked her older sister who had finished her high school to give her private lessons in the meantime. She is not the only one that has mentioned structural and bureaucratic problems in signing up for high schools, especially as females, and all of these students have then told me how much they want to and need to pursue further education.  

“I know that schools in Africa are not as good as they are here, and I want to get my best education”

(Student Fa, my own translation)
This young student from Senegal was instead still going to high school in her native town, but affirmed that her family moved for better job and education opportunities, and that she herself was informed on European schools and why they provide better education, which is her number one priority, as she told me.

These are only some of the many examples of affirmations and parts of stories that notify the strong awareness for the need to learn new things, especially language proficiency, that I have noticed in African students in CPIA classes.

**The Concept of Self**

The conception of self in adults is deemed as an autonomous perception, and the need of being recognized as such. The school environment in the CPIA certainly shows a different relationship between teachers and students, as teachers treat classes as groups of autonomous actors who have extremely diverse needs, and practice different class activities and approaches than the ones that can be observed in other schools. One example of this conception, is that teachers do not assign homework, as numerous students work during the day or on shifts, or other have to take care of their houses and families in their spare time; as aforementioned when discussing multicultural education practices, it is often common for teachers to render students active participants of lessons, asking them to explain concepts they already know to other classmates, helping other students out with subjects they have already treated in their previous experience, or capitalizing their personal background to be central to some lessons, explaining national histories or cultural practices. This includes the relevant practice, used by Teacher B, of encouraging students facing their final exam for the First Level diploma to composing their thesis for the oral exam utilizing their previous knowledge, personal and cultural heritage, and the topics that interest them the most, regardless of the programs that have been followed through the year. This renders students protagonists of their educational journey, enhancing value in their personal background and interests, and encouraging them to make personal choices in the school environment, almost as a reflection of what the rest of life is supposed to be for them.

One of the criticism I have encountered on this matter regards the overlap of some alphabetization morning courses with other hours from the First Level curriculum; a couple of students following both courses in the morning reported they were not allowed to take the First Level final exam that year, even though they had followed the courses for the full school year, because they had missed some maths hours on the schedule, for it overlapped with the A2
alphabetization course (Student II.\textsuperscript{27} and S.\textsuperscript{28}). The overlap of the lessons did not depend on the students, as they were assigned to that A2 level course based on their proficiency, and the decision of not letting them have the final exam for the First Level felt like something imposed from above, as they could do nothing to change the situation. On the official Guidelines of 2015, the section dedicated to the PFI specified that in some specific students’ situation, given any persona or work-related issue, they could be granted a certain amount of hours they could miss, and still result as eligible for taking final exams; this amount of hours was specifically set at 10\% of the total amount of hours for that course, which probably results as a small concession for someone who needs to work on shifts. Other students from the evening course have reported they could not do the language proficiency exam in the past because they had to lose too many lessons due to their shifts (Students Os.\textsuperscript{29} And Ou.\textsuperscript{30}, working in a tannery); this 10\% limit appears to be a rather insufficient compromise for students who have personal conditions and life priorities they cannot change.

This can show as one of the occasions in which, as Knowles has defined the importance for adults’ of the concept of self as an autonomous and acting being, the students’ agency has to be stopped in front of some structural obstacles; some rules on the attendance are obviously needed, but as the PFI states that the personal situation of students are central to take into account, it can stride to perceive the delusion in the students’ discourses, feeling like their personal issues were not taken into consideration, in that occasion.

The Role of Previous Experience

As this research has already tackled, the use of previous personal experience during educational processes, an important feature in the PFI is the recognition of school credits for students who have already acquired other diplomas or different types of professional training. Personal experience is also thoroughly employed as a form of multicultural education practices during class activities, as was described in Chapter 1, and this is considered an empowering practice as well; nonetheless, since this theme has already been tackled in the previous chapter, this section will focus on the recognition of school credits for previous professional training and work experience for the African students who asked for the recognition during the welcoming period at CPIA.

The recognition of school credits from previous education, though, regards the CPIA’s curriculum and school activities, but not recognition in other educational institutions or work environments; many of the students with previous education in their native country did not get their school years
or diplomas recognized, and if they were to pursue the same type of education or career path they would have to repeat the major part of their school years. One example is student Ou., who attended some years of medical school after graduating from high school in Senegal, and now works in a tannery. When he arrived in Italy in 2020, he attended the First Level course and obtained his diploma, and in 2022 he was pursuing the B1 proficiency level certification in order to obtain a longer residence permit.\textsuperscript{31}

Another example is Student L., who has studied in a private school for becoming a nurse, and practiced as a nurse in Morocco for four years, and in Italy works as a private caregiver; her professional certification is not recognized as such in Italy, and she can work as a caregiver but only for families who are willing to hire her, while she would need an Italian diploma from the social-sanitary operator course in order to be hired by bigger structures or work in state hospitals. She is studying for the B1 certification in order to request a longer residence permit, and plans on acquiring a higher language proficiency for being able to study for this professional course, and obtain a diploma that could improve her working conditions.\textsuperscript{32}

Student Fi. has already studied in university in Morocco, and had obtained a bachelor’s degree in Foreign Languages and Literature before moving to Italy; in this case, she would need to get the recognition of some university formative credits, and then an international English proficiency certificate such as IELTS or TOEFL in order to sign up for a master’s programme in Foreign Languages at the university of Verona.

“I need to speak Italian well for communication, because I want to study English literature here […]. I really want to become an English teacher, anywhere would be okay, but I would rather stay in Italy closer to my family.”

(Student Fi, my own translation)\textsuperscript{33}

As I discussed these issues with older students who had school and work experience in their native countries, I have not detected particular resentment for some of these situations, as the students that already had jobs declared themselves satisfied with their positions and work environments; they all had contracts that enabled them to ask for a work residence permit, a fair salary, and a friendly environment, where they could meet new people and practice their Italian (Students L, Ou and Os\textsuperscript{34}). Regardless of the perceived or stated satisfaction of students’ professional positions, it is

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
relevant to notice the difficulties in obtaining institutional recognition of their past education or work experience outside of the CPIA system, where the only recognition they get regards school credits.

The Availability to Learn
The principle of the availability to learn in adults’ instruction refers to the selectiveness of adults in choosing to invest time and energy in learning something only when it proves to be useful for their lives and resourceful for the role they play or will play in work environments and in society. This proves to be essential when speaking about language acquisition, as the first results of language courses is to provide practical use to students’ expression in their everyday lives; when asked about the usefulness of the lessons, all the students interviewed mentioned practical activities with examples from daily life, grammar notions that they felt they needed to learn in order to express themselves properly, the teaching of vocabulary that pertains to concrete life situations. As stated in the section pertaining to the importance of The Need to Know in andragogy, many students have referred to the need for communication as their primary need, that Italian language acquisition is supposed to fulfil.

“Everything we learn in school can be useful: verbs are very important, […] but also knowing the laws and learning about Italian culture is useful. […] School has been so useful so far, and so fun too! I have fun when I come here.”
(Student R, my own translation)"}

Student R told me they have had whole lessons about writing CVs and letters of application for job positions or other professional training, and had practical examples proposed by teachers of how job interviews work in Italy, and how to express yourself in Italian in such occasions. She told me that there is no other place where you can get that kind of information, because it would only be Internet advice; but teachers know those realities and can give concrete feedback. Student II has told me that she likes how Italian teachers are not extremely grammar focused, for they care the most that students understand when some norms are useful, and which language features are important in which contexts; later, they test grammar knowledge but they care more

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
about them acquiring concepts, not writing everything perfectly. This student told she feels like teachers know what can be useful for students when they need to communicate.37

“The thing I like the most about coming to school is speaking; everyone says that I am chatty and that is true, I like speaking Italian and being able to communicate so much.”

(Student II, my own translation)38

Similar affirmations have been made by other students, who said that the practical things they do in school are the most interesting, and the most useful as well. Students A, Fa, and S all told me that their preferred part of going to school were the hours of Italian alphabetization, for they involved a lot of speaking exercises and concrete help from teachers about how to use certain vocabulary or grammar notions in communicating.39

Student A has showed the most selectivity in terms of defining what is worth investing in and what is less; he told me that learning to write and speak was the most important thing for him, because he cannot wait for being able to express himself properly in Italian. Most of the subjects he was learning in First Level courses, he referred to them as “useless”, as he had already studied most of the topics in his middle school years in Morocco, but his diploma was not as recognized as an Italian middle school diploma in Italy. This student also affirmed that even though grammar can turn out as a little boring sometimes, that is something he studies gladly at home because it has a practical result, which is improving his communication skills.40

It appears very clear that adults’ selectivity in what they want to learn and why is a strong factor in their educational path, as they choose how to and how much to invest in their education if they feel like it is worth it. By the students’ perception, the CPIA courses seem to satisfy these expectations for practical outcomes, and to meet the needs for communication skills first, and then for self-expression later. The alphabetization courses in particular seem to bring concrete help to the students’ needs, both in terms of how useful the students perceive the lessons are, and of how satisfied they feel with the time they invest in going to school and studying.

37 Interview conducted on May 23rd, 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.
38 Ibid.
39 Interviews conducted on May 23rd, May 31st, 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.
40 Interview conducted on May 23rd, 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.
The Orientation towards Learning

An adult’s understanding of the importance of learning, even throughout the course of life, is clearly deeper than the perception children can have around school and educational matters, which they tend to feel as an external duty, imposed by others, and even when they put effort into learning, it cannot be defined as a personal choice, for they hold a very different type of agency than adults do. Deciding to embark in a new school experience after the age of development is a strong choice, and even if it feels like a necessity, and almost mandatory, in a new country, the willingness to invest in education is not to give for granted. In the previous section the research has underlined how important practicality and concrete outcomes are to adult students, who want to acquire expendable competences, that render them more autonomous in social life, and active agents in their own professional choices. In some cases, though, the explicit will of learning for many reasons, even just the sake of it, has appeared strong in some students, especially the younger ones. All of these students have expressed appreciation for practical outcomes to their education, acquiring communication skills, getting language proficiency certifications; but they also stated the priority that getting education has for them in their lives, regardless or additionally to the instant results they can acquire by being able to express themselves in Italian. A pattern that I have noticed, is that all these students were women, and they all mentioned difficulties they have encountered or know they might encounter in their native countries on their path to getting education, or for their professional careers.

Student R does not belong to the group of younger students, but she has told me that when she was a child she was not able to get mandatory education because the school was far from her house, and she and her sister would have had to walk to school and come back all by themselves; their father thought that it was too dangerous for two girls to walk alone every day to go to school, so he preferred to keep them home, for the sake of their security. This student is not oriented towards higher education right now, because she had children in the meantime, and is looking for a stable job, but she has stated how much she feels lucky and grateful to go to school, and how much she enjoys learning new things and being able to discuss with classmates.41

Students Fa and S, both from Côte d’Ivoire, were able to attend school up until the first years of high school, but they both have told me that they felt like in their native country they did not have the same job opportunities as they might have here. Student Fa is the same, referred to in the section dedicated to The Need to Learn, who said that she knows education in Europe was better, and that she was determined to get it. When asked if she had a specific job as a goal in her mind, or some career ideas, she told me she would like to study medicine, or some other scientific based discipline;

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41 Interview conducted on May 30th, 2022; Caldiero (VR) Italy.
then she specified that first of all she wants to continue studying, and that her future projects would come later.\textsuperscript{42} Student S, instead, told me she would like to study economy, in order to build a career that could “make her free and travel a lot”; she also specified that her main concern is to pursue all the years of mandatory education, in order to understand better what choices she would have in the future, and learn as much as the school offers.\textsuperscript{43}

Student Im is another student who had not completed her mandatory education in Morocco, for reasons that she has not specified. She does not have precise ideas about her future, but she wants to go on studying in order to get a job that renders her autonomous, and said she would be interested in following a professional course to become a social-sanitary operator. She has already acquired her First Level diploma in Italy, and she told me she is studying Korean language by herself at home, since she is very interested in Korean culture and would like to visit, and maybe move there one day.

“I am so grateful I am able to study here. […] Even when I was not in school, back home, I made my mom buy me books in order to study by myself. […] And now in my free time, I study all the time, everything I can get, all the books I can borrow…”

(Student II, my own translation)\textsuperscript{44}

With this quotation I would like to conclude this section, dedicated to the strong willingness to learn that can distinguish adult students from other students, and specifically people who have willingly left their home behind in order to get education opportunities when they could not. Enabling these students to acquire their education, encouraging them in their personal path, putting value in their enthusiasm and their desire for knowledge, surely are actions that define when an environment wants to enhance people’s agency, not because they do not have it themselves, but because they might need the tools in an otherwise limiting society.

The Motivation

Motivation is perhaps the strongest precondition that distinguishes adult learners, and it is a rather broad term, that includes various factors in people’s personal lives, both internal and external. As previously observed, the need for communication competences and the will to socialize and create personal connections appears to be the strongest motivation for starting a language course at

\textsuperscript{42} Interview conducted on May 31\textsuperscript{st}, 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Interview conducted on May 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.
CPIAs, as the majority of students have stated (Students A, Fa, Fi, Il, Im, L, R, S). The intention of acquiring more and more self-expression skills seems to be the ground condition, therefore what comes before other aspects of cultural, economic and political life. The school, even implicitly, by encouraging students to talk to each other in Italian as much as possible, puts effort in meeting this social need that everyone shows and describes; the first lessons of alphabetization courses are in fact dedicated to presenting oneself, getting to know different people and how they can be described, and then they go on with practical matters like access to services and bureaucratic matters in Italy. Giving importance to social and practical needs of students who follow courses, is recognizing their educational needs and listening to their primary motivation for deciding to learn new things, which is not acquiring perfect grammar skills, but being able to express themselves.

Then, many students have to acquire language proficiency certifications, or the First Level diploma, in order to access specific job positions, or to apply for other schools where they are provided with professional training, such as the course for becoming social-sanitary operator, or qualifications for working in welding, or HACCP certifications. The CPIA school, as stated by the official 2015 Guidelines, has the role of creating a net with services and institutions on the territory (Supplemento n.26 alla Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2015: 13-14), in order to facilitate the inclusion in society or in the job market of adult students; teachers do indeed help personally students who need to apply for jobs by writing CVs and motivational letters together, by creating links with local enterprises, and helping students apply for professional courses within the territorial offers. Students Im and L, for example, were being helped respectively by Teachers C and A in order to apply for the professional course for social-sanitary operator, in the period where the interviews were conducted. When undecided on future education or job opportunities, after the First Level diploma, students would often consult their teachers in order to understand what would have been in their best interests, and how to proceed in that direction; student A, for example, told me that he was checking professional high schools to apply for together with Teacher C, as he was undecided between a culinary high school, or a course for becoming electrician.45

In regards to future plans, some students have told me they had plans in acquiring higher education, and teachers would serve as mediators and consultants in this situation as well; Student Fi, for example, that was looking for applying for a master’s degree program, was helped by Teacher A in writing emails to the university and asking for the recognition of academic credits. Other students who mentioned the will to study academically (Students Fa, II and S)46 would still have to acquire their First Level diploma first, and then attend a high school for having that diploma as well;

45 Ibid.
46 Interviews conducted on May 23rd and May 31st, 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.
teachers were very encouraging of their plans, helped them integrate subjects were they had some didactic shortages, and searched possible high schools with them for providing didactic orientation towards higher education.

Another common final scope of the learning journey for students was to acquire language proficiency certifications, and therefore to be able to apply for ten years long residence permits (Students L, Os and Ou)\textsuperscript{47}. One of the main roles of CPIAs, in fact, is the provision of preparation courses for proficiency tests, and the administration of proficiency testing itself, according to the competences guidelines of CEFR levels. The language level certifications that immigrants obtain at CPIAs are in fact completely official documents with which they can apply for residence permits, job positions and higher education. Exams can be held even without following courses before, but students prefer applying for preparation courses in order to acquire better speaking and practical competences with the help of teachers, that tend to always privilege the skills that students feel like they need the most, like oral expression and knowledge of correct vocabulary for practical daily situations.

“I don’t want to get married, you know…when you get married then you have to stay home, cook all day, and have kids. There would be a lot of chaos. I don’t want to get married, at least not until I’m over thirty years old.”

(Student Im, my own translation)\textsuperscript{48}

What this student told me summarizes another conceptual motivation for immigrant students deciding to study and acquire diplomas, and it regards particularly young women; younger women, in fact, have all showed interest in studying up until high school, and most of them have stated they would like to attend university. Student Im is the only one who openly mentioned the matter of autonomy, but this surely does not appear as a coincidence; as she said, getting higher education and having a stable job with a safe salary would result in her not being forced to depend on someone else, and therefore being able to choose whether she would like to get married or not, since she would have more than the sole option. The same student, in fact, told me that she and her mom, who is a widow, had to leave Morocco because there was no job opportunity for a woman raising a daughter by herself there; and the same goes for her, because her mom wanted her to have

\textsuperscript{47} Interviews conducted on May 30\textsuperscript{th}, 2022; Caldiero (VR) Italy.

\textsuperscript{48} Interview conducted on May 25\textsuperscript{th}, 2022; San Bonifacio (VR) Italy.
better future opportunities and more freedom of choice. This motivation, therefore, is also strictly linked to many female students’ choices, or their families’ choices, of leaving the native country.\textsuperscript{49} Student R, who has moved to Italy to give better education and work opportunities to her two sons, is studying to obtain the B1 level of language proficiency, because with that certification she can apply for the Italian citizenship, having lived in Italy for more than fifteen years now. She has had a few jobs, always for short periods, and has mainly taken care of her family and her house; but she has very high oral proficiency, thanks to the personal connections she has made in her work environment and in her neighbourhood since she has arrived. The B1 level is still hard for her, as she told me, since she has not studied for a very long period of time, and her memory for grammar norms and written expression has proved to make it hard for her to pass the written test.

“I hope to acquire the Italian citizenship because I am very grateful for being here. […] Here I have found a better life for my sons, but for myself as well. Life has not been easy all the time, but it is still better than before. […]”

(Student R, my own translation)\textsuperscript{50}

The certification for the B1 level in Italian proficiency is one of the main prerequisites for applying for Italian citizenship; therefore, this is one of the various reasons why students request to follow alphabetization courses and final exams.

\textbf{Conclusion}

To conclude, this chapter aims at defining whether and how the CPIA system’s Guidelines and its curriculum promote activities and didactic programs that support adult immigrant students in their personal education choices, in their future professional and educational orientation, in their expectations and motivation for their studies. Then, the chapter outlines some key aspects of teaching principles for adults, that define adults’ education as an approach that needs to keep the learner at the centre of the educational project; following the conditions that distinguish adult learners that Knowles (1996) has delineated, the section seeks to analyse whether these peculiarities were kept in consideration in the educational projects, and how teachers approached adult immigrant students’ need for agency and autonomy in the school environment and in their personal lives.

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{50} Interview conducted on May 30\textsuperscript{th}, 2022; Caldiero (VR) Italy.
As sustained by numerous sociolinguistic and educational theories, education for adults, and in particular second language acquisition education, presents a deep need of centrality for the adult student, in order to obtain more efficiency in the language acquisition process or in the educational process in general, by encouraging students’ autonomy and agency in their scholastic and personal choices. The CPIA system’s Guidelines from 2015 do show an adherence to the latest and more student-centred theories regarding adult education, by introducing a new didactic tool, namely the PFI, which is a shared pact between the school and the student around the student’s past experience and what can be considered their competences heritage, and their future professional or educational plans. The planning of this personalized project remarks a new relevance given to the student, who becomes the main actor in their own educational process, and not only a mere recipient to be filled with impersonal knowledge.

Moreover, by following the same principles Knowles had outlined as the main ones to enhance in adult students, class practices and teachers attitudes have proven to be particularly oriented towards providing an educational service that puts values in the adult students’ wills and needs; many class activities, but also extra-scholastic services that the CPIA and its teachers offer to students, are planned in a strong student-centred approach, and the perception of students demonstrate so. The majority of the students that participated in the study have declared themselves to be satisfied in their expectations for the language courses, as they met their practical needs and supported their numerous motivations. The school environment, in general, has proven to be student-oriented, by proposing didactic programs that fulfil students’ expectations for practical notions, and by creating a friendly and fair environment where adult students are treated as such, and are supported and guided throughout their path towards autonomous personal choices, according to their future professional plans.
Conclusions

The aim of this research is to describe how the CPIAs deal with the themes of diversity and agency for African students in a student-centred educational approach, utilizing the study of multicultural education and the andragogy approach. The Research Questions that have conducted this study are:

- How do the curriculum and teachers in CPIAs deal with multiculturalism and diversity in their classes?
- How do the curriculum and teachers in CPIAs promote the reinforcement of African adult students’ agency?

As the mentioned sociolinguistic research suggests, the role of students in their own educational path needs to become increasingly central, for the social and cultural factors in people’s lives strongly influence their academic successes; elements such as motivation, investment, and cultural diversity can be determining in education, and need to be taken into consideration when planning academic programs. This necessity for a central role of the student in school systems becomes even more crucial when tackling the matter of adult education, and in particular immigrant adults’ education; these individuals, due to their peculiar experiences and societal and cultural changes, encountering multiple realities and dealing with their own identity definition, are in specific need for an education that is tailored around them in order to satisfy their expectations, meet the needs of their motivations, and receive support in acting their autonomy.

The multicultural education approach was born as a way to deal with cultural and ethnic diversity in schools, but has developed together with the notion of culture itself, which is not considered to be solely tied to ethnic and national boundaries, but encompasses multiple realities of individuals’ lives in society, such as age, gender, social class, disabilities, religion, sexual orientation. In such a diverse environment like the one in CPIAs, where age groups, communities from the same countries, shared religious confessions, diverse educational background, it comes as natural to assume that a multicultural didactic approach is needed. The particular situation immigrants are in, dealing with shifting societies and cultural practices, requires school systems and in particular CPIAs to adopt a multicultural approach, in order to render teaching more effective by involving students in sharing and enhancing cultural diversity as a resource, and not a barrier. CPIAs official Guidelines and didactic programs do not mention nor regulate specific forms of multicultural approach, while a few topics in alphabetization courses tackle cultural diversity in classes. Nonetheless, teachers have proven to practice numerous multicultural education activities
and many didactic techniques adopted do mirror the five main dimensions of multicultural education, defined by Banks (2009). The dimensions of content integration and prejudice reduction are the ones that appear more enhanced during courses, as teachers often propose themes and sources from various cultural backgrounds, involving students and their cultural heritage in participating to the building of multicultural common knowledge, and choosing texts and topics that tackle the concept of diversity and differences in society, while encouraging discussions on such themes. The dimensions of equity pedagogy and knowledge construction prove to be the most challenging, as they involve a relevant amount of meta-reflection on the school ideology and the conception of education itself, therefore they might need specific training for teachers; equity pedagogy, though, is still enhanced through some class activities that are modified in order to be rendered more accessible for everyone. The dimension of empowering school culture and environment is strictly linked to the second approach analysed in this research, which is the encouragement of agency enhancement for adult immigrant students; this dimension is tackled in the programs of the courses and ingrained in the CPIA institution itself, being part of its goals.

The second educational approach that this research has investigated through class observation and personal interviews is the one of agency enhancement through second language learning and class activities; the characteristics of adult learners defined by Knowles (1996) have been utilized in order to define how these factors are taken into consideration when teaching to adult students, and whether the attached educational needs were recognized and met. The andragogy perspective underlines the importance of adult learners’ agency enhancement, as adults present different conditions than children learners, for they make specific choices for their educational path, driven by various motivation factors and following personal or professional planning. CPIAs institutions have been thought and programmed to function as centres that encourage and support adult students through their educational choices, especially through the introduction of the Personalized Formative Pact, which enables students to agree together with teachers their training objectives and get their personal heritage and professional experience recognized. Agency enhancement is therefore in certain ways regulated in the CPIAs’ institution, and moreover, it is practiced by teachers through class activities and didactic choices. The adult learners’ factors of necessity to learn, self-conception, the role of previous experience, the availability and the orientation towards learning, and motivation, are all dimensions of the adult learner that are taken into consideration by teachers when programming teaching activities and support for their students’ extra-scholastic or professional needs. The students’ perception appears to be mirroring the intentions of the school system towards the enhancement of agency, as students demonstrate to feel involved and main agents in shaping their own educational experience.
In conclusion, the multicultural education approach proves to be practically efficient, through the proposition of class and out of class activities that encourage the involvement of students and employ cultural diversity as a didactic tool, and as an opportunity to render learning more inclusive. By rendering education more accessible, students can experience the employment of their own knowledge and heritage as a central mean to others’ education, and will approach the study with more enthusiasm. Nonetheless, it is fundamental that this approach is regulated by the Guidelines of CPIAs’ system, and it will need to be included into teachers’ training in order to establish the approach as central to teaching in the Centres; depending on teachers’ personal initiative and experience cannot be held as a long term solution, and it might make the approach at risk when not officially instituted.

The enhancement of adult immigrant students’ agency in the institution of CPIAs proves to be positively perceived by students themselves, and to be actually practiced not only through the engagement of the PFI, but also through the employment of teaching techniques and class activities that encourage the centrality of the students’ needs and motivation in their educational experience. Although some technical issues, such as the adaptation of programs to workers’ needs, are still relevant to tackle and regulate, the model for student-centred education in CPIAs proves to be positively perceived by students themselves, and effectively acting towards an enhancement of students’ autonomy and agency, and a support for their motivation and personal and professional plans for self-realization. The approaches and related activities that have proven to be successful should therefore become integral part of the Guidelines and the didactic programs on a national basis, in order to set a more complex and even more student-centred model for the generations of adult immigrant learners to come.
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Appendix

CPIA students from the African continent who have actively participated in the study are 10 in total; they come from 3 different countries of Africa, which are Côte d’Ivoire, Morocco and Senegal, and they encompass 3 different age groups, namely under 20, between 20 and 40, and over 40.

Student A. is a 16 years-old boy, who comes from Morocco and lives with his close family. He has arrived in Italy 9 months before the interview, in the summer of 2021. He had studied in Morocco up until leaving for Italy, and is most interested in the humanities, and most importantly in Quranic Studies, which are mandatory in Moroccan schools. He follows the A2 level course, and the First Level classes to get his middle school diploma. He is one of the most reserved people I have met in the classrooms, related to a lower language proficiency and strong language insecurities, but he has built some self-confidence overtime and has accepted to participate in the interviews anticipating that he was not sure he would have been good enough.

Student Fa. is a 16 years-old girl from Côte d’Ivoire, who lives with her close family and arrived in Italy in the spring of 2021 to join her father and brother with her mother. She has attended school up to middle school in her home country but has not attended high school. She attends the A2 level course and the First Level classes as well. She appears as a very strong-minded individual, with clear ideas about her plans, and a deep passion for studying.

Student Fi. is a 22 years-old girl from Morocco, who came to Italy with her mother to join the rest of the family in the summer of 2021, only 8 months before the interview. She has a bachelor’s degree in English language and literature acquired at the University of Marrakech, but the title is not recognized in Italy. She attends the classes for the B1 level. She has proved to have adequate language skills, but still presents many insecurities in having conversations in Italian, while she has strong knowledge of English and French as well.

Student Il. is a girl from Morocco who is 16 years-old and had been in Italy for 9 months at the time of the interviews. She attended school only until she was 12, and then had to stop attending due to Covid restrictions and other personal reasons. She attends the A2 level course and the First Level course to get her middle school diploma. She has continued to study by herself in the years she has not attended school in Morocco, especially focusing on literature and history, and she has started studying Italian by herself in Morocco, before traveling to Italy. She is one of the students I have had the longest conversations with, since the education topic appears extremely close and important
to her, and it felt like she could finally share her self-education experience with someone; it was very clear that going to school was a fundamental opportunity for her.

Student Im. is a 19 years-old Moroccan girl, who came to Italy with her mom and lives with her only. They both work in a restaurant as waitresses and have arrived in Italy in 2018. Despite the longer time of the stay in Italy, she does not have a high proficiency of the Italian language, which is why she is attending the A2 level course even after having acquired the middle school diploma some years before. She has not attended middle or high school in Morocco.

Student L. is a 24 years-old woman from Morocco, who has come to Italy by herself in 2020 to work as a caregiver, finding the contact for her job through a cousin. She lives with the older couple she takes care of and has followed all the language courses and First Level classes in the years she has been in Italy and is now attending the classes for the B1 level. She has a nurse preparation from higher education in Morocco, but her title is not recognized in Italy. She does not have the chance to speak much Italian in her daily life, since the older man and woman she takes care of do not talk, therefore her speaking skills have been slowed down and she can only practice at school.

Student Os. is another young man from Senegal, who is 25 years old and has arrived in Italy in 2019. He came to join a part of his family that already lived in Italy, and now lives with his close relatives but has numerous family members in the area. He works in a tannery together with other family members and is following the B1 course in the evening. He has studied until the first years of university in Senegal to major in Chemistry but has not finished the degree courses. He has several opportunities to speak Italian at work and where he plays soccer with Italian friends.

Student Ou. is a young man who arrived in Italy from Senegal in 2018, and is now 28 years old. He arrived through contacts with acquaintances who have found him a job and a house, and currently lives with other Senegalese flat mates who are coworkers in a tannery. He attends the B1 level course and has previously attended the A1 and A2 courses but does not have a middle school diploma acquired in Italy; he has though attended school in Senegal until the first year of university, for getting a degree in Medicine.

Student R. is a 43 years-old woman from Morocco, who moved to Italy in 2006 to join her husband who had already been living in Italy for several years. They have two sons, of which one was born in Morocco, and one in Italy. She has had some small occupations during her stay but has struggled to find a stable job since she has not received education in Morocco. She now follows the B1 course to apply for the Italian citizenship. Despite a lower level of education compared to other students,
and evident struggles in writing production, she has a strong fluency in Italian speaking due to her long experience in Italy and her integration within the local Italian community.

Student S. is an 18 years-old Ivorian girl who had arrived in Italy 1 year before the interview was taken; she speaks French at home with her family and has acquired quickly good Italian fluency. She has the A2 certification already, and now attends the First Level classes very happily, while dreaming of acquiring higher education and travelling the world. She has also studied Italian by herself before moving from Côte d’Ivoire, encouraged by her father.