

A Different yet Equal Opportunity

Innovative Practices and
Intercultural Approach in Initial VET

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1. Initial VET Students: Disadvantages and Opportunities

by Mariagrazia Santagati

1.1 Young People's Distance from Training and Work: an Italian Issue

In the context of a long-lasting socio-economic crisis which has produced dramatic consequences on the lives of all citizens, young foreigners in Italy suffer from specific vulnerabilities regarding education: difficulties in accessing non-vocational secondary education and higher education; lower academic performances compared to natives (cf., INVALSI data: Barabanti, 2015; OECD, PISA data 2012: Manenti, Perillo, 2015); an higher risk of dropout; a higher likelihood of joining the NEET group (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2014; Bertozzi, 2015) – although some improvements and successes have been achieved among second generations (MIUR, ISMU Foundation, 2015).

These young people's difficulties, however, are the reflection of a much wider issue that is connected to the situation of a country which, according to the Censis (2014) report, is characterized by a waste of human capital that is not transformed in 'labour force energy' among the younger generations. In Italy, despite the progresses achieved in order to reach the objectives of the Lisbon and Europe 2020 strategies, the reduction in the rate of youth employment is not associated with an increase in time spent in education and training – unlike in other Southern European countries – and the school-work transition is one of the longest and most complex in Europe, especially for those with the lowest levels of education and furthest from the educational system (i.e. Early School Leavers) and from the workplace (i.e. the Unemployed) – who are also those who are less involved in dedicated support programmes and measures (EU Commission, 2015).

Considering the double challenge faced by Italy – youth unemployment, but also the imbalance between skills young people develop in educational contexts and those required by the workplace (Cedefop, 2014) – and focusing on one of the most vulnerable groups, that of immigrants, the role of Vocational Education and Training (VET) is crucial. This is especially true if the perspective is to strengthen the VET system, de-

finitively giving it a place within the overall educational system in order to maximise its impact in contrasting youth unemployment.

Initial VET in the Italian context, is characterized by numerous paradoxes and critical aspects, however, despite the strong trend towards innovation, focused on the development of teaching and organizational methodologies, on learning by doing and on skills-based learning. This educational segment has long been considered – ideologically and incorrectly – as the receptacle for fragile and multi-problematic students. These are young people from a disadvantaged background, typically students who come from families of lower socio-economic status, but also pupils with learning and relational difficulties, those who have been kept back one or more years and risk dropping out of education altogether, those with mental health or existential/experiential issues (immigrant students and those with disabilities), and students referred by Social Services (Allulli, Nicoli, Magatti, 2003; Perone, 2006). This problematic segment has impacted negatively on the VET system, as well as on its image and reputation; indeed, for a long time initial VET targeted mainly unqualified young people without qualifications. For this group it offered a route of re-entry in education, which has recently been compounded by the recent inclusion of young immigrants, who have further reinforced the idea of VET as an educational option for second class citizens or “non-citizens”.

Despite this negative representation, initial VET has offered and continues to offer disadvantaged young people the chance to reaffirm the connection between training and the workplace, creating opportunities to re-ignite the motivation to learn and offering qualifications to find, maintain or change occupation (Lodigiani, 2008; 2010). VET is based on the educational method of alternating school and work, and founded on the idea that one can learn and innovate by doing (Schwartz, 1995; Luciano, 1999). It has represented a parallel route to traditional education in terms of learning objectives and of promoting new generations’ entry in the labour market.

The studies and projects conducted by the ISMU foundation are rooted in this perspective, which oscillates between relegation and promotion of foreign-born students (and others) in the initial VET system. Indeed, during the last decade many sociological studies have been conducted both at the regional and at the local level on students with an immigrant background attending courses in vocational training within compulsory education, activated in VET centres. These studies have tried to describe and interpret the educational experiences of students with direct or family experiences of immigration, who are increasingly attracted to VET. At the same time, ISMU has turned its attention also to available educational and training programmes, creating POP - *Pari Opportunità nei Percorsi degli adolescenti stranieri nella Istruzione e Formazione Professionale* (Equal Opportunities for Foreign Adolescents in VET), a trial project funded by the Cariplo Foundation which has enabled us to systematically guide and monitor various public and private centres belonging to the Lombardy’s regional initial VET system in the development, implementation and validation of good

practices, inspired by the intercultural approach and aimed at promoting educational success among foreign-born students¹. More specifically, the POP project aimed at fostering educational success in the broadest sense: namely, by following students' training, professional and life careers and by offering support to full social integration (Colombo, 2010). The project – one of a kind in Italy – has been a systemic intervention tackling the turning points and critical transitions of educational careers where the equal opportunities of foreign-born students are most at risk (i.e., guidance counseling, concentration in VET, low level of basic learning, cases of discrimination in the transition to the workplace), transforming practices in operative models and prototypes. This included the creation of indicators for the development of guidelines of intervention for regional initial VET.

Considering the experiences developed both via research and through the innovative contribution of the POP project it is possible to say that the ISMU Foundation's experience has anticipated, for the region of Lombardy, the most recent analyses conducted by ISFOL (cfr. Daniele, 2014; 2015). Indeed, the latter have tried to fill the knowledge gap on two levels: regarding the monitoring of presences, in terms of the number of students with an immigrant background in the initial VET system; and in terms of collecting and analysing good practices and effective models for intervention.

In this chapter, before turning to a more detailed presentation of the POP project and its results (cf. chapters 3 and 4), we begin by offering an introduction to some background elements on foreign adolescents in the initial VET system in Italy and in Lombardy, based on secondary data and on the (few) studies conducted on this issue. In so doing, we will try to highlight some reasons why initial VET can be considered a “different yet equal opportunity” compared to standard educational paths, likewise striving to promote educational success among students in multicultural classes.

1.2 The Characteristics of Educational Demand

Integration of immigrant students in initial VET can be considered a relatively new area of study in Italy, given also that the increase in foreign students aged 14-18 has taken place in the last decade. Although most studies have focused predominantly on secondary education (Santagati, 2015a), there are a few which have looked at initial

¹ The experience in research and interventions conducted by the ISMU foundation has led to a vision of integration as a process of mutual inclusion and transformation that involves both native and foreigners. This perspective is in line with the approach adopted by the Ministry of Education from the 1990s onwards and is based on intercultural exchange, where cultural differences are considered social resources, and dialogue, cooperation and solidarity among Italian and non-Italian students are fundamental elements for the construction of a truly intercultural learning context (Besozzi, 2005).

VET. This can be attributed, in part, to the fact that this fragile area, compared to schools, has been difficult to interpret, also because of complex local governance issues, the historically weak link between schools and the workplace and the progressive de-professionalization of school education that has characterized the Italian context (Colombo, 2014a).

Despite this historical delay, following European directives, in the past 15 years or so Italy has been pursuing a political project of reform of the educational system. Since 1999 – first with the “Berlinguer reform” and then with the “Moratti reform”, law n. 53/2003 – Italy has begun a process, which is still in progress (Pattarin, 2013), aimed at creating an integrated VET system managed by Regions which, in parallel with the traditional schooling route, offers a second and equivalent vocational training path. This system offers young people qualifications for entry in the workplace and for access to further education, as well as an alternative for the completion of compulsory education among 14-18 year olds.

Currently, in the Italian system, initial VET is classed as secondary education, along with lyceums, technical and professional education, and as a compulsory educational offer after the first cycle (6-16). From 2011/12, the initial VET system is organized around two main types:

- “ordinary” programmes, completed entirely within accredited training institutions (VET centres) lasting three or four years;
- “subsidiary” programmes, that offer a co-participation of different educational and training institutions, with different degrees of inter-institutional integration (Daniele, 2014).

At the same time, initial VET’s normative frame has progressively become more defined, specifying: the repertoire of 22 professional qualifications after the three-year cycle, and 21 after the four-year cycle; the standards for basic and technical-professional competences; final and intermediate certifications; the introduction of a fourth year for obtaining a professional diploma (in Piedmont, Lombardy, Trentino Alto Adige, Liguria and Sicily) and of an additional fifth year for access to further education (in Lombardy); the accreditation system for registered training institutions.

In the new normative context, different areas have seen the progressive growth of demand and offer for training, albeit with different models for regional implementation, as the constant monitoring conducted by ISFOL has shown. As shown by table 1.1, in the last decade those enrolled in three-year initial VET courses (for the completion of compulsory education) have gone from 23,562 students in 2003/04 to 316,018 in 2013/14.

Table 1.1 - Students enrolled in initial VET courses in Italy. Historical series. 2003/04-2013/14

Training year	Students enrolled	Absolute value increase
2003/04	23,562	-
2004/05	72,034	+48,472
2005/06	96,580	+24,546
2006/07	120,868	+24,288
2007/08	130,431	+9,563
2008/09	152,885	+22,454
2009/10	165,215	+12,330
2010/11	179,054	+13,839
2011/12	241,620	+62,566
2012/13	290,619	+48,999
2013/14	316,018	+25,399

Source: ISMU analysis on ISFOL data

This growth can be explained in part by the increase in enrolments in accredited training institutions – which, incidentally, have remained numerically stable since 2009. In part, since 2011/12, this is a result of the exponential increase of students in initial VET programmes offered by professional institutes via a subsidiary route, in parallel with the actuation of the reform of upper secondary education.

Foreign-born students represent a significant component of initial VET users (Colombo, Santagati, 2013). The first available data is relative to 2010/11 and indicates the presence of 24,170 foreign students, concentrated especially in Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Piedmont and Lazio, or 20% of students in three-year courses and, in 40% of cases, enrolled in VET courses after completing lower secondary education (ISFOL, 2012a).

The 2013/14 training year offers a more in-depth analysis of foreign students and is presented in the XIII monitoring report on training actions conducted on compulsory education (ISFOL, 2015). The document confirms the inclusive character of initial VET with respect to non-Italians; unique compared to other segments of the Italian educational system. Foreigners, in particular, continue to grow compared to previous years and include 46,539 students in the first three years and 1,746 in the fourth year, for a total of 48,285 students (ISFOL, 2015: 11). In the fourth year the percentage of foreign students remains stable (16.8%), similar to the percentage of the first three years (16.9%). From a territorial point of view, the area with the highest incidence of foreigners among the VET student population is in the North East (approximately 27% in schools and over 23% in training institutions), followed by the North West (21% and 17% respectively)². In terms of training choices, in 2013/14 there have been particular-

² In 2013/14 there have been a total of 182,181 non-Italian citizens enrolled in upper secondary schools, equal to 6.8% of the total number of students, subdivided as follows: 69,062 in Professional Institutes (12,6%) and 70,220 in Technical Institutes (7,9%). Cf. Bertozzi (2015).

ly high percentages of foreigners enrolled in the three-year course for Mechanical Operator (26.9%), Motor Vehicle Repair Operator (25.9%), Thermo hydraulic Plant Operator (21.6%) among the predominantly male-oriented qualifications, but also in the predominantly female-based Admin-secretarial Operator (21.8%) programme; similar distributions can be found also in the fourth years.

From a national balance on the training and occupational outcomes of students who graduated from three-year courses (ISFOL, 2012c), what emerges is a positive evaluation of initial VET, which seems to offer both foreigners and natives fast access to the workplace, a good occupational level and a certain level of coherence between occupation and qualification, transmitting professional skills and concretely supporting access to the workplace, especially via training internships.

In Lombardy, the region that hosts the largest number of enrolled foreign students – as well as the area of intervention of the POP project – the presence of foreign students in VET programmes within compulsory education has increased significantly, going from 3,039 students in 2004/05 to 7,026 in 2012/13 (Tab. 1.2): in the same period the proportional incidence on the whole student population within these courses went from 11.8% to 17.9%, above the national average (Besozzi, Colombo, Cordini, 2014). This tendency clearly reflects the higher number of foreign students in Lombardy compared to the rest of Italy in all areas of education, both in absolute terms and in proportional incidence, but is also the consequence of the aforementioned inclination among immigrant students to choose VET.

Table 1.2 – Foreign students attending VET courses within compulsory education in Lombardy . Historical series. 2004/05-2012/13

Training year	Foreign students	Foreign students per 100 students
2004/05	3,039	11.8
2005/06	3,468	13.6
2006/07	3,215	13.8
2007/08	4,480	15.3
2008/09	5,112	16.4
2009/10	4,183	16.8
2010/11	5,397	16.5
2011/12	5,939	15.7
2012/13	7,026	17.9

Source: ORIM analysis on Sistema Gefo Lombardy data

We also ought to highlight the diversity that characterizes the region of Lombardy at the geographical, economic and cultural level and which corresponds to a multi-faceted capacity to attract immigrants in specific training and professional sectors: Milan, Brescia and Bergamo represent, in 2012/13, the areas with the largest presence of immigrant students in absolute values – 1,945, 1,525 and 839 students, respectively –

even though the incidence of foreigners on the total number of students is consistently higher in Mantova (29.1%) and Cremona (23.2%), followed by Milan (20%) and Brescia (22.7%).

The choice of initial VET among immigrants is prevalent among males – based on the offer of courses that refer to a culture of industries, trades and crafts that is connected to a male-oriented occupational demand – whereas in mainstream education there is a greater gender balance or, as in the case of upper secondary school, a prevalence of females. Female students in VET are 43.6% among natives and only 34% among foreigners, with even lower numbers in some provinces.

In terms of nationality there is an heterogeneity, similarly to mainstream education. In initial VET courses in Lombardy the largest minorities among students in 2012/13 are Moroccans (907 students), Albanians (809), Romanians (654), Indians (528), Ecuadorians (515) and Pakistanis (388); indeed, all the main continental areas of immigration are represented. There is a particular concentration of Indian, Pakistani and Moroccan students in VET compared to the total number of students in the same age range, whereas the presence of other European (from Albania and Romania) and Ecuadorean students is lower.

If we consider vocational areas of interest, courses in the mechanical sector are the most attended by foreigners, chosen by 31.5% of all foreign students enrolled in these programmes: 2,216 on 7,026 total foreign students enrolled. A significant, albeit much lower, presence can be seen in the electrical sector (15.4%), in catering (15%), and in hair and beauty courses (11.9%). On the total number of students, the proportion of foreigners is highest in the mechanical (30.3%) and fashion and design (28.9%) areas. ORIM analyses have emphasised, for a number of years now, the tendency among Italian students to choose the service sector, whereas foreigners tend to choose industrial-based sectors which, despite the risk of training and professional segregation, offer good occupational opportunities (Besozzi, Colombo, Rinaldi, 2013). This group encounters more employment hindrances in public-contact based occupations and is also more open to the needs of industrial labour (physically demanding tasks, unsociable working hours, night shifts, etc.) compared to natives. Over and beyond these trends, for foreign (and female) students programmes leading to occupations in commercial, catering and business services sectors continue to hold strong.

1.3 The Attitudes of the Students with an Immigrant Background towards VET

Studies conducted on VET enable us to further explore students' choices, their evaluations of the training experience and their expectations regarding their professional future. Already in 2005 the ISMU Foundation – in the study *Linear and fragmented trajectories of second generation youths in the training-to-work transition* (Besozzi, Colombo, 2006) – considered the two channels of secondary education and VET, in light of the concentration of non-Italian adolescents in Lombardy (like the rest of Italy) in technical-vocational education/training and their scarce presence in lyceums (Bertozzi, 2015). This over-representation in the technical-vocational chain – defined in the ISMU Foundation studies as “educational channelization” – represents a clear indicator of an educational disadvantage for foreign-born students who choose or are guided to reconsider their educational careers downwards, showing less opportunities to continue and complete their studies, as well as reduced chances of accessing higher positions in the occupational hierarchy (Canino, 2010)³.

The 2005 study identified different types of non-Italian adolescents enrolled in VET centres and upper secondary schools in Lombardy (Besozzi, Colombo, 2007): among initial VET students there seem to be fragilities similar to those of Italian users, in terms of scarcity of available socio-economic resources, further aggravated by migration, which often produces a devaluation of the family's cultural resources and an instability in educational careers. These students, according to Besozzi, Colombo and Santagati (2009), are concentrated in the “low profile” group, made up of prevalently male, disadvantaged adolescents with low socio-economic status, who accumulated numerous educational failures and are characterized by low aspirations towards education and weak expectations of social promotion. This group, most likely “destined” to enter and remain in the workplace in underqualified positions, is the most needy of support, guidance and counselling in the transition to adult life.

In the same period a national study on VET users sponsored by ISFOL (Barone, 2006; ISFOL, 2008) notes that among foreign-born students there is a greater number of students with a linear educational career (i.e., those who have never been kept back a year), enrolled directly in VET after lower secondary school, quite unlike Italians who are characterized by discontinuous careers and failures (this is confirmed also by studies conducted in Piedmont: Eve, Ricucci, 2009; Barbera et al., 2010). In this phase, most non-Italian students are young people with a recent migratory experience. Young for-

³ The concentration within certain educational routes is a complex phenomenon, which might also be the result of faulty guidance at the end of lower secondary school or of forms of “disincentivation” conducted by lyceums, but might equally be the result of choices that respond to the needs of immigrant families (Giovannini, 2008).

eigners who chose VET appear to be led by socio-economic requirements and the need to accelerate entry in the labour market, especially as they approach legal age (18) or in the case of unaccompanied minors (Ricucci, 2010). On the other hand, this educational segment is considered by those who have recently arrived, as the starting point for their own life in Italy (and not as the last resort, unlike many Italians), as well as an opportunity to make up for the inevitable educational delays generated by migration and related linguistic difficulties (Santagati, 2011).

More recently, a new national study conducted by ISFOL (Daniele, 2015) added further elements to the analysis, confirming some aspect which had already emerged in local studies. Among the sample of 3,675 Italian and non-Italian students who participated in the study, approximately one-fourth of foreigners are recent immigrants, another fourth are born in Italy and 10% immigrated before entering education. Second generation migrants also choose VET, although as users with different educational and training needs compared to first generations and those “awaiting citizenship” (Santagati, 2015b). What also emerges, moreover, is that foreigners are over-represented, compared to natives, among those with university-educated parents and one-income families, indicating a contradictory situation where the tendency towards vocational training is connected both to socio-economic disadvantage and to a high level of education in the family. These qualifications, however, are often not reflected in parents’ occupation and, having been completed abroad, are not always useful in guiding and supporting their children at school. The study confirms that foreign students’ educational demand in initial VET is of a higher quality compared to natives. Their training choice is indeed “vocational”: in 51.2% of cases VET was their first choice and not the result of other educational failures, they have less school failures compared to Italians and obtained higher marks in the 8th grade exam.

Research suggests that foreign-born students not only make more deliberate and motivated choices, but also appear to have a good level of satisfaction from their educational and training experiences. These students achieve positive results, not least because of the possibility of combining a gradual learning of Italian with a training route that aims at professionalization, with frontal lessons, laboratory work and internships (Santagati, 2011). At the same time, we must not forget that these VET students are particularly at risk of school dropout (ISFOL, 2012b). Giving up education appears to be more distressful for this group compared to young Italians, however, and the degree of motivation to study and tendency to accept sacrifice are, in contrast, higher than natives’.

At the relational level, students with an immigrant background report a positive evaluation of teachers and other educators, placing emphasis on the motivational and person-centred climate. This emerges from the research project *Between training and work: young immigrants and good practices in the regional VET system* which followed the trajectories of young foreigners with vocational qualifications in Lombardy (Besozzi, Colombo, 2009). In peer relationships, on the other hand, there can sometimes be misun-

derstandings, as a result also of linguistic difficulties and typical conflicts among adolescents, affected by similarities and differences which can override national origin but can nonetheless generate particularly negative and conflict-ridden classroom climates (Martini, 2011; Besozzi, Colombo, 2012; Colombo, Santagati, 2014). Shared practical experiences, cooperation in the lab and in group work, however, offer concrete opportunities for young people to make contact, to get to know and understand each other and build interethnic friendships. Foreign students are characterized also by a higher level of participation, of civic duty, of trust and conformity, indicating they are particularly integrated in VET courses (Cavaletto, Dagnes, Molino, 2010).

Finally, these students also appear to be optimistic on the possibilities of entry in the labour market, due to a positive vision of labour developed via internships and laboratory activities, while at the same time dreaming of professional growth, at times considering further education. The training-to-work transition seems to be a delicate moment where new obstacles emerge, but so does young foreigners' potential. Research highlights that this transition is not particularly problematic, nor do there appear to be discriminatory situations upon first contact with the workplace. Young immigrants are characterized by an ability to handle and overcome difficult situations, thriving in the long run and showing an uncommon determination in the present, both in training and on the job (Besozzi, Colombo, 2009). Among foreign-born students qualified in initial VET what prevails is a "traditional acquisitive attitude", typical of first generations of immigrants that perceive labour as a process of inclusion that enables participation to a public sphere that is not granted by birth but which one can access by choice (Paghera, 2012).

VET, however, is not mere a mode of accessing the labour market. According to the ISFOL report (Daniele, 2014) it appears that one fourth of the sample, both Italian and non-Italian, plans to continue studying to achieve a diploma and, perhaps, enrol in higher education. These students have positive expectations for the future and consider the educational investment – even long term – as a strategy to ensure equal opportunities, in the face of social and labour discriminations they have seen in their parents experience. Therefore, despite immigrants' positive attitudes towards their occupational future, it appears necessary to look at the numerous risks of marginalization that can emerge with access to the labour market.

1.4 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Educational Offer

Research has also strived to analyse the strategies adopted by training institutions facing the multicultural transformations of users, highlighting critical areas or those which deserve further attention.

In terms of treatment of foreign-born students, the earliest studies suggest VET is characterized by a widespread welcoming attitude – ordinary practice in a sector which has traditionally been accustomed to dealing with a fragile and disadvantaged category of users with specific support and guidance needs – but an approach that considers the specificities of different national origins has not been developed (Travagliati, 2009).

The strengths of initial VET appear to be, in particular: the ability to respond to the specific needs of students, tailoring the educational relationship with specific instruments (individual guidance, tutoring, work-school alternation, personalized programmes, laboratory work, etc.); the presence of qualified and motivated educators which, in different roles (teachers, coordinators, tutors, guidance counsellors, project managers, etc.), obtain good results with immigrants, thanks also to the network of schools, services and the labour market (Besozzi, Colombo, 2009; Santagati, 2011).

Among the weak points of the system, on the other hand, we have: the same treatment of different difficulties among students (economic, cultural, family, migratory, etc.); the challenge of optimising resources that come from immigrant families and students; little exchange of good practices, instruments and materials among training agencies (and with schools); limited training in teaching/learning in multicultural educational contexts.

The ISFOL report *Foreign students in initial VET: careers, inclusion and entry in the workplace* (Daniele, 2014), drawing on case studies conducted in training centres in the North and South of Italy, also identified multiple critical aspects, in part already highlighted by previous analyses:

- a trainers' training based on hands-on experience and developed in an intuitive fashion, but which doesn't include systematic and focused actions for managing multicultural classes;
- varied but still insufficient guidance actions, that rarely reach those minors and families most needy of support and which, conversely, should be standardized nationwide, especially when the offer is complexified by the intersections between school and training;
- a lack of courses in Italian language and culture, not yet organized as a structured and formal offer, but still conducted by volunteer teachers in emergency conditions;
- many experiences aimed at fostering a positive climate within mixed classrooms, but without the clear framework of intercultural learning.

Despite the lack of clearly defined integration policies for immigrant students, however, different regional and provincial administrations, often in partnership with private

organizations, have put in place specific actions for foreign-born students, which have developed along two lines (ISFOL, 2012c). The first aims at realigning core competences and in particular Italian language learning. The second aims at integrating these students in the system of services (help desks, initial interventions, guidance counselling and other actions for entry in the workplace).

Among the practices that aim to achieve training success among young foreigners (Galdus, 2007), there have been trial projects employing innovative methodologies, using expressive-recreational activities, theatre, etc. These actions to facilitate learning, but also personal and relational development, represent an example of dialogue between work-oriented training programmes and school-based practices focused on studying, narratives and theory.

Regarding the transition to work we have also found consolidated skills among initial VET trainers in creating connections and longstanding collaborations with employers, companies and with local contexts. The aforementioned studies identified the presence of personalized guidance strategies, conducted with a high level of sensibility and effort, during internships and placements, through opportunities for “protected” work placements and also when ex-students ask for support and guidance regarding their current training and work choices.

Overall, what emerges is a situation characterized by the scarcity of services and projects dedicated specifically to non-Italian users, as well as a deep heterogeneity between and within different areas: VET centres with excellent practices aimed at fostering the integration of immigrants coexist next to agencies where no specific practices are in place. This heterogeneity calls for the need to spread common measures and strategies for intervention in multicultural training contexts, using innovative methodologies for more participant and active guidance actions, for anticipated socialization to the workplace via simulations, giving value to the cultural heritage brought about by young foreigners, with the aim of facilitating the match between offer and demand for those who are exiting the VET system.

1.5 Vocational Training within Compulsory Education, a Different but Equal Chance

The analysis of immigrants’ participation in initial VET outlines a complex and contradictory picture. This is the starting point to think about and implement adequate measures and policies aimed at promoting educational success and equal opportunities for all disadvantaged students.

However, as I have been arguing for some time now, initial VET represents a relevant opportunity for foreign-born (and other) adolescents, which should not be considered as a second-class or final training opportunity for subjects who are at risk of exclusion from training, employment and society more generally. Rather, VET represents a different opportunity, not inferior but equivalent to the standard educational offer, in terms of quality of teaching, of contents and skills acquired, and of occupational prospects. Indeed, available studies and research confirm that VET is not only a generic receptacle for the children of immigrants, but rather becomes a concrete occasion for the integration of foreign adolescents, thanks to methodologies and offers that appear to be particularly appropriate for subjects with discontinuous and problematic biographical trajectories such as those generated by migration (as emphasised also by the comparative study conducted by Cedefop, 2011). In the process of integration, therefore, vocational training within compulsory education performs some crucial functions such as:

- reactivating the process of acquiring knowledge, abilities and skills interrupted by migration, demotivation, lack of guidance, etc., important in the prospective of qualifying human capital and lifelong learning;
- incrementing students' social capital, especially through relationships with educators and trainers who are able to guide them through training and work and towards educational success;
- developing students' abilities to live and collaborate in diversified contexts, via co-operative learning activities and methodologies, tutoring, conflict management, lab work, etc.;
- promoting and protecting young people in work contexts, helping them take responsibility and discover their rights and duties as citizens, which they can exercise in the workplace and, more generally, in the social sphere.

At the same time, the increasing presence of these students, motivated to learn and obtain good results, is an opportunity for the whole system and for training policies. It is a stimulus to direct attention to the specificities of single students, to deconstruct prejudices and stereotypes that act on guidance and counselling, to intervene on disadvantages, in order to achieve educational success for all, founded on the reciprocal connection between training and employment that contrasts discriminations and constructs spaces of participation and citizenship (Santagati, 2012). Immigrant students offer VET a stimulus to develop as a different yet equal channel in terms of educational objectives, because, on the one hand, we cannot preclude young people with an immigrant background the opportunity to achieve a diploma and enrol in higher education, even when they come from VET; on the other, because it is necessary to provide VET the necessary resources to face up to the challenge of accepting young people of different origin, class and profile, and respond to their specific educational and training needs.

Policies aimed at the specific needs of second generations, therefore, are a real opportunity to foster change towards innovation and modernization for the whole initial VET system. No doubt there is still a long way to go in Italy where the dominant model is a “liberal model of competence development”, where neither one of the two main stakeholders, State and businesses, invests substantially in this direction (Ballarino, 2013) and where the transversal nature of training across different policy sectors (education, welfare, industrial relations, economic development, labour, etc.) is one of the main obstacles to the development of a univocal approach with a common institutional framework across subsectors (Alushi, 2015). Despite fragmentation and inconsistency, and the lack of a coherent governance (Agostini, 2012) VET remains one of the main opportunities to strengthen educational inclusion and foster young peoples’ employability. Granting equal and indiscriminate access to a high-quality, adequately financed training offer is the objective promoted by the European Union (Solidar Foundation, 2014), which Italy still needs to invest in. We ought to construct a “different educational opportunity”, which is able to recognize the personal skills and individual resources that new generations are able to activate, within the framework of an institutional context whose objective is the equal distribution of opportunities without seeking uniformity (Nussbaum, 2012). What is at stake is the right to diversity for all students, which can be granted only by an educational system that is able to give ample space to the development of life trajectories centred on the production of subjects who are aware, competent, responsible and able to live in a plural world where they can make the best of their gifts and skills (Besozzi, 2015).

2. Second Cycle Programmes in the Lombardy VET system

by Carlo Catania

The decision to dedicate a chapter to the description to the initial VET system in Lombardy is connected to the fact that the prototypes produced and tested during POP refer to this specific segment of the offer. Therefore, understanding its distinctive traits is important for the location and positioning of the prototype contents and their development. This refers particularly to three-year courses, where the prototypes were created. Drawing from this perspective, the chapter explores in further depth some project, organizational and methodological aspects that ought to be understood given that they are the premises and the instruments (organizational flexibility, personalized courses, learning methodologies) that the system offers educators in order to apply the prototypes described in the chapters that follow and enable their integration in the educational curriculum (sustainability).

2.1 The Second Cycle Educational Offer

Art. 1 comma 2 of Law 19 of 6.8.2007 (Norms on the educational and training system in Lombardy) offers a definition of the initial VET system as follows:

the supply of courses aimed at fulfilling the Right-Duty to Education and Training as well as the requirements of compulsory education. VET should support entry and active participation in the workplace and in society at the European, national and local level, the lifelong improvement of knowledge and skills, and the promotion of teachers' and trainers' professional development¹.

The second cycle is thus conceived in unitary terms as the set of courses that, starting from initial education can extend to non-academic tertiary education, or connect to the

¹ Based on the rules and requirements of regional accreditation (Ddg. n. 10187/2012) all educational and training institutions (public and private non-profit) registered with the specific regional roster can offer second cycle programmes, as can state and private school

continuous and permanent education for citizens and workers in the perspective of lifelong learning.

Moreover, from the definition of Art. 1 one can seize the institutional nature of the second cycle, situated in a framework of national norms that recognizes initial VET students' the opportunity to complete both the 10 year compulsory education cycle (DM 22.8.2007, n. 139) and the Right-Duty to Education and Training (RDET; D.lgs 15.4.2005, n. 76), which can be achieved by obtaining an upper secondary school diploma or a 3-year, or longer, vocational qualification by age 18.

All these aspects define the levels and flexibility of the second cycle's educational offer. Indeed, there are different types of educational and training routes that can be situated on a vertical axis (i.e., that of an "educational supply chain" which goes from the second cycle to higher education), but also on a horizontal axis in conjunction with the school system. Along the first axis we have three-year RDET courses, which offer a nationally recognized vocational qualification. Access to these courses is possible, for those who want a technical vocational diploma, after the conclusion of lower secondary education². The regional plan, however, also includes the possibility of four-year courses with the option of obtaining a vocational qualification after three years. More recently a new possibility – albeit already contemplated in the regional legislation – includes the option of an additional fifth year in order to access the upper secondary school final exam, known as the "esame di maturità".

On the horizontal axis we have, in addition to these programmes that the Region of Lombardy defines as "structured" (i.e., systematic and continuous courses), other possible programmes and ad-hoc routes characterized by different lengths, structures and educational methodologies developed on the basis of specific user needs (also known as "unstructured routes"). These routes and educational projects³ can be aimed at educational success or at countering school drop-out and are geared prevalently at those who have left more traditional routes.

From this first brief description what emerges is a picture of the regional educational offer for the second cycle that presents the following architecture (Fig. 2.1).

² With the decree n. 7420 of 27.7.2010 the Region of Lombardy has determined that, since 2009/10 it is possible to offer the nationally valid title of Technical Vocational Diploma for 4-year courses, overcoming a transitory regime that up to 2008/9 offered for such courses only 3rd level qualifications.

³ Unlike institutional (3-year and 4th year) programmes this type of courses are based on contingent programming closely connected to the availability of economic resources.

Figure 2.1 - The structured offer for the second cycle of initial VET (law n. 19/2007)

	Non-academic further education (post diploma specializations, continuous and permanent education)		University Its ⁴ Afam ⁵ School Education	
	<i>Initial VET</i>			
	Integrative 5th year	Integrative 5th year	5-year courses	<i>Upper secondary school diploma</i>
<i>Initial VET diploma</i>	4-year courses with the possibility of a 3-year qualification	4th year		
<i>Initial VET qualification</i>		3-year courses		

2.2 Timetables and Autonomy among Training Agencies

Timetables are one of the major elements of flexibility of the initial VET system compared to the school system. VET follows the same calendar as schools but the possibility of dividing and organizing the timetable allow VET programmes to maintain a significant level of flexibility. The minimal number of hours per year is 990⁶, distributed in various percentages between basic competences and technical competences according to the following table:

Table 2.2 - Timetable. Percentage values on the overall number of hours

Macro area Specific Educational Objectives (SEO)	3- and 4-year courses, and 4th year	Absolute value increase
Basic competences	35-45	70-80
Tecnical-vocational competences	55-65	20-30

Source: Decree 12550 of 20.12.2013, Attachment A - Regional guidelines for the educational offer

Once these two conditions are absolved, each institution can freely decide how to arrange projects and organize curricula, in particular concerning:

⁴ Higher technical education.

⁵ Higher education in art, music and choir.

⁶ This total number of hours for 3-year courses includes Catholic religion and PE courses.

- The definition of programmes in terms of training areas, disciplines, competences and the attribution of weekly, annual and periodical time quotas to each course. The standard of competences (see paragraph 2.4) represent a common reference for all programmes but each institution can choose independently how to translate its learning objectives in concrete teaching plans;
- The organization of teaching staff, attributing different teaching and training areas to dedicated professional resources;
- The diversification of teaching modes such as classroom teaching, laboratory exercises and work experiences (internship/placement, alternation) within limits defined by the following percentages.

Table 2.2 - Teaching modes. Percentage values on the overall number of hours

Teaching modes	3-year courses	4-year courses and 4th year	5th year
Laboratory and classroom teaching	50-85	50-90	90-100
Workplace training	Alternation	15-50	20-50
	Internship	15-25	20-30

Source: Decree n. 12550 of 20.12.2013, Attachment A, Regional guidelines for the educational and training offer

The different possibilities for timetable composition enable the creation of highly differentiated educational and training courses, based on various objectives: supporting social inclusion, contrasting dropout, promoting employment, fostering educational continuity and further education, supporting smooth transitions between education and training, offering support to disadvantaged/disabled subjects.

2.3 Minimal Educational Standard for Learning

All second cycle VET programmes have to respect the minimal educational standards necessary to ensure homogeneity of training at the regional and national level. The definition of mandatory education up to age 16 has also introduced a set of “cultural axes” for all school and VET routes (linguistic axis, mathematical axis, technical-scientific axis, socio-historical axis), each with a set of respective competence objectives. To this day, this reference point represents the common foundation for the development of basic competences in the first two years of the second cycle. Drawing from this, the Region has developed a set of minimal educational standards regarding

Italian language knowledge, knowledge of a foreign language, mathematical-scientific knowledge, socio-historical-economic knowledge.

In addition to these sources, moreover, there are a series of agreements signed during the State-Regions Conference which have contributed to the uniformity of regional VET programmes for the second cycle also from a technical-vocational point of view. The regional repertoire currently includes seven vocational areas, each of which includes specific profiles⁷ and specializations for both vocational qualifications and vocational diplomas.

2.4 The Methodology of Initial VET Courses

VET has always, from the outset, represented a laboratory of innovation for learning methodologies, situating itself at the crossroads of two different forces: on the one hand, the needs of users that, by choice or as a result of other conditions (belonging to a socially disadvantaged group, for instance, as emphasised in chapter 1) do not continue education in upper secondary schools or drop out before obtaining a diploma and find in VET a tool to reaffirm their personal and professional identity; on the other hand, giving value to the workplace not only as a place to learn a trade or craft but, more generally, as a environment which fosters the acquisition knowledge and of technical – but also cultural and transversal – skills. It is interesting to note how these two forces are still two qualifying aspects of the initial VET system, despite the fact that vocational training has changed significantly and much more time is dedicated to acquiring basic competences. It also true that the debate in the last decade has been characterized by a polarization of opinions: on the one hand those who interpret the reforms prevalently as a process of assimilation of the “old vocational training” to mainstream education which has determined a loss of its traditionally more strictly and immediately vocational character; on the other, those who see the changes as an opportunity for the legitimation of regional programmes and a national reform of the educational system, adapted to newfound social and economic needs (Nicoli, 2004).

The current VET system in Lombardy does not resolve this conflict but it has certainly introduced some general principles which have shaped the reform process and have been recognized in regional guidelines and legislation. These principles (person-centred education, equality between education and training, circularity between tech-

⁷ These profiles represent the regional version of the national professional profiles and can lead to different occupational profiles, or none, on the basis of the specific employment necessities of a particular area.

nical and humanistic cultures, personalization, educational value of labour) can translate into concrete organizational and learning measures, as a result also of the flexibility that regional rules allow both in terms of developing and carrying out different programmes. From a methodological point of view it is possible to distinguish the most qualifying aspects of the system in Lombardy along three dimensions: a strictly didactic dimension, a personal dimension and a professional dimension.

2.4.1 Teaching founded on the interconnection of knowledge and the value of active methodologies

The organization of regional educational standards along competence lines has various implications on how teaching is organized. The most evident is the transition from a discipline-based system (based on different subjects) to a system based on the aggregation of knowledge in areas or macroareas. This is a natural consequence of the fact that competences are not always connected to single disciplines but require a broader and more collegiate participation to ensure their development. This approach may not be, in absolute terms, more effective compared to the classic discipline-based system more widespread in upper secondary education (and which is connected also to the link between subjects offered and teachers' employment). The possibility of connecting specific competences to different educational and training areas enables single institutions to adapt programmes to specific user-needs and training profiles while, at the same time, enabling students to more tangibly seize the connection between different technical and cultural areas of knowledge.

A second implication on didactic organization of the competence-based approach concerns the methodologies used. In initial VET programmes didactic strategies are based prevalently on the development of skills related to knowledge and abilities acquired compared to the reproduction of content (theoretical and classroom teaching). This implication is at the basis of what can be defined a "laboratory teaching" that tends to be articulated around clusters of assignments/activities/projects where the students are actively involved in the learning process (Catania, 2005).

2.4.2 Flexibility and personalization of learning

Personalization is one of the most recurrent words in regional documents, albeit often used in a dual fashion (Montedoro, 2001):

- as a guiding principle that should steer the entire educational plan, adapting courses and learning objectives to the characteristics of users (and specific groups) or to specific needs of the territory and of stakeholders (ie., businesses);
- as the set of specific teaching and educational instruments adapted to individual

training paths. In this second dimension personalization represents the process through which a standard programme is adapted to the characteristics and needs of users or in relation to specific training phases. Examples of concrete personalization measures are connected to the entry phase, supplementary learning activities, management of specific projects in partnership with local stakeholders, management of alternation or of internships/placements, the certification of competences upon completion or the recognition of educational credits upon entry.

In other words, we have two different levels of attention to the issue that feed into each other because it is in the concrete measures of personalization that it is possible to see its translation into general principles. Equally, it is also true that in day-to-day practices these measures are often confronted with planning needs and the typical organizational rigidities that don't always make this an easily applicable approach.

2.4.3 Workplace culture and professionalizing dimension as qualifying elements

In the initial VET system employment is invested with a plurality of professional, cultural and educational functions. Regional guidelines indeed speak of a “professionalizing dimension and educational valence of labour” as a prime instrument for the “definition of educational interventions connected to students’ interests and life contexts and in order to foster personal, social and professional responsibility. It is easy to imagine how such an overload of functions would not be free from risks and side effects (Fischer, 1998), especially when an excessive faith in the thaumaturgical qualities of labour is coupled with weaknesses of an educational and training programme. In any case, labour remains – also in the imagination and the motivations of most VET users – the main vector around which to build the learning programme (Roncalli, 2003). It is not surprising, therefore, that training in technical-professional competences has a significant weight in most programmes (for qualifications and diploma), up to 65% of the 990 total hours per year.

Regional guidelines distinguish three types of training “on the job”, which can also be conceived of as three different levels of “intensity” of the workplace experience, that gradually move the axis of the relationship from the training end to the the workplace end.

The first type of “on the job” training is the curricular internship/placement, which represents one of the main methodologies used in all initial VET programmes, aimed at verifying and consolidating the technical-professional competences acquired in the classroom and in the laboratory. It is activated from the second year onwards and can vary in the number of hours (between 15-25% in 3-year course, 20-30% in the 4th year).

The second type of “on the job” training is the alternation between school and workplace⁸, with periods of classroom training and periods of learning via work experiences. Normally, this alternation means more hours in the workplace compared with a curricular internship (15-15% in 3-year courses, 20-50% in the 4th year) and, from the methodological point of view, its main difference with an internship is the division of tasks between school and work. Indeed, if the internship is a mode of training used prevalently to verify on the job what has been learned in formal training (at school), alternation goes further and includes a division of responsibilities between school and workplace in the development of competences (Bertagna, 2003). The experience of alternation thus becomes an opportunity to acquire competences that are not dealt with and developed in school but are included in the learning standards of the training programme.

The third type of “on the job” training is the apprenticeship, that represents a further push in this direction. The main difference with the other two modes of training is substantial given that with an internship or during alternation users continue to maintain a status of “students undertaking a work experience”. With apprenticeships, on the other hand, we have a mixed cause (training and work) job contract where the status of users is that of “workers-in-training”.

2.5 The Evaluation of Learning

The evaluation of learning is one of the main functions that educational and training institutions conduct autonomously (choice of methodologies, of instruments, of timetables, of modes of registration and publication of results) coherently with minimal national standards that are needed to grant national and European validity of the titles acquired⁹.

The main objective of evaluation are the OSAs: forms of knowledge and essential abilities for each basic and technical competence that make up the training profile specific to the 3-year programme (operator profile) and the 4-year programme (technical profile). To these objectives we must add the evaluation of behaviour that often becomes quite important in initial VET programmes in terms of weight in the final evaluation, especially in the first years. The evaluation of behaviour is based on the Educational, cultural and professional profile of the second cycle (Pecup)¹⁰, particularly for

⁸ Law n. 77/2005.

⁹ The main reference here is to Law n. 13/2013.

those aspects connected to personal identity and civil cohabitation, and is applied in each institution via independently created specific grids for the observation of behaviour. These instruments aim at subdividing behaviour in specific indicators for observation (i.e., independence, participation, respect for rules) which can be used to evaluate students' overall development and help them become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

The evaluation at the end of the 3rd and 4th years is particularly important as it gives access to the final exam. All programmes include a three-part final exam, which can be sat on the basis of one's admission credits, which correspond to 18-30/100. The remaining part of the final score is made up of three tests. The first test is called the "multidisciplinary test" and is aimed at evaluating the candidates' basic competences. The second part is a professional test which evaluates the technical-professional OSAs. The last phase of the exam is an oral interview which normally has two aims: verifying the results of the previous tests, and understanding students' expectations and motivations in relation to future projects and personal awareness.

The evaluation of competences represents perhaps the sector where the greatest efforts have been made (in defining rules and procedures, as well as in concrete practices) to integrate more school-based instruments (centralized tests, evaluation of knowledge and disciplinary and interdisciplinary abilities, evaluation of conformity to national standards) with an overall approach to evaluation that pays particular attention to the educational and personal growth of students, to independence and to the awareness of self and of one's experience, thus giving value especially to the consolidation of social competences and citizenship. In this perspective evaluation becomes a particularly effective instrument to foster integration among disadvantaged categories. Among these, students with an immigrant background represent a growing component for whom, however, there are no specific regional guidelines or measures. Rather, guidelines stress the importance of using the available instruments (particularly those connected to personalization) to develop literacy courses in Italian, intercultural education courses and projects for reducing or preventing school drop-out. Moreover, the presence of staff skilled in counselling, tutoring and guidance – and not only teaching – can be seen as a further aid in welcoming and responding to the plurality of needs that these students have. Certainly students with an immigrant background represent, along with other disadvantaged categories, one of the main challenges that the initial VET system in Lombardy will have to face to ensure that the pedagogical and cultural values that have guided the regional intervention are actually applied in practice. It is from the efficacy and sustainability of these premises and their relative application that the transition from an educational offer which has historically been considered re-

¹⁰ This is the Profile defined by Law n. 226/2005 which illustrate the educational and cultural objectives that second cycle programmes (for both schools and initial VET) should pursue to ensure Constitutional civil and social rights are granted.

sidual and second-class to an educational model which is indeed able to integrate cultural training, professionalization and education to citizenship ultimately depends.

3. The POP Project

Equal Opportunities for Immigrant Students in VET

by Guia Gilardoni

Despite the high number of students with a migratory background in VET, in Italy there is an almost complete lack of educational practices specifically targeted to the needs of users with an immigrant background and of standards of best practice in intercultural education. The “POP Project – Equal opportunities for students in VET” represents a highly innovative experiment, unique in the Italian context. The POP Project was funded by the Cariplo Foundation and carried out by the ISMU Foundation. The ISMU Foundation was responsible for the project’s scientific direction and operational management and guided its implementation in partnership with the private and public initial VET agencies in Lombardy. The project was first carried out for an preliminary trial in 2009/10, which was then followed by a second edition conducted in 2012/13 and 2013/14.

POP is a complex intervention targeting the initial VET system in Lombardy, focusing on minors with an immigrant background. Primarily, it aimed to consider: how immigrant students are received by the initial VET system; Italian as a Second Language (teaching and learning); value given to students’ native language(s) and linguistic skills in their training programme; training success; guidance in the transition from training to employment.

The Cariplo Foundation’s interest in activities regarding the strengthening of the VET system is based on a set of broader strategies which the Foundation has been carrying out with a significant funding effort. In this sector Cariplo has sought after excellence and innovation in practices, favouring interventions aimed at those at greater risk of marginalisation and exclusion, with particular attention to the increase of young people with a migratory background, and the social advancement and the diffusion of a specific intercultural sensibility.

Considering – in a climate of long-lasting economic recession – the specific difficulties that young people face upon access to the labour market and, more specifically, the vulnerabilities that characterize Italian and foreign young people as indicated in chapter 1, the POP Project represents an experimental yet systemic intervention that targets critical areas of educational and training disadvantage among students with an immigrant background. It is an attempt to address the challenges they face in terms of school choice (greater segregation in VET and poor awareness in decision-making), learning (poor results, risk of drop-out, limited linguistic competences, etc.) and transi-

tion to employment (greater difficulties in approaching the job market). The project has been conducted in the region which still counts the largest number of enrolments in initial VET and aimed at implementing supportive interventions in 3-year qualification programmes. Once completed, the interventions were systematically organized into 21 prototypes (or operative models), each referring to one of the main phases of the training cycle (guidance, reception, learning programme completion and transition to employment). The prototypes also included teaching materials, instruments, and methods of the entire training cycle, thus making them potentially transferrable for use also in different contexts. These prototypes represent the first result of the trial, which aimed at offering the Cariplo Foundation a set of “operational directives” in the form of guidelines and/or prototypes and validated models, relative to the measures and interventions actually activated and implemented, which can be used as the basis for the development of specific interventions supporting educational success among adolescents with an immigrant background in initial VET in the future.

The project, moreover, has enabled us not only to tackle training success and reinforce professional competences among educators, improving the overall training offer, but also to foster social and professional integration of immigrant students and their families in the areas of residence.

Experimenting with practices inspired by the principles of intercultural education – which are primarily aimed at immigrants, but also include natives present in those same classes and training centres – has enabled the students, teachers and families involved to take part in training and socialization programmes which otherwise they would not have had access to (cf., Chapter 4). Moreover, the organization of practices into prototypes represents an added value for all institutes and/or educators who are currently involved or interested in developing similar experiences. The project, therefore, is almost like the process of social innovation which, in its pilot phase is geared at finding new practices and solutions, is mindful of creating prototypes which can be used over time and, finally, contributes to the spread and exponential growth of innovative experiences (Nesta, 2010). The final phase of social innovation is about stimulating true systemic changes, which impact upon a wide range of practices and behaviours in different institutional spheres. In some ways, as we shall see, this is indeed one of the results of the POP Project.

In total, the POP Project involved 8 training agencies and 18 local initial VET centres in the provinces of Bergamo, Brescia, Como, Cremona, Milano, Monza-Brianza, and Varese across three different training years and produced 21 prototypes (guidelines, models for intervention) deriving from the implementation of 21 interventions.

The first edition of the project, POP1 (2009/10), included three initial VET agencies (Afol Milano; Fondazione Clerici; Fondazione Enaip) in six training centres¹ in the

¹ For a detailed description of participating agencies and branches see Attachment 2.

provinces of Milano, Bergamo, and Lecco, and the creation of 6 prototypes/models. The second edition, POP2 (2012/13 and 2013/14), targeted 7 initial VET agencies (Afol Nord-Ovest, Milano and Monza-Brianza; Aslam; Capac; Azienda Speciale Zanardelli; Clerici Foundation; Enaip Foundation; Scuola Edile Cremonese) and 12 VET centres in the provinces of Cremona, Como, Lodi, Monza-Brianza, Milano and Varese, that created a total of 15 prototypes in two years.

3.1 General and Specific Objectives

The general objectives of both editions of POP are, on the one hand, to offer adequate training opportunities to adolescents with an immigrant background currently enrolled in 3-year qualification programmes of initial VET under the regional RDET (Right-Duty to Education and Training); and, on the other hand, to foster training success and full social integration for these students. These general objectives underscore a third overall aim which characterizes the trial and which can be summarized thus: *to develop and implement interventions following the aforementioned general objectives which, having been tested and validated in "real" situations, can produce specific operational models and guidelines for action that can be used for the development of future projects, undertaken either by the funding body or by other public and private agencies active in this area.*

In terms of the first general objective regarding the offer of quality training, the specific aims of the intervention have been as follows:

- offering Italian language learning support, particularly aimed at helping students reach a B1 competence level (based on the common European framework for languages) in Italian L2 at the end of lower secondary school and in the transition from school to the initial VET system;
- spreading instruments for the definition of the different levels of competence of ItalBase and spotting problems with ItalStudio among teachers and trainers;
- promoting the practice of certification of Italian L2 among immigrant students (raising awareness among parents), in the perspective of giving value to and fostering a greater and more effective use of competences acquired by students in their educational and training careers;
- facilitating Italian teaching and learning processes in relation to the need to promote and give value to immigrant students' linguistic-cultural heritage;
- supporting the link between theory and practice, between disciplinary and vocational knowledge, between classroom and laboratory teaching.

Regarding the second objective – fostering educational success and the full integration of students with an immigrant background enrolled in initial VET – the specific actions undertaken by the intervention were:

- strengthening educational success, guiding immigrants towards good training results via personalized educational plans, peer to peer tutoring, extra-curricular support, networks with families and with resources outside the training agency;
- testing laboratory courses based on learning from experience, as specific practices fostering the overall development of the individual, in all his/her cognitive, emotional and relational potential and emphasising the value of the relationship between student and teachers/trainers and between peers;
- creating opportunities to foster a culture of pluralism, in partnership with educational and training institutions, which can be spread to the local context and shared with other training institutes and upper secondary schools;
- promoting guidance counselling strategies upon entry, in order to create greater awareness regarding training choices and ensure they are in line with students' and families' actual expectations and real possibilities.

Finally, regarding the third objective, related to the development and implementation of interventions to be tested and validated in “real” situations, the prototypes generated indeed represent guidelines for the development of teaching and project-based actions, which can be constructed on the basis of the specific directives contained in the operational models.

3.2 Intervention Lines and Measures

Intervention lines are the operational application of the project's general objectives with reference specifically to the content of the implemented activities.

The project included an initial preliminary phase with participating agencies, “listening” to their questions and effectively co-creating the specific contents of the various interventions. In methodological terms, the project was based on a constant dialogue between the ISMU Foundation, the Cariplo Foundation and the initial VET centres involved around issues regarding the definition, implementation and creation of models of intervention on the basis of the following guidelines.

Interventions were constructed and implemented bearing in mind the focus of the project: to give value to and put centre stage immigrant students and their families. Moreover, interventions were carried out by the participant initial VET agencies either together or in a coordinated fashion.

The intervention lines through which the project was implemented, in its first edition, were mainly four, subsequently defined in detail in concrete examples of intervention measures and practices.

The first line of intervention tackled a salient aspect for users with an immigrant background, namely Italian as a second language teaching in RDET courses. In particular, attention was focused on the following actions:

- the implementation, upon entry, of a set of different actions, which can be classed as: exploratory (reconstructing immigrant minors' personal, educational and linguistic history), relational (making an educational pact with the migrant family), pedagogical-didactic (understanding early linguistic and learning needs, acquired competences and knowledge, and developing an individualized work plan) and organizational (arranging the most effective systems to respond to the linguistic and learning needs of newly enrolled students);
- teacher training in Italian L2 for B1 level certification teaching;
- implementing Italian language teaching modules (potentially for B1 certification) with students in the first years of RDET qualification courses.

Secondly, next to Italian L2 learning, a set of significant actions geared at promoting immigrant students' native language(s), with specific reference to the disciplines/vocational areas of the curriculum, were put into place:

- teaching/learning of technical-professional competences and fundamental notions of basic competences in students' native language in parallel with L2 learning;
- the creation, with the students themselves, of a glossary of terms related to their specialist technical vocabulary, the work environment, and job place security for a set of vocational qualifications (mechanic, electrician, hairdresser, beautician, hotelier, business services, etc.) where there is a greater concentration of immigrant students in all of the principal minority languages;
- coordination among language teachers (languages area), teachers and trainers of other areas, cultural linguistic mediators, foreign language teachers.

Thirdly, activities focused on supporting educational and training success in in RDET courses in initial VET:

- creating courses aimed at consolidating Italian L2 competences and preparing for certification;
- training, guidance and interventions for teacher and tutors constantly involved in following immigrant students in a process that develops from entry level actions to the transition to the labour market, for example with the construction of personalized educational plans, through newfound guidance actions intended as the possibility of changing schools in the case of wrong choices or upon exit from initial VET; in the development of relations with other non-training organizations (learning and motivational support organizations, educators/social workers, CTP, cooperatives, etc.); in reinforcing the relationship with the family, with the optimization and enhancement of cultural capital and of family resources; in the construction and capitalization of relations with the local system of job services;
- peer to peer tutoring, especially for students in the first years, organized in different phases: selection, training, organization of (Italian and immigrant) tutors for newly arrived pupils; specific support for immigrant students in the first phase of admission by tutors, aimed at identifying specific needs and creating personalized learning plans; extra-curricular support (with opportunities to learn vocabulary for communication and study). Finally, the organization of various activities, that fall under the umbrella term ‘expressive workshops’, which are not only educational but also have the advantage of including those subjects who presented the most resistance such as, at times, the families of immigrant students;
- artistic-expressive workshops for different classes, conducted by teachers and trainers with the support of experts (pedagogists, educators, psychologists) aimed at supporting adolescents – both Italian and foreign – in the discovery of their resources and potential and fostering cooperative learning, socialization among peers and the creation of relationships with adults;
- production of events (exhibitions, representations, etc.) conducted by students of participating initial VET centres, with a presentation and exchange of the experience: with families, with teachers and students of training agencies (and also of upper secondary schools) interested in the project, with institutions, local authorities, etc.

The second edition of POP (POP2: 2012-2015) substantially followed upon the intervention lines adopted and implemented during POP1, with the specific aim of transferring previously developed prototypes to training institutes and agencies belonging to the regional initial VET system not involved in POP1. POP 2, moreover, also included the creation of new prototypes, different from those already developed in POP1. New themes and issues were tackled, always with an explorative and experimental approach, specifically tackling guidance on entry and exit to initial VET.

Responding to the requirements which emerged at the end of POP1, with the aim of capitalizing upon and following upon the strategies already in place, POP2 concentrated prevalently on:

- spreading the prototypes developed;
- extending the prototypes produced to other qualifications or areas of qualification;
- improving, expanding and completing available prototypes, qualifying them, for example, in terms of a greater attention to the conclusion of immigrant students' educational cycle (transition to work);
- developing of new prototypes related to other issues and topics connected to the more general mission of educational and training success and the integration of adolescents with an immigrant background.

3.3 Expected and Actual Outcomes

The expected and actual outcomes of the POP project were essentially of two types. The first outcome – connected to the overall aim of the trial – is the creation and availability of validated guidelines/prototypes/models, related to the activated and implemented measures and lines of intervention.

In order to obtain an overall final organization of each prototype or guideline, the ISMU Foundation proposed a common index, aimed at supporting the configuration of reports in terms of operational instruments, in order to enable third parties to carry out any given intervention in a different context².

The second outcome is closely linked to the result of the intervention measures activated and this includes different areas. Firstly, the possibility of exchanging information and experiences among different training agencies, or of transferring experiences across agencies' different branches, has no doubt represented a significant added value in terms of innovation and professional quality. Second, the creation of opportunities for dialogue between training institutions participating in the project, on the one hand, and upper secondary schools with students with an immigrant background, on the other. Third, a greater cohesion among teachers, with the aim of developing a common line of conduct on group management and learning, facilitating the exchange of information between teachers in the same school, in schools across different cities and among different training and educational institutions.

In terms of practices of reception, that represent the start of the school/family relationship, the project managed to:

- promote the exchange of practices and modes of reception among teachers;

² A detailed index is presented in Attachment 1.

- improve the reception of immigrant students and their families with consequent positive effects on the relational climate in the classroom;
- foster immigrant families' involvement in their children's training environment.

In terms of the support offered by POP to the areas of L2 (Italian as a second language) and L1 (giving value to students' native languages) interventions, the following results were achieved:

- teachers of training centres acquired a knowledge of the different levels of competence in Italian – according to the Common European Framework for languages – to evaluate immigrant students' language levels upon entry and exit;
- the practice of certification of Italian L2, as an opportunity for students and an occasion to improve language skills, was spread among teachers, immigrant students and their families;
- the increase in the number of linguistic certifications among immigrant adolescents in VET;
- the creation of links between Italian language teaching (language area) and the acquisition of technical-professional competences with a focus on students' linguistic competence (with the creation of multilingual glossaries).

In relation to the increase of training success among students with an immigrant background as a result of learning support interventions through socialization, the following results were obtained:

- the training of some pupils as tutors with the role of supporting immigrant student during the first years;
- support for tutors and teachers;
- the creation, via alternative methodologies, of spaces for the expression and authoring of the self for foreign and Italian adolescents aimed at helping students discover their potential and creating opportunities for socialization.

In terms of fostering a more widespread intercultural sensibility, which represents perhaps one of the main challenges of our present-day society, POP made it possible to:

- render training centres increasingly attentive and sensitive to the issues of receiving and integrating students with an immigrant background, as a result of a greater involvement of classes and pupils;
- increase all students' awareness of the socio-cultural and linguistic differences of various minorities;
- improve students' self-control in relational situations, with positive effects on security, on self-esteem and on classroom climate.

Finally, it was possible to activate trials connected to guidance upon entry and upon exit with the aim of helping students make more effective choices based on greater awareness. In particular, the project achieved the following results:

- the creation of guidance interventions based on a peer education methodology;
- an increased knowledge of initial VET and of training options among the various stakeholders (students, families, school guidance counsellors, local services, etc.);
- reduction in rates of drop-out and failures often connected to insufficient support offered to students in the decision-making phase.

The following is a list of the prototypes carried out during the course of the entire POP projects, as well as the training agency and the province where the intervention was conducted. For an analysis of the contents and the areas of intervention, see Chapter 4.

During the first edition of POP (2009/10) the following prototypes were carried out:

- 1) “Integrated paths in VET for the reception of foreign students and the promotion of best practices” (Afol Milano, Milan);
- 2) “Aesthetic criteria in a multiethnic society: a praxis of intercultural education” (Afol Milano, Milan);
- 3) “An analysis of foreign students’ educational cycle across compulsory education: highlighting strengths and weaknesses and imagining possible interventions” (Clerici Foundation, Milan);
- 4) “Educational support and promotion of training success among foreign minors: the development of specific interventions for teaching and learning competences in the area of general culture” (Clerici Foundation, Lecco);
- 5) “Supporting the development of technical skills and the value of plurilinguism as an instrument for training success among both foreign-born and native-born students in VET” (Enaip Foundation, Lecco);
- 6) “Experimental Italian L2 Teaching” (Enaip Foundation, Bergamo).

Overall, the six interventions carried out in the context of the first trial edition of POP can be considered particularly significant because they enabled the activation of experimental modes, whether by conducting interventions in specific areas (reception, teaching, L2 Italian, supporting plurilinguism and laboratory/workshops in the context of creating specific vocational competences) or by developing actions with the aim of classifying immigrant students’ training paths from the moment of entry in a VET centre all the way to the transition into employment, highlighting existing practices, strengths, weaknesses and potential gaps to be filled with future interventions.

The second edition of POP (2012-15) is subdivided into two different years. The first, 2012/13, led to the production of the following prototypes across seven initial VET agencies (some of whom differ from those participating in the trial edition):

- 1) "Life stories: sharing cultural identities and training of students and teachers with expertise in intercultural reception in schools" (Afol Nord Ovest, Milan e Monza-Brianza);
- 2) "Support to entry in the workplace for students exiting RDET courses" (Aslam, Varese);
- 3) "Studying the law, I learn the language" (Capac, Milan);
- 4) "Bridge over troubled water: decision-making after the lower secondary school" (Enaip Foundation, Como);
- 5) "Training in rights and duties using a multicultural approach" (Clerici Foundation, Milan);
- 6) "Intercultural reception. Creating educational products and producing a theatre performance" (Clerici Foundation, Milan);
- 7) "Multiethnic construction. Educational products for effective learning in the construction sector" (Scuola Edile Cremonese, Cremona);
- 8) "No one gets left behind. Promoting best practice in reception and integration of foreign students in VET" (Azienda Speciale Zanardelli, Brescia).

POP2's second year (2013/14) resulted in the definition of seven other prototypes and focused on the following areas (in some cases these involved the continuation of the work conducted the previous year):

- 1) "School and work: two world joined by stories of working life" (Afol Nord Ovest, Milan and Monza-Brianza);
- 2) "Support to entry in the workplace for students exiting RDET courses. Sample increase and instrument assessment" (Aslam, Varese);
- 3) "Studying the nation, I learn the language" (Capac, Milan);
- 4) "Now I know what to do and how to do it. Development of digital instruments in total security" (Clerici Foundation, Lodi);
- 5) "Nothing changes: water: decision-making after the lower secondary school" (Enaip Foundation, Varese);
- 6) "Multiethnic construction. Educational products for effective learning in the construction sector" (Scuola Edile cremonese, Cremona);
- 7) "Gulliver. Promoting best practice in reception and integration of foreign students in VET", (Azienda speciale Zanardelli, Brescia).

The products developed by the project, in the two editions, are thus 21 prototypes deriving from the implementation of the same number of interventions and articulated according to the same structure. In terms of the single intervention, on the other hand, the results are connected to the increase in educational success and “training inclusion” of the adolescents involved in the (different) interventions (meaning also the terms “successful results” will have different meanings). This increase was influenced in a significant way by the adoption, in the interventions carried out and later prototyped, of an intercultural approach as a founding category to develop their structure and contents.

Lastly, let us highlight, as a qualifying element, the method used to develop each single “prototype”. This involved the creation of a group within each VET centre/agency accompanied by an ISMU Foundation tutor; the definition of an intervention project validated by ISMU and monitored in its implementation also via plenary sessions with ISMU’s central coordination; the development of training interventions and specialist consultancies carried out by ISMU Foundation experts, as a support to the activation of single prototypes.

3.4 Phases, Timetable and Organization of the Project Offer

Overall, the project was carried out according to the following phases:

- formal start of the project, activation of governance and management organs and functions, macro-management of the trial and definition of the operational intervention lines and the measures activated;
- development of interventions and predisposition of the organizational and training conditions for their activation across single participating training institutions;
- implementation of interventions in participating agencies;
- monitoring of interventions;
- validation of interventions and development of models;
- development of guidelines and models supporting the diffusion of tested practices;
- governance, support to and evaluation of the trial;
- closure of the trial/project;
- final report and presentation of project results (November 2014 - May 2015).

The financial strategy adopted by the Cariplo Foundation and carried out by the ISMU Foundation in the context of POP turned out to be extremely helpful to VET centres,

who were able to “free” themselves from the subservience to regional funds which puts great organizational and bureaucratic strain on agencies.

For both editions of the project the ISMU Foundation was responsible for both the governance and overall management of the project, offering scientific supervision, operational coordination and administrative management, as well as acting as an intermediary with the Cariplo Foundation. This overall responsibility included also supporting the VET centres and agencies carrying out projects in terms of content and methodology of interventions, organizing meetings and seminars, and offering specialist professionals and consultants.

The project’s coordination structure was made up of individual project managers from each participating training organization, in partnership with project representatives from the ISMU Foundation. In addition, each organisation was given the task of creating a specific workgroup responsible for carrying out the interventions (that is, planning, constructing and testing the specific prototype(s), and some administrative management functions).

The project included the following human resources from the ISMU Foundation, each with different roles and responsibilities:

- a project manager, supported by a scientific supervisor and other aids for institutional relations and operational aspects;
- a technical team (made up by project managers for each participating training organization, by the ISMU group responsible for coordinating the project and, when necessary, by a representative of the Cariplo Foundation);
- various operational teams, one for each participating training organization;
- tutors – experts on particular issues – who supported the different teams for specific needs in relation to operational activities, interventions or the creation of prototypes.

3.5 Monitoring and Evaluation

As aforementioned, the project’s implementation was constantly monitored by tutors and the documentation produced at the end of each line of intervention progressively appraised. In order to monitor different interventions, tutors conducted meetings with the respective project managers in each participating training organization which, at times, also included the teachers directly involved in conducting the interventions. These meetings, which took place during the different phases of the project, tackled issues such as the evaluation of the implementation phases, of modes of organization

and of data gathering instruments, states of advancement, as well as gathering teachers' comments and observations and their intercultural perspective.

Moreover, a final evaluation comparing actual results with expected outcomes was conducted, using the following quality criteria which refer to the different lines of intervention and measures adopted:

- adequate involvement of the training centre;
- adoption of an overall method characterized by a prevalence of teamwork and attention to the immigrant student's point of view;
- a high degree of shared objectives, activities and modes of intervention among the different participants in the project;
- the construction – as a result of the project – of internal and external networks among participating initial VET centres;
- greater intervention skills with immigrant students among teachers, trainers and other professionals involved;
- significant teaching and methodological innovation in the trials conducted;
- high potential replicability of the experience;
- involvement of all participating organisms in the final evaluation of the project's results.

Overall, the 21 interventions carried out during the trial period of the POP Project can be considered particularly significant. Firstly because they allowed for the activation of experimental methods via interventions in specific areas (reception, teaching, L2 Italian, supporting plurilinguism and laboratory/workshops in the context of creating specific vocational competences, guidance) and actions aimed at organizing immigrant students' training paths from entry in a VET centre all the way to employment, identifying existing practices, strengths, weaknesses, and any gaps for future interventions.

Indeed, the actions and interventions carried out with the POP project highlighted a multiplicity of potential actions for immigrant students in the initial VET system in Lombardy. These are inevitably conditioned by previous experiences, by available human resources, working conditions and modes of functioning of individual training institutions and, more generally, by the rules and mechanisms of the regional training system, presented in Chapter 2.

In each participating institution, however, the interventions fostered the development of reflexive processes which, in time, may lead to further actions and include other teachers, students, and training agencies and branches, continuing the development and trial of new prototypes.

Finally, in terms of network creation, the project highlighted the need to strengthen the connection between training agencies and the surrounding territory, in order to make better use of other local institutions to further foster the success and integration of stu-

dents with an immigrant background. The aim of these networks, which were developed during the course of the project, was to coordinate the specific competences of each agency in order to answer the needs of students more quickly and efficiently.

4. The Educational Cycle of Students with an Immigrant Background. Innovative Proposals for Initial VET

by Antonio Cuciniello, Mariagrazia Santagati, Alberto Vergani

4.1 Successful Practices. An Analysis of Prototypes for Equal Opportunities in Training Issue*

An important outcome of the POP Project, as already highlighted in previous chapters, is the development and availability of validated prototypes, which are the result of the measures and interventions implemented by the different teams within the VET centres participating in the project. The interventions conducted can be considered particularly significant because they fostered innovation, whether by conducting specific interventions (focusing on reception, Italian L2, intercultural teaching, etc.) or by developing actions with the aim of following immigrant students' training careers from entry in a VET centre all the way to the transition into employment.

The aim of the present chapter is to describe the prototypes, focusing on the phases and the issues they insist upon, including: actions targeting students with an immigrant background in 3-year or 4th year courses within compulsory education (RDET); but also "systemic" interventions, that target training agencies directly – and students indirectly; plus mixed interventions geared at organizing and classifying activities for foreign-born students.

The general framework for the presentation of prototypes is that of the foreign student's educational cycle through compulsory education. The title comes from a prototype conducted during the POP project¹, which operates as a unifying container of the

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¹ The reference here is to the prototype *An analysis of foreign students' educational cycles across compulsory education: highlighting strengths and weaknesses and imagining possible interventions* (2009/10) conducted by the Clerici Foundation in partnership with the Enaip Foundation and Afol Milano. The prototype, which is the outcome of a sort of action research, reflects the practices currently in use in VET centres and the actions needed to implement an overall improvement of the offer of services for immigrant students in RDET. The educational cycle of these students was analysed identifying the crucial phases of training, on the basis of data gathered on the outcomes of foreign students and via evaluation questionnaires given to tutors, teachers/trainers and students. The analysis included also: the mapping of real experiences (procedures, methodologies, materials), of selected and shared practices, with the aim of formulating a list of the critical aspects, and of strengths and weaknesses of the various activities; a set

different actions and innovations which could be conducted within the initial VET system in order to improve the degree of integration and success among foreign minors. It also allows for the creation of a sort of protocol which includes the two aforementioned objectives. This general framework highlights the main phases and turning points which – in terms of minors with an immigrant background in RDET courses – characterize a student's educational cycle within a specific educational or training trajectory (from first contact and information with potential enrolees all the way to the end of training activities). More specifically, we have identified four macro-phases which follow the logical and chronological sequence of an educational or training path, highlighting specific points of concern for immigrant students and corresponding available instruments and resources. These are:

- a preliminary phase, related to guidance counselling in lower secondary school;
- an entry phase connected to reception and commencement of a VET programme;
- a work-in-progress phase that coincides with actions aimed at retaining students in a VET programme;
- an exit phase connected with guidance counselling on exit and/or entry in the workplace.

Within these four phases, the POP Project has chosen to adopt the intercultural approach, defined by Besozzi (2005) as a process that transforms the educational and training context through mutual encounters and the activation of communicative processes among people with different cultures, attitudes and lifestyles and which translates into a new way of teaching and learning. In the projects activated within participating training agencies, the intercultural criterion was applied by:

- predisposing educational and training areas that were open and welcoming and respectful of differences;
- creating official forms and instruments of communication in different languages;
- recruiting teachers specifically trained in the main issues concerning the management of foreign students, strengthening the role of individual tutors, offering specialized personnel for special support as well as a resource to foster collaboration with various ethnic communities and associations and with students' parents, identified as key players in helping other migrants understand the characteristics of training programmes in RDET;
- devising training programmes tailored to the real possibilities and needs of students, tailoring training objectives along the 3-year programme in order to reach minimal regional training standards;

of materials or examples developed during other POP projects; the development of a model as a result of the analysis of the materials gathered.

- predisposing a repertoire of teaching aids specifically designed to help foreign students with learning (especially with respect to the more challenging competences and skills) and to offer teachers/trainers helpful teaching aids and subsidies (glossaries, multimedia supports, etc.);
- conducting activities dedicated to the implementation and/or strengthening of intercultural teaching to be integrated in the curricula;
- reaching out to the local territory and involving significant actors who can offer useful contributions to face and solve specific problems related to some of the aforementioned critical turning points.

Table 4.1 presents the 21 prototypes conducted in the POP Project, subdivided into the different phases of the training cycle they intervene on, ordered chronologically on the basis of the training year they were tested out in and, within a given year, ordered alphabetically. The prototypes title are translated in English.

Table 4.1 - POP prototypes according to phases of the educational cycle of the students with an immigrant background in initial VET

Preliminary Phase: Guidance
– <i>Bridge over troubled water. Decision-making after the lower secondary school</i> (Enaip, 2012/13)
– <i>Nothing changes</i> (Enaip, 2013/14)
Entry Phase: Reception and commencement of the VET programme
– <i>Aesthetic criteria in a multiethnic society: a praxis of intercultural education</i> (Afol Milano, 2009/10)
– <i>Integrated paths in VET for the reception of foreign students and the promotion of best practices</i> (Afol Milano, 2009/10)
– <i>Experimental Italian L2 Teaching</i> (Enaip, 2009/10)
– <i>Intercultural reception. Creating educational products and producing a theatre performance</i> (Clerici, 2012/13)
– <i>No one gets left behind. Promoting best practice in reception and integration of foreign students in VET</i> (Zanardelli, 2012/13)
– <i>Life stories: sharing cultural identities and training of students and teachers with expertise in intercultural reception in schools</i> (Afol Nord Ovest Milano, 2012/13)
– <i>Gulliver. Promoting best practice in reception and integration of foreign students in VET</i> (Zanardelli, 2013/14)
Work-in-progress Phase: Retention in the VET programme
– <i>Educational support and promotion of training success among minors with an immigrant background: the development of specific interventions for teaching and learning competences in the area of general culture</i> (Clerici, 2009/10)
– <i>Supporting the development of technical skills and the value of plurilinguism an instrument for training success among both foreign-born and native-born students in VET</i> (Enaip, 2009/10)
– <i>Multiethnic construction. Educational products for effective learning in the construction sector 1</i> (Scuola Edile Cremonese, 2012/13)
– <i>Training in rights and duties using a multicultural approach</i> (Clerici, 2012/13)
– <i>Studying the law, I learn the language. Self-learning centre</i> (Capac, 2012/13)
– <i>Now I know what to do and how to do it. Development of digital instruments on safety issues</i> (Clerici, 2013/14)
– <i>Multiethnic construction. Educational products for effective learning in the construction sector 2</i> (Scuola Edile Cremonese, 2013/14)
– <i>School and work: two world joined by stories of working life</i> (Afol Nord Ovest Milano, 2013/14)
– <i>Studying the nation, I learn the language</i> (Capac, 2013/14)

Exit Phase: Supporting entry in the workplace
– <i>Support to entry in the workplace for students exiting RDET courses (Aslam, 2012/13)</i>
– <i>Support to entry in the workplace for students exiting RDET courses: sample increase and instrument assessment (Aslam, 2013/14)</i>
From the Preliminary Phase to the Exit Phase
– <i>An analysis of foreign students' life cycles cross compulsory education:: highlighting strengths and weaknesses and imagining possible interventions (Clerici, 2009/10)</i>

In the paragraphs that follow the contents of the prototypes, grouped into intervention phases, are described in detail (cf. also Attachment 3).

4.2 The Preliminary Phase: Guidance in Lower Secondary School*

In terms of the responsibility for “taking on” a user, the educational cycle of a student (whether foreign-born or not) in RDET starts with the enrolment phase. In the perspective of implementing projects/prototypes aimed at giving evidence of the fundamental critical turning points of this process, however, it is indispensable – especially in terms of preventing failures and drop-out – that interventions act early on, particularly during the guidance counselling process for educational choices at the end of lower secondary school.

The issue of guidance is crucial when faced with immigrant students and their families. Various studies and projects carried out by the ISMU Foundation highlight various critical aspects connected to foreign students' trajectories in the transition from lower secondary to upper secondary school or to VET (as already noted in Chapter 1, cf. Besozzi, Colombo, 2006; Besozzi, Colombo, 2007; Besozzi, Colombo, Santagati, 2009). This is because these students are not always given equal educational opportunities compared to their Italian counterparts and their chances are often limited to economic, family, migratory and/or guidance issues, the latter of which are constructed within schools in relation to students' socio-economic condition. Moreover, analyses of the Italian guidance system (Isfol, 2012a) highlight that only a small percentage of students, concentrated in specific areas and institutions, has access to guidance counselling activities. These activities, however, do not include those students (whether Italian or foreign) most needy of support and at greater risk of drop-out. A recent ethnographic study conducted in Milan (Romito, 2014) focused on the influence of teachers' guidance advice on students with an immigrant background: a widespread practice among teachers is to recommend lower profile educational or training profiles to these

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students, guiding them towards less ambitious options and considering them inadequate for more prestigious routes.

The aforementioned prototype concerning whole foreign student's educational cycle stresses the fact that guidance counselling activities aimed at choosing and supporting a student in his/her education or training choice can adopt two possible types of services:

- guidance information: is the most common activity and includes information regarding the characteristics of the educational and training offer in a given area or within single institutions, with the aim of broadening students' and families' knowledge in order to facilitate decision-making. Usually this involves activities conducted with entire classes or small groups (more rarely on a one-to-one basis), limited in length, and which often include other significant actors (Youth Centres, Job Centres, guidance booths, etc.);
- guidance counselling: that is, those activities aimed at the development of a decision-making project, supported by information, an evaluation of students' aspirations and interests, meetings with qualified informants (e.g., practitioners, other students, etc.), on-the-field experiences via technical-professional workshops. These are longer, more complex interventions, and include information-based activities but with the aim of promoting greater awareness among students regarding choices.

Usually these interventions (especially in the case of guidance counselling) are prevalently group-based – although they may also include individual moments. The group is seen as a fundamental asset in addressing individual guidance counselling needs. Group work makes it possible to share emotional aspects connected to the task at hand, offers a container for feelings of uncertainty and isolation and fosters communication. It thus creates fertile ground to strengthen personal potential and offers expert guidance and support in decision-making.

A particular aspect that concerns foreign-born students is the fact that a necessary minimum condition is knowledge of the Italian language and the ability to understand and use information, including the "use" of classmates and peers in order to access new information. If these conditions are missing or fragile, without specific aids which can compensate deficits and support users in the decision-making process, the efficacy of guidance actions tends to decrease significantly. In order to support students and families in this delicate phase it is best if: institutions include the presence of intercultural mediators during meetings with families and students and, where possible, also in the classroom during various activities; offer enrolment modules and information materials in various languages; offer guidance (information/counselling) activities from the second year of lower secondary school, using qualified testimonials.

Over and beyond those who normally intervene in these phases and in these type of interventions (guidance counsellors), we believe in the usefulness of further human resources dedicated to supporting those students with greater linguistic difficulties. These can be specialized figures like mediators, but also tutors who can facilitate information-gathering, socialization in small groups, and decision-making. The tutor can be internal to the school (or it can be the Italian teacher) or with more specialist skills (e.g., a VET tutor). Without specific resources that make it possible to recruit externally, we believe it is useful to enlist members of the various cultural minorities present (e.g., parents or former students) who can support others in understanding the characteristics of RDET training programmes.

In this area, during the POP trial, two more prototypes were produced, namely:

- *Bridge over troubled water. Decision-making after lower secondary school* (Enaip Foundation, Como and Cantù VET centre, 2012/13);
- *Nothing changes. Decision-making after lower secondary school* (Enaip Foundation, Busto Arsizio VET Centre, 2013/14).

These projects focus on developing and testing a model for a guidance counselling programme specifically aimed at immigrant students in lower secondary schools. It was conducted by the teachers/trainers and students of the Enaip Foundation VET centres and co-designed and evaluated together with teachers responsible for guidance counselling in lower secondary schools in the targeted areas². The project intervenes on a specific weakness of school guidance: the difficulty in presenting and helping students get to know vocational occupations.

The prototypes, therefore, concentrate on “learning by doing” and on “processing experience”, two concepts on which VET teaching/training methodology is based and which aim at promoting more realistic representations of vocational occupations and trades. The central moment is based on the organization of placements in the professional workshops of the agencies involved, which allow students, under expert supervision, to explore some activities connected with the different vocational profiles available in the various programmes.

The placement is part of a larger project that includes other activities aimed at supporting students’ and families’ decision-making, which include also VET students as key

² The Enaip Foundation Lombardia had been, in the past, the object of a case study in the ORIM study *Between training and employment*, which looked at actions for students carried out in the VET centre in via dei Giacinti, Milan. In terms of the guidance phase on entry, the analysis did not find an explicit project, clearly defined and shared among trainers (neither in that specific branch nor across the Centre), but rather different everyday practices for the management of problematic users which had become consolidated (Santagati, 2009).

testimonials. Briefly, the phases of the two prototypes, developed by the Enaip Foundation over two academic years, are the following:

- a) analysis of the presence of students with an immigrant background within lower secondary schools in the local area;
- b) development of multilingual information pamphlets for guidance counsellors, families, and local institutions and services;
- c) activities for 3rd and 4th year VET students aimed at re-thinking about their chosen programme and training experience using questionnaires and video-interviews;
- d) meetings/seminars with guidance counsellors in lower secondary schools;
- e) open day managed by VET students;
- f) guidance counselling meetings dedicated to immigrant communities and associations;
- g) mini guidance placements in VET centres for 2nd and 3rd year students in lower secondary schools;
- h) individual meetings and interviews with lower secondary school students and their families, with a brief visit of the centre.

In terms of outcomes achieved, these projects offered lower secondary school students a broader knowledge of initial VET programmes. Moreover, they fostered the participation of initial VET students in guidance actions and increased lower secondary school teachers' knowledge of VET programmes. Finally, in terms of qualifying and innovative elements, let us point out: the presence of activities aimed at enabling current VET students (especially foreign students) to reflect on their educational experience as the starting point for guidance counselling; the role of these students as peer tutors and experts in the training context; placements in VET centres in order to offer direct and practical experience of training activities; significant attention paid to lower secondary school teachers.

4.3 The Entry Phase: Reception and Beginning*

In the following paragraph we want to share the interventions and good practices tested – or consolidated and formalized – during the two editions of the POP Project, relative to the reception and beginning phase of the training programme. Given that the percentage of foreign students in initial VET does not seem to show signs of decreasing neither at the national nor at the regional level (cf. Chapter 1), reception represents

* by Antonio Cuciniello.

the first fundamental turning point in the foreign student's educational path. As noted above, regarding the prototype on the *Foreign students' educational cycle* (cf. footnote 2), reception is crucial for at least three reasons:

- 1) it represents the first instance of socialization with the class, with new peers and more generally with the school environment;
- 2) it's a time when the student's degree of motivation to participate is assessed through the educational pact and other activities that enable the teaching staff to evaluate the student's ability to perform on a variety of operational and organizational aspects;
- 3) it is the phase when, for the first time, it is possible to conduct a more specific evaluation of a student's skills and competences on entry, using tests to evaluate learning after lower secondary school and in relation to the objectives of the RDET programme.

The MIUR ministry guidelines for receiving and integrating non-Italian students (CM n. 24, 1.3.2006, and CM n. 4233, 19.2.2014) specify that the term "reception" refers to the measures and obligations which structure the relationship between the student and his or her family and the school, distinguishing between administrative, communicative-relational and educational-teaching areas.

The reception phase is always a delicate and decisive moment in an educational/training path, because this is where the bases of a positive school relationship are set out (MIUR, CM n. 4233, 19.2.2014). "Receiving well" means finding strategies and good practices in order to create responsive occasions and environments, giving value to all available resources and, if needed, looking for more. This sets the basis for an educational experience which is not only an opportunity for learning and cognitive development, but rather a real experiential possibility, in a space between family and society.

In this phase, the peer group no doubt has a fundamental role in the socialization of new students, transmitting the class culture ("how to", use of spaces, behaviour, etc.) and, at the same time, is perceived as less judgemental compared to adults.

In what follows, starting from the VET centres' prototypes, we will try to reconstruct the development of some interventions in key areas such as: reception, Italian L2 teaching, supporting educational success, intercultural teaching.

In 2009/10 the Paullo VET branch of Afol Milano tested out a project called *Integrated paths in VET for the reception of foreign students and the promotion of best practices*, which sets the basis for an operational model (reception protocol). Facilitating foreign students' and their families' entry in VET agencies, reducing critical aspects and fostering their success is always an open challenge. For this reason the operational model offers

specific guidelines for the different phases of reception and aims at providing an educational perspective geared at overcoming – in a responsible fashion – disadvantage and maladjustment (cf. Besozzi et al., 2010: 204).

The instrument, congruent with the needs and specificities of VET in RDET, is structured yet flexible, and enabled the systematization of interventions for students with an immigrant background according to target areas: from reception to monitoring, from Italian L2 courses to intercultural teaching, with the involvement of all participating actors (i.e., teachers, tutors, admin staff). Indeed, the prototype included detailed guidelines for action: a specific operational model for first contact and reception with foreign students (guidance and introductory meeting with students and families at enrolment; reception and creation of the classroom; ongoing tutoring and portfolio; learning units); an Italian L2 workshop (introductory meeting; entry test; Italian L2 courses according to the European Framework of Reference - CEFR; certification of linguistic skills; evaluation of learning); intercultural learning (expressive workshop and other examples of intercultural teaching, teacher training).

An intervention with these characteristics made it possible to test out a model of working practices, overcoming the implicit and informal approach of some trainers in order to become a good practice at the core of a systemic action. At the same time it made it possible to imbue existing strategies and teaching techniques with the intercultural education perspective as a reciprocal transformation process, as an opportunity to think and experience the *other*, and as a good practice of intercultural exchange (cf., Colussi, 2009: 6).

With this perspective the Clerici Foundation developed, at the Belloni VET centre in Milan, a reception programme based on new learning approaches in order to facilitate the intercultural encounter between students of different origin, by getting to know each others' identity and values. Such a perspective created the opportunity to overcome foreign students' "invisible visibility" (Besozzi, Colombo, 2009: 25), facilitating the transition from a universalistic approach to one of positive discrimination. It also made it possible to fully understand the specific implications of working with foreign students, without necessarily reducing them simply to disadvantaged users or those with special needs, both in terms of teaching/training and in terms of guidance and support towards employment.

One of the elements of innovation of *Intercultural reception. Creating educational products and producing a theatre performance* included changing the order of traditional reception actions: not only at the beginning of the year but throughout. This had a positive effects on students' ability to make plans and on the relational climate, with both peers and adults. In this regard, it is interesting to note that foreign students, in general, already tend to give a positive evaluation of teachers and other staff, emphasising the motivating climate and attention to individual needs. On the other hand, relations with classmates are not without misunderstandings due to communication difficulties

and typical adolescent dynamics, over and beyond national origin (Colombo, Santagati, 2013: 142). Theatrical activities were a tangible occasion for contact, knowledge and reciprocal understanding while developing interethnic friendships, within classes which are miniature versions of the plurality of the outside world (Colombo, Santagati, 2013: 142). Indeed, if the increase in second generations leads to a reduction in linguistic differences, it is also true that often attitudes, behaviours and values linked to a different culture or life context often continue to crop up (Besozzi, Colombo, Cordini, 2014: 95). Training agencies can build upon these multicultural stimuli to seize a specific opportunity for development and to rethink their current working practices – without minimizing or negating challenging aspects – paying particular attention to the criteria of quality and innovation both in planning and in conducting and evaluating intercultural actions (Colombo, 2014b).

Different studies reveal that in initial VET the actual problems connected with foreign students emerge in every-day teaching contexts, rather than being tackled through systemic monitoring. On the one hand, this approach does not enable preventative actions and potential adjustments (e.g., mode of reception, class composition criteria), but on the other it avoids labelling the phenomenon as an emergency, with potentially negative effects on staff performance. The lack of systemic observations, however, must be considered in a context where the culture of reception, the capacity to respond on a one-to-one basis to the specific needs of students, coupled with complex situations and the ability to rethink and reinvent existing practices, represent a significant capacity for adaption and innovation.

Drawing from this methodology of “reception management”, the Zanardelli VET centre in Brescia³ conducted, in 2012/13 and in 2013/4, two projects called *No one gets left behind* and *Gulliver* (subtitle: *Promoting best practice in reception and integration of foreign students in VET*). The projects aimed at identifying, testing and organizing best practices for the reception of foreign students and their families (with cultural-linguistic mediators), in order to ensure educational success and integration. Moreover, aware of the fact that one of the weaknesses of initial VET is a limited training in teaching/learning in multicultural training contexts (cf., Colombo, Santagati, 2013: 144) the projects tested out a teaching approach using different innovative methodologies (film analysis, EAS – situated learning episodes, cooperative learning). The positive outcomes include: sharing and helping behaviours in the classroom, a reduction in cultural and gender stereotypes, complex thinking when analysing external or class-specific events.

VET training in RDET is a specific training segment, a starting point for young foreigners and not the “last resort” it often represents for many natives. Thus, the positive

³ Like the Enaip Foundation, the Zanardelli Provincial VET Centre was the object of a case study within the ORIM study *Between training and employment*, which explored actions for immigrant students in the city of Brescia (Travagliati, 2009).

outcomes achieved by foreign students – who appear to have higher levels of motivation compared to their Italian counterparts – often derive from the coupling of a training programme that responds to an interest in vocational occupations with the gradual learning of a new language (cf., Colombo, Santagati, 2013: 142). It is not uncommon, however, for educational delays to be caused by an inadequate knowledge of Italian, especially as a language-for-study, which uses abstraction and decontextualization.

These considerations were addressed by the prototype conducted by the Enaip Lombardia Foundation, in the Bergamo branch during 2009/10, which follows the implementation of the project titled *Experimental Italian L2 Teaching*. This intervention focussed specifically on the idea that qualified and motivated trainers can obtain good results with foreign adolescents also thanks to a network that includes other VET agencies, services and the workplace. In this perspective, the consolidation and expansion of the inter-institutional network with the Italian Centre for Foreigners at the University of Bergamo (CIS) has enabled the divulgation of on the job skills relating to Italian L2 teaching (observation/co-teaching with experts), the management of a specific programme, and the conduction of specific curricular and extra-curricular interventions. Moreover, in partnership with the Centre for education of adults Petteni VET centre, a kit of teaching and guidance materials – which can be considered, as an addition to current methodological and instrumental resources, as the product of a systemic action – was produced and tested out.

The challenge of initial VET is to make the leap from an educational route characterized by a fragile user group to an innovative workshop, where opportunities for social and professional integration are possible for both Italians and foreigners (Colombo, Santagati, 2013: 136). There is a significant number of students with personal or family experiences of migration (both internal and international) and an extremely high percentage of adolescents who are ‘dialect mother-tongue’, who share the experience of being uprooted with their foreign counterparts. For all these reasons the linguistic learning/boosting activities of *Experimental Italian L2 Teaching* were open to all students with linguistic difficulties. In this way, as different studies have already indicated, through L2 language teaching for foreign students teachers develop skills that engage all students, especially those that need to be motivated to learn, following their foreign classmates’ example (Besozzi, Colombo, 2009: 65).

The specificity of the L2 linguistic intervention, considered in its multiplicity (curricular interventions, with the whole class, and extra-curricular actions, with subgroups differentiated by language families), modularity (basic Italian, Italian for studying) and flexibility, started with the assumption that in the administrative area – where the prototype was conducted – the development of B1 linguistic skills (CEFR) is a prerequisite to ensure both social integration and training success.

The fact remains that school success represents one of the fundamental factors of integration for foreign students in their host society, especially within a model of inte-

gration that places the acquisition of a country's basic language and culture at its core (Besozzi, Colombo, Santagati, 2013: 25). "Receiving" means also, from the first phases of entry in the new context, giving value to everyone's linguistic-cultural heritage, in motivating and promotional terms. Initial VET is a segment that includes a rather large portion of youngsters and is progressively becoming an important educational route which is increasingly attractive (Colombo, Santagati, 2013: 137), with a significant rise in foreign student enrolments.

Drawing upon these significant elements, another prototype was developed and implemented by the Paullo VET Centre, Afol Milano, in 2009/10: *Aesthetic criteria in a multiethnic society. A praxis of intercultural education*. The programme spans the whole first year of the course and uses different methodologies and teaching instruments, both traditional and new, mixing core disciplines and vocational knowledge.

This interdisciplinary project (which included Italian, history, geography, economics, law, English, hairdressing, cosmetology, history of costumes, model building) made it possible to discover other cultures within the specific domain of a training programme, with particular attention to aesthetic criteria (fashion, hairdressing, aesthetics) and vocational practices in different cultures using films, educational outings, expert interventions and vocational workshops alongside traditional teaching instruments. In this case, as in many other 'prototyped' interventions, the intercultural approach coupled with "hands-on teaching" (i.e., expressive, narrative and vocational workshops) made it possible to further include foreign students and motivate natives. At the same time, cooperative learning stimulated the development of significant relationships, offering students the possibility to experience plurilingual and pluricultural resources as an intercultural asset and added value in the workplace. Cooperative group work increases motivation and facilitates an active learning process where the student develops a significant relationship with learning. In small groups students have the possibility of making mistakes and correcting them, reinforcing their sense of responsibility, their listening skills, the ability to ask questions, to criticize, to find an agreement, in a debate that stimulates thinking. Activities were always organized in mixed classes in order to avoid the concentration of particular minority group and foster the creation of homogeneous subgroups who further explored the single linguistic-cultural traditions. At the end of the project the centre became an intercultural learning environment where cultural diversity became a primary resource for educational and curricula development.

Similarly, Afol Nord Ovest Milano's prototype *Life stories: sharing cultural identities and training of students and teachers with expertise in intercultural reception in schools*, conducted in 2012/13 and 2013/14, tested out the methodology of using cooperative groups who narrated and constructed (auto)biographical material (about family, school, work, friends) in order to create different products (a photography exhibition, a conference, a book: Afol Nord Ovest Milano, 2013), thus bringing together an innovative teaching approach with the aid of multimedia technology.

By training some students as “reception tutors” for their foreign classmates, the intervention aimed at creating an innovative teaching programme to foster foreign students’ linguistic and relational abilities and the whole class’s educational welfare. At the end of the programme all the students involved developed in terms of interpersonal relations and became more cooperative and supportive towards those classmates who had more difficulties.

4.4 Work-in-progress Phase: Retention in the VET Programme*

In what follows we will present some of the prototypes conducted by different agencies who invested in projects aimed at the retention in VET programmes, an equally crucial phase to ensure training success among foreign students. With the term “retention in the VET programme” we refer to a period which includes some of the most delicate and important moments of students’ training paths. These include aspects that intersect the teaching dimension (training standards for learning), the methodological dimension (how to reach those standards), and the personal/motivational dimension, which often plays a fundamental role in ensuring the efficacy of the other aspects. Continuing to “take care” of them, finding strategies and applying best practices requires strengthening the bases of a step-by-step programme that needs to be co-constructed in-progress with all the stakeholders involved. The shared responsibility for the integration of foreign students must therefore be acknowledged at various levels – fully aware that integration is not merely the result of students learning the new language but requires an effort on everybody’s part to be open to and welcome diversity.

After the initial phase of Italian L2 for communication, the next phase involves a “transition” towards Italian for studying (Miur, CM n. 4233, 19.2.2014). This is a long process that requires a consolidation of instruments and teaching materials, as well as the fine tuning of linguistic modes of intervention. Supporting the development of L2 as a contact language means also offering the student cognitive and metacognitive skills useful for classroom learning, where all the teachers of a given class become “facilitators” for learning, allowing the students to make their first steps towards linguistic independence, well aware that these students must learn Italian to study but also learn Italian while studying.

On the basis of these considerations, the Capac Polytecnic of Business and Tourism in 2012/13 developed and conducted the intervention *Studying the law, I learn the language*, and in 2013/14 offered its continuation, *Studying the nation, I learn the language*.

* by Antonio Cuciniello.

Both interventions included students (Italians and foreigners), teachers and families. The project, created to improve the performances of foreign students and foster the intercultural skills of all pupils, started with the acknowledgement of the challenges of learning the fundamental rules that regulate the catering sector; to which followed, during the second year, elements of history and geography.

The rise in second generation children and adolescents (which, since 2013/14, represent the majority of students with non-Italian citizenship, cf. MIUR, ISMU Foundation, 2015) leads to a progressive reduction in the distance with Italian students in terms of both language and learning results (Besozzi, Colombo, Cordini, 2014: 95; Barabanti, 2015). The project was devised based on the three levels of the CEFR (A1-A2, A2-B1, B1-B2) specifically for the linguistic heterogeneity which is present, emphasising well that foreigners are not to be grouped together along linguistic lines. Indeed, the mastery of Italian as a study language – or the lack thereof – is a clear differentiator between second generation students (born in Italy or migrated early in life) and those who have arrived more recently and who, naturally, face more challenges in accessing education and training, from the possibility to understand and make oneself understood, before even approaching the issue of learning in the host language. This led to the creation of an online centre aimed at self-learning for Italian L2 and other course disciplines which, on the basis of linguistic and disciplinary needs, offers the free use of a platform with the possibility of self-correction and control of the level reached in L2. Moreover, this mode of learning also offers the opportunity to lower performance pressure.

In order to respect the requirement/criteria of interculturalism, the project included, in the first part, the multilingual translation of the Institute Regulations, with the involvement of students and families, supported by professional translators. This type of activity is included in the 2006 Guidelines for reception and integration of foreign students and cited again in 2014 (“it is useful to create an information leaflet, translated in different languages, which explains the school’s organization”). Moreover, it focuses on the active involvement of foreign families, often considered “distant”, in their specific L1 language skills. Clearly, the act of translating in and of itself, albeit important and useful, is not enough to make the student and his/her family feel part of the new educational/training context, unless it is supported by a process of relationship-building, cultural decentering, and of taking on the perspective of the “other.”

I believe that the weak spot is still the relationship with families and it cannot simply be solved by translating communications in their native tongue. The challenge, for many teachers, is to understand foreign families’ perspective, and thus their way of relating to and approaching schools [...] (Besozzi, Colombo, Santagati, 2013: 94).

Giving value to plurilinguism was evident also in the creation of a bilingual (Italian/Arabic, Italian/Chinese, Italian/Spanish, Italian/English) and a 'simplified Italian' kit of teaching instruments for courses on food security norms and their correct application. At the end of the project all the materials developed and tested were presented in a training programme for the trainers of the centre with the aim of sharing the linguistic difficulties of foreign student and the strategies and instruments which could be adopted to face and overcome them, in order to aid teaching practices.

Among the different prototypes, *Educational support and promotion of training success among foreign minors: the development of specific interventions for teaching and learning competences in the area of general culture*, conducted in 2009/10 by the Clerici Foundation (Lecco), focuses on the principle of training success as "guidance of each student in the choice and development of services/training and/or work programmes which are in line with their personal aspirations and needs and able to offer useful and relevant skills". Drawing from this perspective, pursuing training success means fostering awareness in decision-making during turning points and transitions, but also creating environmental, learning, training and organizational conditions that can support inclusion and motivation and avoiding drop-out. Equally, in order to offer real opportunities of educational success it is fundamental that school integration policies be coherent with national immigration policies, which often make it complicated, if not impossible, to access opportunities for training success (Besozzi, Colombo, Santagati, 2009: 150-151).

The project aimed at the production of a learning unit (LU), created also thanks to the support of the local network for the integration of specialistic competences, and was tested in the first classes of the courses for Business Services Operator and Cosmetologist. The LU was developed by conducting a needs assessment with the students and staff of the VET centre, which then led to the development of a set of project and organizational indications, later used in the preparation of instruments and materials for testing.

The students had the role of devising, preparing and setting up an event/party for students and their families, with the aim of improving socialization upon entry in the VET Centre, encouraging students to get to know one another, and the integration of new kids at school and in the classroom. All these objectives were reached using an active and inclusive "hands-on teaching" methodology, which gives value to the creative skills of all students, and at the same time produces and support teachers' reflexivity.

The issue of norms, in terms of rights and duties, was chosen as the focus of the project *Training in rights and duties using a multicultural approach* conducted by the Clerici Foundation (San Giuliano Milanese) in 2012/13. Closely connected with the future occupation which students start experiencing during job placement, project developers believed this topic could foster knowledge and exchange between classmates, both Italian and foreign, on the cultural values underlying specific juridical aspects in their

different countries of origin, highlighting common elements but also trying to understand the reasons that lead to different conducts at the social, ethical, and economic levels.

Attention paid to different cultures of origin and the effort to maintain them alive, also from a linguistic standpoint, remains a key element of compensation with respect to the need to conform to the peer group which, in some cases, can lead to the negation of one's cultural belonging. Therefore, the aim was that of consolidating forms of cohabitation based on mutual understanding and respect, which draws from the knowledge and the value given to the specific contribution that each culture can give to the development of a society based on rights and duties of citizens and workers.

Through an innovative model (contents, teaching methodologies) that aims at personalizing teaching in order to facilitate learning for the whole class, a set of Training Units (TU) were produced and included in the Training Plans for all course activities, in relation with the regional standards for learning for the *historic-socio-economic* and the *technical-vocational* areas (e.g., sources of legislation, freedom, law and individual behaviour, workplace legislation).

The theme *Let me explain the Constitution* was given a social value in terms of active sharing with families, through the creation of a theatre workshop. As with the other prototypes, working with families was once again difficult because of the lack of Italian language skills, plus the lack of time due to work commitments (Besozzi, Colombo, 2009: 26). This confirms the extent to which families and their relationships with training centres are a key element in initial VET, given how often families guide their children's decision-making in terms of educational choices and also their visions of the future.

Now I know what to do and how to do it. Development of digital instruments on safety issues is the title of another prototype, also conducted by the Clerici Foundation, Lodi branch, in 2013/14, which explored the issue of security norms in the workplace. The idea comes from a need observed in previous years: enabling students to develop the necessary skills in order to sustain the mandatory internship for the Mechanical Operator programme. The project made it possible to reach this objective by testing non traditional teaching methods, in order to deliver contents and facilitate interethnic and intercultural contact. The latter element is certainly not irrelevant, given that various studies on interethnic relations in the classroom noted that the similarity of second generation adolescents with their Italian classmates tends to highlight the problems of foreign-born students, and especially of those who have arrived more recently.

Language is the fundamental instrument for the transmission and development of knowledge and access to a sectorial technical language – like that of norms – composed of many microlinguistic inputs, does not represent an easily acquirable segment of L2, nor is it concretely applicable in real life contexts, especially if the input one receives is not comprehensible. In this regard teachers:

today can count on instruments they can test out, such as: plurilingual glossaries that contain key terms connected to the microlanguage of the various disciplines; “simplified” multimedia texts and instruments that offer contents in a more accessible language (MIUR, CM n. 4233, 19.2.2014).

These are teaching tools that make the acquisition of linguistic mastery for educational success easier. Indeed, in the prototype conducted at the end of the project, the emphasis is placed on how the application of a multimedia approach to teaching (using storyboards, video recordings, etc.), with the production of a matching security kit, could increase both students’ self-esteem and learning.

The challenge of the disciplinary microlanguage – a real working language of a “discourse community” – in the process of teaching/learning of L2 was tackled also by the Scuola Edile Cremonese in 2012/13 and 2013/14 with the project *Multiethnic construction. Educational products for effective learning in the construction sector*.

Attention was focused on a set of actions aimed at producing easily accessible, comprehensive linguistic inputs. Specifically, the project tried to facilitate the achievement of technical competences (building technology, building site accounting, building design, security in the workplace, mathematics and geography, educational building site), in order to foster the acquisition of the sector’s specific terminology, improve educational processes and foster educational practices based on the inclusion of all students, Italian-speaking or otherwise.

The specificity of the intervention is connected with the possibility of transforming the language “of understanding” into the language of contents, which led to the development of educational instruments: flashcards for building materials and simplified texts that explain methods for the use of materials and types of construction, with graphical illustrations, an exercise book and an essential glossary.

Different prototypes emphasise, through specific actions, the importance and the attention paid to other languages spoken in the classroom.

Italian schools have a multitude of languages and cultures (cf. MIUR, *National guidelines for kindergarten and elementary school*, DM 16.11.2012, n. 254) and Ministry guidelines on reception and integration of foreign students (CM n. 24, 1.3.2006 and CM n. 4233, 19.2.2014) have focused time and again on promoting linguistic diversity.

In terms of other native languages, considered an important resource for cognitive and emotional development, in order to promote them it is necessary to assume a polycentric perspective that includes both families and public and private third sector agencies (p. 13).

In an increasingly multilingual and multicultural context, actions that promote diversity can pass through the signs of reception (booklets, information pamphlets, bulletin boards and messages in various languages), measuring skills and competences in students' native language (plurilingual questionnaires, bilingual entry forms), bilingual stories (narrative heritage, different alphabets and writing), study words (bilingual glossary), a linguistic exchange (loanwords) and teaching also non-EU languages (Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, etc.).

Drawing from an awareness of the richness, variety and heterogeneity of languages and cultural origins in schools, in 2010 the European Council proposed a *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education*⁴ which reads:

given that all learning takes place integrating new knowledge and skills to those already present [...] and that these are often coded in other languages, it is indispensable to take into account the languages that make up students' repertoires. Indeed, these are the first base, the foundation for the formation of learners' individual and collective identities (p. 7, Italian ed.)

This principle, with its corresponding guidelines, are easily traceable in the intervention conducted by the Enaip Foundation Lombardia in Lecco in 2009/10, *Supporting the development of technical competences and the value of plurilingualism as an instrument for training success among both foreign-born and nativeborn students in VET*.

Acquiring linguistic competences for studying often represents the main obstacle to succeed in the various disciplines. It is therefore fundamental to act on the learner, supporting him/her with efficient learning tools and instruments in his/her route in acquiring a language for education, given that the technical-specialistic uses of a language require a specific attention to the introduction of specialistic terminology, education to the scientific discourse, precision in explanation, and a systematic review of understanding. This means assuming communication across different disciplines to be an important occasion for linguistic education, and involving also teachers in subjects other than Italian (Vedovelli, 2002).

The validated model proposes guidelines for the construction of three multilingual instruments: a glossary, with the aim of facilitating technical learning connected to the occupations of Commercial Operator/Sales Person and of Car Mechanic, a kit to facilitate entry in the workplace (presentation letter, CV, etc.) for the Sales Person and a multimedia support connected to work process for the Mechanic.

More specifically, the technical multilingual glossary not only gave "citizenship" and equal dignity to the languages of students in a given classroom (Albanian, Arabic,

⁴ See <http://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/promoitals/article/view/2279>.

French, English, Italian, Spanish) fostered a more positive evaluation of foreign students' linguistic capital among both teachers and peers, and had positive effects also on Italian students' linguistic skills, as they were able to learn technical terms in different languages. When developing the kit for entry in the workplace, the project team, together with the students, decided to also actively involve families in the training programme. This phase was particularly significant in terms of promoting training institution-family relations. Helping foreign students overcome relegation in underqualified professions, in order to achieve higher aspirations towards a job which, perhaps, could be different from and better paid than their parents', means also supporting them in becoming agents of a "normalization" process that minimizes the risk of excessive differentiation and "ethnicization" (Besozzi, Colombo, 2007).

This led to a higher level of participation of families, and especially of mothers – some of whom are notably less integrated in Italian social and cultural life, compared to their husbands – in training activities. In this regard the aforementioned MIUR guidelines state:

receiving the family and supporting it towards a gradual integration means creating the conditions for involvement and participation in events and activities, sharing an educational project that gives value to the specificity of the student, through the recruitment of cultural mediators in order to overcome linguistic difficulties and facilitate the comprehension of educational choices (p. 12).

In sum, the projects conducted – aimed at different issues and phases of initial VET programmes (reception, retention in the VET programme) have shown to be particularly significant, given that they made it possible to activate reflexive processes and innovative modes of operating, with the aim of standardizing these practices in foreign students' educational and training careers. The qualifying element, in addition to the outcomes and positive effects on beneficiaries both during and after the intervention, was explained and validated in the prototyping process (e.g., guidelines, intervention models). The prototypes were given a structure that could be easily transferred into further actions geared at supporting training success, with the aim of overcoming the lack of exchange of practices, instruments and materials among training agencies (Colombo, Santagati, 2013: 144), spreading know how and disseminating the best intercultural practices. This will be possible also in other training contexts, other than those where the prototypes were created, all the while respecting the specificity and the needs of the new potential pilot context.

A further objective of the POP Project was to offer both VET centres and their teachers/trainers the opportunity to apply the intercultural perspective on the basis of current training practices – in use yet not recognized as such – or to test out new practices, co-constructing processes where the interconnections between theory and practice could become tangible in reflexive action: not only products but also reflexivity on the

process. This will inevitably reverberate positively also on the quality of the training offer, and ensure all students achieve a level of learning which will lead to professionalization, further education or other qualifications (Santagati, 2012a).

4.5 The Exit Phase: Transition to Work and Support to Employment *

Only one of the POP Project prototypes explicitly and directly refers to the exit phase of VET courses in compulsory education (whether at the expected completion of a course, after obtaining the final certification, or without completing the course and therefore passing to another education or training course). This is the prototype developed by Aslam during a two-year testing period (2012-14), which focuses on the specific dimension of support to employment for immigrant students with a 3-year qualification. The exit phase is considered, within the educational cycle prototype, as a delicate transition: although the post-qualification period is formally outside the training programme, without adequate guidance measures it can increase the chances of failure, especially for those students who are more at risk. Therefore, actions to support entry in employment or guidance in choosing further education or training options, which can include various types of interventions for active job seeking, are particularly important⁵.

It is perhaps redundant – but noteworthy nonetheless – to emphasise the importance of the issue not so much in general terms (ie., in relation to the individual and social meaning of working and having an occupation) but with respect to the profile of the subjects involved (young people aged 18-20 for whom – at least according to official data – employment is a critical issue, when not a true difficulty⁶) and the nature of the training offer considered (the Regional initial VET training courses within compulsory education, although significantly modified in the last decade, are still strongly geared towards entry in employment upon completion⁷). From this point of view, to (serious-

* by Alberto Vergani.

⁵ These include, for instance: the creation of a CV and a cover letter, finding potential employers, offering necessary information for job seeking after signing up with a local Job Centre, the organization of actions for personal promotion and to find out more about different employment contexts such as guided visits or meetings with key testimonials from the workplace, etc.

⁶ For example, the November 2014 ISTAT data (released in January 2015) indicate that the rate of unemployment for young people aged 15 to 24 is 43.9% (up 0.6% from the previous month). This is the highest value ever to be measured since ISTAT began offering monthly data (January 2004) or even trimestral data (1977). Approximately 729,000 under-25s are in search of an occupation, which represents 12.2% of the population in that age range. Cf. the recent *Rapporto Giovani 2014* by the G. Toniolo Foundation (2014), il Mulino, Bologna.

⁷ See Chapter 2.

ly) target the issue of support to employment for students who have completed 3-year initial VET courses and, more specifically, to do so in the perspective adopted by the prototypes developed in the POP Project (that is, in the perspective of an accredited training agency and not that of, for instance, a local planning institution) means bearing in mind at least four fundamental aspects⁸:

- the available knowledge regarding the conditions and the mechanisms through which young people, particularly immigrants, who completed an initial VET qualification access job market, not in general but within the specificities of the Italian context;
- the most relevant policy guidelines (especially those coming from the European Union, and especially via the Commission and the Council);
- the system of rules that regulates, in the specific case of Lombardy, the regional offer of initial VET and the subjects (public or private) that belong to it;
- the characteristics of the VET organization such as values, mission, general criteria for action but also its structure and make-up in terms of roles, functions and responsibilities.

The first three aspects are the most relevant in order to approach the issue of entry in employment of qualified young immigrants exiting compulsory education in a realistic way. These students are present in different degrees and different numbers, within the Aslam prototype, which includes the following specific elements:

- a general structure made up of actions supporting foreign students “exiting” RDET and a role (that of the Employment Promoter) specifically dedicated to “supporting, monitoring and supervising immigrant students’ entry in the workplace”⁹;
- a detailed job description for the Employment Promoter (whose role is to manage the individual transition from training to employment – or to further education –, carrying out the actions and using the instruments detailed in the prototype);
- actions (and relative support instruments) that guide the individual students (thus acting, on the one hand, on job seeking) in his/her transition from training to employment (or, alternatively, to further education or training);
- a set of actions (and, here also, instruments) that intervene on potential employers (and thus on job offer) with the aim of “evaluating employers’ openness to take on foreign personnel and fostering employment of foreign personnel among more reluctant employers”;

⁸ The prototype refers to employment which is in line with the qualification achieved, with a regular job contract, in safe environmental conditions and for a significant time frame (albeit not necessarily in a permanent situation).

⁹ The quotes are taken from the final version of the prototype, year 2013/14 (July 2014).

- the configuration of the prototype in a process-like structure, with the development of actions supported by specific instruments and operationalized in meeting with both graduates and potential employers.

Regarding this last aspect, the actions which – according to the prototype – are geared to the single qualified student, with the guidance of the Employment Promoter, are the following (each supported by relative operational worksheets):

- 1st meeting: welcome interview;
- 2nd meeting: aimed at developing one's "knowledge and About-Self-Project";
- 3rd meeting: aimed at finding "areas of improvement...in order to make job seeking more efficient";
- 4th meeting: aimed at "thinking about...socially accepted/acceptable values and binds of the Italian job market";
- 5th meeting: dedicated to developing a CV, writing a cover letter, and "exploring the best ways to face a job interview";
- 6th meeting: "job interview with a potential employer who has been previously contacted by the Employment Promoter";
- 7th (final) meeting: evaluation of the intervention and evaluation, using contents and instruments used in the 2nd meeting in order to "improve [the graduate's] awareness of his/her experience and his/her ability to express him/herself at the end of the intervention".

Let us also look at the job description of the *Employment Promoter*:

- He/she is responsible for analysing the local job market and local development policies, paying particular attention to the employment of foreign users;
- He/she organizes and manages databases for the supply of employment services;
- He/she develops interventions to support entry in employment on the basis of foreign users' needs;
- He/she offers interventions to support the employment of foreign users;
- He/she manages, together with guidance services, activities to conduct preparatory interventions (...) for foreign users;
- He/she offers guidance counselling and/or tutoring on employment and entry in the workplace (information and selection of employers, preparing interviews with employers,...) for immigrant students;
- He/she helps foreign users to develop their ability to analyse job offers and evaluate their professional training experiences;
- He/she uses guidance counselling methodologies;
- He/she identifies information sources that have strategic importance for the offer of effective guidance services to immigrant students;
- He/she activates cooperation and/or information networks.

In conclusion, it is possible to highlight the following functional aspects:

- a) the prototype contains, as previously described, the qualifying elements of an intervention to support entry in employment of immigrant adolescents who graduate from 3-year RDET courses;
- b) it appears to be particularly important – also in terms of organizational choices for the agency – to have a dedicated function (even though, realistically, this means the creation of a new function but not of a new organisational position);
- c) it appears important to opt for structured interventions (defined by procedures and instruments to be used) both in terms of employment offers and requests;
- d) it is necessary to test the function more broadly (over and beyond what has already been done in the second year by Aslam) in order to understand how it works in different contexts and extending its intervention to all graduates of a given agency or branch (and not only to foreign graduates);
- e) finally, the prototype must be validated – as an intervention model and after the necessary adaptations – also with reference to support for qualified students who continue on to further education/training (in the initial VET system or in higher education).

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Attachment 1

Structure of the final products of the POP Projects

The activities carried out during the training year as a result of the implementation of each Centre/Branch's individual projects are formalized in a product that can be defined as a guideline and/or prototype and/or model. These terms indicate that the expected product – which is obviously the result of the set of activities undertaken within a given project – must take the form of a sort of operating instructions package which would enable a third party to replicate the intervention, albeit with the necessary contextual variations.

Given this framework, we have established that:

- a) the single *final product* (guideline, prototype, model) must take the form of a written document, available both in hard copy and in electronic format (each consisting of approximately 3000 characters with spaces + attachments: see below;
- b) the contents of the document – i.e. what identifies it as a guideline, a model or a prototype are the following:
 - 1) title/denomination;
 - 2) area (issue, object, etc., with explicit reference to the approved project);
 - 3) description and general structure (aims, characteristics, macro-contents...);
 - 4) description of evidence supporting the validity/efficacy of the prototype;
 - 5) mode of application of the intercultural requirement/criterion;
 - 6) detailed architecture/structure (detail of contents, timelines, mode of application, professional and organizational resources, etc.);
 - 7) network requirements for the applicability of the prototype among educational organizations, institutions, third sector organizations, etc.;
 - 8) implementation processes and functioning (beginning, monitoring, closure, evaluation, data collection, etc.);
 - 9) minimum conditions for feasibility;
 - 10) notes and warnings for the implementation/functioning of the prototype;
 - 11) attachments (instruments and operational devices; various documents; etc.).

Attachment 2

Prototype forms

by Erica Colussi

Decision-making after Lower Secondary School

- 1) Bridge over troubled water
- 2) Nothing Changes

Organization, contact person and email	<p>1) Enaip Lombardia Foundation Como branch, como@enaip.lombardia.it Cantù branch, cantu@enaip.lombardia.it</p> <p>2) Enaip Lombardia Foundation Busto Arsizio branch, busto@enaip.lombardia.it</p>
Year	2012/2013, 2013/2014
Prototype description	<p>The prototypes intervene in the area of educational guidance counselling. They include two guidance routes to VET for 3rd year students of lower secondary school (8th Grade). These are based on different phases and/or activities and were carried out with different modes and timeframes across the 2-year period and in the three branches where the testing took place (Como and Cantù the first year, Busto Arsizio the second). They include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Activities aimed at offering VET students the opportunity to re-think about their school/training experience b) Meetings with teachers responsible for guidance counselling in lower secondary schools c) Open Day organized by VET students d) Placements in VET centres for students of lower secondary schools e) Interviews and individual meetings with students of lower secondary schools and their families.
Prototype beneficiaries	Students of lower secondary schools and their parents; teachers responsible for guidance counselling in lower secondary schools; VET students enrolled in 3-year courses
Main outcomes	In-depth knowledge and “hands-on” experience of VET programmes for 8 th Grade students, with greater awareness in decision making at the end of lower secondary school; involvement of VET students; increased knowledge of VET programme among teachers of lower secondary schools
Elements of innovation	Students’ re-thinking of their school/training experience as the starting point of guidance counselling; role of initial VET students as peer tutors and “experts” in the educational/training contexts; guidance placements in VET agencies based on gaining direct and practical experience of training activities; special attention to the relationship and communication with teachers responsible for guidance counselling in lower secondary schools

Aesthetic criteria in a multiethnic society. A praxis of intercultural education

Organization, contact person and email	AFOL Milano – Training, guidance and employment agency, Province of Milan, segreteria@afolmet.it
Year	2009/2010
Prototype description	The prototype is a standardized operative model in an integrated system of practices aimed at receiving immigrant students and their families. The intervention deals with the issue of multiethnicity using film, thematic educational outings, and knowledge of aesthetic criteria in different cultures, in conjunction with traditional teaching instruments, in order to give value to other cultures and integrate them in professional practice. The logic of the prototype is based on knowledge of cultural diversity, openness towards other cultures, integration, overcoming prejudice and related attitudes in order to foster better integration in schools.
Prototype beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1st year initial VET students – families of students with an immigrant background
Main outcomes	<p>For academic subjects (Italian, history and geography, economics and law, English): development of knowledge of other cultures in relation to one's own, development of the ability to think and explore course content;</p> <p>For vocational subjects (hairdressing, cosmetology, history of costume and modeling): development of knowledge of other cultures with a focus on aesthetic criteria; development of skills connected to the vocational practices employed;</p> <p>For technical-professional subjects: ability to search for images, ability to apply makeup, hairdressing and dressmaking (eg., cloth dyes, batik) techniques on models selected from different classes; creation of final events and presentations</p>
Elements of innovation	Creation of a common space, a meeting place of languages and cultures where different people can come together to discover the stories of one another, in mutual respect of difference; fostering a culture of integration in the perspective of change and new behaviours; production of training modules for teachers/trainers via working groups and professional self-advancement modules.

Integrated paths in VET for the reception of foreign students and the promotion of best practices

Organization,	AFOL Milano – Training, guidance and employment agency, Province of Milan
contact person and email	segreteria@afolmet.it
Year	2009/2010
Prototype description	The prototype standardises, via a specific Protocol, an integrated system of practices geared at receiving foreign students and their families in order to ensure educational success and a better integration, offer adequate training opportunities to immigrant students in order to reduce drop-out and increase educational success. The prototype aimed at offering adequate training opportunities for students with an immigrant background in 3-year initial VET programmes, fostering training success and full social integration by offering a working model of a reception protocol, which was structured yet flexible and respondent to the needs and the typical requirements of VET. The contents of the prototype are as follows; individual guidance meetings upon entry, with the presence of at least one parent or legal tutor; reception in the classroom during the first 2-4 weeks of school (with an evaluation of skills upon entry); educational activities kit (role playing, individual questionnaires, etc.) aimed at kick-starting the socialization and integration process at school; tutoring and monitoring the process of initial adjustment; intercultural learning activities for students and teachers, expressive workshops and trainers' training; Italian L2 courses
Prototype beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Students enrolled in the 1st year of initial VET programmes – Families of students with an immigrant background
Main outcomes	Increased level of initial integration of newly enrolled migrants in initial VET programmes; increased level of teachers' /trainers' awareness of students with an immigrant background on entry; availability of an organic and homogenous picture of immigrant students' <i>actual</i> skills on entry; increased level of participation among parents in their children's "educational and training life"; increased ability among teachers/trainers to relate with students with an immigrant background and their families; increased level of retention and participation in training

Experimental Italian L2 Teaching

Organization,	Enaip Lombardia Foundation
contact person and email	Bergamo branch, bergamo@enaip.lombardia.it
Year	2009/2010
Prototype description	<p>The prototype intervened in the linguistic area and focussed on reinforcing the acquisition of B1 level skills in Italian L2 among all students with linguistic difficulties (first and second generation foreigners, “dialect mother-tongue” Italians). This is considered to be a minimum prerequisite for training success the area of business administration, where the student is constantly managing documents and paper and/or computer procedures that require the constant use of a good level of written and oral communication skills. The prototype includes the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Trainers’ training, for Italian teachers – Creation of an entry file/kit in order to manage the reception of migrant students (“what are the important pieces of information, how can they be gathered and managed”) – Training interventions geared at foreign and Italian students with linguistic difficulties, organized in: evaluation of skills on entry; curricular training interventions, with the use of L2 teaching for the whole class; extracurricular training interventions.
Prototype beneficiaries	Students, both Italian and immigrant students, enrolled in each of the 3 years of the Administrative Business Services Operator programme and in the 4 th year of the Business Services Technician diploma programme; Italian teachers
Main outcomes	Satisfaction among students, who particularly appreciated the extra-curricular activities, despite the need to stay on in the afternoons, with levels of attendance and participation that positively influenced also curricular activity; increase in the level of Italian language use among students; development of a reception kit created by sharing teaching materials used by Italian teachers
Elements of innovation	In terms of activities with students: plurality, modularity and flexibility in L2 interventions. In terms of Italian teachers: creation of on the job training occasions; expert observation/support to Italian teachers during classroom teaching. In terms of the training centre overall: strong cooperation with outside organizations in order to set up the trainers’ training module.

Intercultural reception. Creating educational products and producing a theatre performance

Organization,	Luigi Clerici Foundation, Belloni VET centre, Milan
contact person and email	bellonii@clerici.lombardia.it
Year	2012/2013
Prototype description	<p>The prototype identifies a structured pathway of reception, supported by the improvement of linguistic skills, with the aim of fostering the best possible integration of migrant students in the classroom and spreading positive relationship behaviours based on the knowledge of each other's identity and values. The prototype thus includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – classroom activities: experiences of intercultural exchange (guided tours watching films, etc); workshops and exploration of chosen issues in the linguistic areas; group meetings with the psychologist – evaluation and development of linguistic skills – activities that involve the whole class: theatre workshop – interdisciplinary activities with the whole class both at school and in professional hairdressing, cosmetology, cookery and design workshops – event organization
Prototype beneficiaries	Students from different classes within various initial VET programmes (areas: printing, catering, beauty treatments, hairdressing); families, communities, trainers in cultural and technical professional areas
Main outcomes	Improvement of the relational climate among students; increased knowledge of the cultures and values of the different ethnic groups present in the classroom; strengthening of migrant students linguistic skills on entry, after a process of evaluation; increase in the active participation of families; development of students' creativity and ability to create projects
Elements of innovation	The implementation of the project changed the traditional collocation of reception actions, which do not end with the beginning of the year but change and grow during the whole training year. In preparation for the final event a positive, unexpected event occurred: the interdisciplinary element of the project made it a "social" project which in turn made it interesting also to those students who were not initially involved.

Promoting best practice in reception and integration of foreign students in VET

1) No one gets left behind

2) Gulliver

Organization,	VET centre Giuseppe Zanardelli – Brescia Province Special Agency
contact person and email	Verolanuova and Villanuova sul Clisi branches verolanuova@cfpzardelli.it , villanuova@cfpzardelli.it
Year	2012/2013, 2013/2014
Prototype description	The prototypes identifies and organizes a set of best practices, aimed at receiving foreign students and their families and ensure greater training success and better integration. Once organized, these practices can be shared and applied also in other contexts. The prototypes focused on reception and integration processes of foreign students in the 1 st year of RDET programmes and on training teachers in EAS (Situating Learning Episodes) and Cooperative Learning methodologies
Prototype beneficiaries	Immigrant students in the 1 st year of 3-year RDET programmes; families of students with an immigrant background
Main outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Students: increase in sharing and mutual helping behaviours in the classroom, less use of cultural and gender stereotypes, greater use among all students of complex modes of thinking in the analysis of world events, and specifically those related to life in the classroom – Teachers: more information regarding the life cycle and linguistic and learning skills of immigrant students, more skills in the management of social and relational dynamics in multi-ethnic and multicultural classrooms, use of innovative teaching methodologies (EAS and cooperative learning)
Elements of innovation	Use of film analysis, EAS and cooperative learning methodologies, stable presence of cultural and linguistic mediators

**1) Life stories: sharing cultural identities and training of students and teachers
with expertise in intercultural reception in schools**
2) School and work: two worlds joined by stories of working life

Organization,	Afol Nord Ovest Milano, Limbiate and Cesate branches
contact person and email	segreteria@afolmet.it
Year	2012/2013, 2013/2014
Prototype description	The aim of the two prototypes was to foster integration and educational success among foreign students and create a network with public and private organizations, promoting an exchange on intercultural issues in order to co-plan actions aimed at: integrating foreigners; eliminating stereotypes and prejudice; giving value to and expanding experiences of civic participation in order to stimulate and promote a sense of local belonging. The first prototype began with teacher training and followed on with meetings held by the project coordinators (experts in the cooperative method on the one hand, and on intercultural issues on the other). This experience was then transferred into the classroom across different activities where group work was often used as an educational strategy which could facilitate the transfer of knowledge and abilities to a large number of students. Then came the narration proper, activated in various steps and in different contexts, in order to facilitate students' interest in becoming "writers". Narration was used also in the second prototype, whose main topic was work and which focussed on the areas of language, of vocational training and of personalization.
Prototype beneficiaries	1 st and 3 rd year students enrolled in RDET programmes
Main outcomes	Teachers put the students' learning at the centre of their actions and, thanks to the prototypes, managed to develop a set of best practices for the creation of a school which is increasingly attentive to the needs of the individual ("a school for each and every one"). Teachers supported students' development of interest in and curiosity for the other, without judgement and personal evaluations and, thanks to a positive climate – achieved with substantial effort – it was possible to open a discussion where prejudice and stereotypes were confronted and deconstructed as they emerged. The students were asked to open up to each other and relate with respect. Moreover, searching for material for the photo exhibition was an opportunity to rediscover lost pieces of personal histories, at times also reactivating problematic contacts with some family members.
Elements of innovation	In order to promote truly effective educational-learning activities initial VET must bear in mind the changes, the technological innovations and the increase in migrations that have created an increasingly diversified school population, with different cultures and values. If we add to the picture socio-economic problems, were the disparities in the distribution of resources are increasingly present, as are deviance and unemployment, it is not surprising that educating and training are increasingly difficult and often a source of demotivation and drop out. It is for this reason that teachers must always be flexible, willing to innovate, face a challenge and adapt to change. This was possible given that the project acted on motivating not only the students but also the teaching staff.

Educational support and promotion of training success among foreign minors: the development of specific interventions for teaching and learning competences in the area of general culture

Organization,	Luigi Clerici Foundation, Lecco branch
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Year	2009/2010
Prototype description	The prototype focuses on reception, using a set of activities aimed at developing a set of learning objectives regarding linguistic support, both cultural, social/transversal, and technical-professional. In order to do this a training unit of 40 hours was created, where students were asked to plan, prepare and organize a social event involving students and families, with the aim of improving socialization upon entry, fostering the creation of new relationships, and the integration of new arrivals in the school and in the classroom. Families' involvement is part of socialization and is considered a prerequisite to ensure adequate motivational support and personal adherence to the programme. The intercultural nature of the prototype is a guiding criteria to improve knowledge on of oneself and of the other by reconstructing the main characteristics of one's culture and language of origin.
Prototype beneficiaries	Teachers and students in 3-year initial VET programmes in RDET and Training in the areas of "wellbeing" and "business services"
Main outcomes	Awareness of choices during moments of transition (especially with reference to the transition from the first to the second cycle); creation of environmental, teaching, training and organizational conditions necessary to prevent the risk of isolation, lack of recognition, demotivation and consequently the reduction of participation in training activities; all of which are factors that determine school drop out.
Elements of innovation	The learning unit tested focused on reception and was characterized by a methodological approach that gives value to "learning by doing". This method is particularly apt for students who, for different reasons (primarily the difficulty with abstract thought so widespread among young people) learn more easily when they are placed in active situations and faced with "real" problems (deriving from their personal experience, from the professional sector, from current events, etc.)

Supporting the development of technical skills and the value of plurilinguism as an instrument for training success among both foreign-born and native-born students in VET

Organization,	Enaip Lombardia Foundation
contact person and email	Lecco branch, lecco@enaip.lombardia.it
Year	2009/2010
Prototype description	The prototype intervenes in the area of professional language, with particular reference to the technical content in those programmes with a larger number of immigrant students (Car Mechanic Operator and Sales Operator). It includes and illustrates the process of development of the 3 products by the students themselves: a) two multilingual technical-professional glossaries, one per sector; b) one multilingual multimedia aid on work processes of the Car Mechanic; c) one multilingual kit for the Salesperson's entry in the workplace. The glossaries were developed by identifying technical terms (i.e., documents and procedures for the Salesperson, tools and instruments for the Car Mechanic) and translating them in various languages, based on sharing linguistic knowledge among students and consulting sector-specific technical dictionaries. The multimedia support was produced by creating 5 Power Point presentations of the same number of job processes for the Car Mechanic, which had previously been analysed via a reconstruction and description using flow charts. The multilingual kit for entry in the workplace was created exploring job seeking techniques with 3 rd year students in the Sales Operator programme.
Prototype beneficiaries	Students, both Italian and foreign, enrolled in the courses for Car Mechanic Operator (two 2 nd year classes) and Sales Operator (2 classes, one 2 nd and one 3 rd year)
Main outcomes	Active involvement of students from an educational point of view; increased motivation to learn; increased comprehension and improvement of technical-professional vocabulary
Elements of innovation	Creation of instruments that facilitate learning, using different communicative codes and channels and integrating them; use of instruments outside the classroom (i.e., at home), as an individual support to understanding technical vocabulary; active involvement of students in every phase, from project development to final testing

Multiethnic construction. Educational products for effective learning in the construction sector (1 and 2)

Organization,	Scuola Edile Cremonese, Cremona
contact person and email	info@scuolaedilecr.it ; scuola@pec.scuolaedilecr.it
Year	2012/2013, 2013/2014
Prototype description	The prototypes identify a method to facilitate learning of construction technology among non-Italian native speakers or native speakers with linguistic difficulties. The prototypes give access to agile and flexible learning instruments based on the immediate and necessary needs of VET students. These instruments are thematic files dedicated to construction materials and simplified texts explaining procedures and use of materials, with graphic examples, an essential glossary and an exercise book.
Prototype beneficiaries	Students who are non-Italian native speakers with little linguistic knowledge or have recently begun schooling in Italy; students who are "semi-native" speakers; native speakers with poor linguistic skills
Main outcomes	Creation of easily accessible construction technology texts, which can be used for construction technology teaching and on the building site (instruments which are currently unavailable on the market)
Elements of innovation	Involvement of students in the validation process; involvement of lower secondary school teachers; involvement of construction technology teachers from specific technical institutes; giving value to the process and not only to the product; possibility of developing the prototypes by changing the communication medium (from printed to multi-media format), the role of those involved (students become teachers in a peer to peer relationship with other students), and with the involvement of other professionals (building site instructors, etc.)

Training in rights and duties using a multicultural approach

Organization,	Luigi Clerici Foundation, San Giuliano Milanese branch
contact person and email	giuliano@clerici.lombardia.it
Year	2012/2013
Prototype description	The prototype defines a model of personalized teaching aimed at facilitating the whole class and especially immigrant students. A structured set of teaching instruments is defined in order to approach the issue of "rights and duties" in a transversal and interdisciplinary fashion. The focus is on the sphere of citizenship (1 st year) and its different applications to the workplace (2 nd and 3 rd years). A set of training units were produced, starting from regional learning standards and focusing on: 1) foundation of Law; 2) "good/bad-right/wrong"; 3) freedom, Law and individual behaviour; 4) workplace legislation (rights, health, safety); 5) job contracts. The theme "Let me explain the Constitution", on the other hand, is given a "social" value that includes families by creating a final event based on a theatre workshop.
Prototype beneficiaries	Students enrolled in the course for Car Mechanic Operator, 1 st , 2 nd and 3 rd years; families, trainers from the cultural and technical-professional areas
Main outcomes	<p>Availability of training units on the issue of "rights and duties", structured to facilitate learning among immigrant students; increase, as a result of a personalized training offer, in those conditions (linguistic, content-related, giving value to cultures of origin) which can increase motivation and facilitate learning. Moreover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For students: the acquisition of basic skills which are both useful and necessary in understanding the values and social, ethical and economic behaviour of immigrant peers; - For trainers: introduction to the specific practices of personalization for groups of students in the educational practice of the VET centre and, afterwards, of the Agency; - Increase in immigrant students' families' levels of participation in training activities
Elements of innovation	The prototype offers the opportunity to test intercultural education as an instrument which, while supporting the acquisition of specific learning objectives, fosters the social and cultural integration of students with an immigrant background. In terms of methodology, it introduces an approach based on "learning by doing", particularly appropriate for students that learn more easily when placed in an active situation and faced with real problems and challenges. In terms of organization, it promotes an innovative approach that gives value to group practices, facilitating the acquisition of transversal objectives (relational, communicative, organizational, etc.)

1) Studying the law, I learn the language 2) Studying the nation, I learn the language

Organization,	Capac Polytechnic for Commerce and Turism, Milan
contact person and email	direzione@capac.it
Year	2012/2013, 2013/2014
Prototype description	<p>The prototypes have the aim of improving immigrant students' school performance, especially in relation to their knowledge of the fundamental norms for their future occupation. This is done through the following actions: 1) greater involvement of families; 2) getting to know the most important norms and a specific sector's vocabulary, in the students' mother tongue; 3) creation of intercultural exchanges and education in the classroom; 4) creation of an Italian L2 online self-learning centre for foreign students. The prototype achieved 3 objectives: extension of course contents to history and geography, over and beyond the Law and sector norms; the creation of material for the whole class which includes a common group objective with different tasks and, for foreigners, an online in-depth linguistic programme in order to solve the task; a course for teachers on linguistic difficulties of foreign students and on how to use the material created.</p>
Prototype beneficiaries	Students enrolled in 3-year initial VET programmes; teachers; families
Main outcomes	<p>For students: increase in interaction between students and in classroom tolerance due to the introduction of an intercultural programme; increase in the understanding of specific normative content thanks to the translation of sector norms in 5 languages; increased involvement during training units due to the possibility of improving one's linguistic skills and, thus, classroom performance.</p> <p>For teachers: greater knowledge of immigrant students' linguistic needs and of differentiated teaching proposals; availability of material which, using new technology, offers the opportunity to respond to the specific needs of individual student groups (in this case of foreign students but could also apply to students with ADD/ADHD, learning difficulties, etc.).</p>
Elements of innovation	Use of new technologies in classroom projects; adoption of measures to analyse and manage the high number of foreign students at school (entry tests, material in students' native language, teaching material, intercultural programmes)

Now I know what to do and how to do it. Development of digital instruments on safety issues

Organization,	Fondazione Luigi Clerici, sede di Lodi
contact person and email	lodi@clerici.lombardia.it
Year	2013/2014
Prototype description	The prototype was developed according to a logic of integration and collaboration among the 3 different classes involved in the production of teaching/information material connected with safety norms in the workplace. The aim was to spread awareness for the fact that prevention and application of safety norms are fundamental for the reduction of accidents in the workplace and enable students to acquire the necessary skills to complete the internship part of the programme. In carrying out the prototype the students take on various tasks connected with: developing the script; producing a video; documenting the products produced and presenting the contents. The prototype includes, moreover, the possibility of cultural exchanges, documented and used for the creation of the various products.
Prototype beneficiaries	Students enrolled in the Car Mechanic Operator programmes
Main outcomes	Excellent results were achieved in terms of awareness on Safety issues. Each student participated according to his/her resources and skills, but everyone could take part in the satisfaction for a high quality finished product as a result of the shared experience. In general, the activities contributed to: greater cognizance regarding health and well-being; greater understanding regarding the consequences of one's behaviour; the opportunity to give value to students' extra-curricular skills; allowing students to feel part of a group and active agents in a project without ethnic or cultural differentiations.
Elements of innovation	The prototype's main innovation regards the fact that students were given responsibility for developing, producing and disseminating teaching material both in terms of contents and of methodologies – material that represents an integral (and not an “optional”) part of the school curriculum. A further focus was the attempt to update the lines of intervention, with particular emphasis on: the use of instruments connected with new digital (multimedia) technologies so widespread among the younger generations; a simple and clear language which, using different sensory channels, can facilitate understanding also for foreign students that often have difficulties, especially with technical-professional language.

1) Support to entry in the workplace for students exiting RDET courses
2) Sample increase and instrument assessment

Organization,	Associazione Scuole Lavoro Alto Milanese (Aslam)
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Year	2012/2013, 2013/2014
Prototype description	The prototypes illustrate the actions undertaken upon exit from the training programme and the definition of a specific role within the VET centre's organization that supports, oversees and monitors foreign students' entry in employment. This role, named EP (Employment Promoter) accompanies immigrant students during the job searching phase, with coaching and individual counselling actions. In the two year period, a set of modular guidance counselling actions were devised for exit from initial VET, together with support on entry in the workplace based on the needs of students with an immigrant background. The intervention begins with a mutual agreement between student and EP, then works on the development of self-awareness and, finally, ends with active interventions in job searching, such as the creation of a CV and covering letter, spontaneous applications, identifying potential employees, finding necessary information for job search management with a Job Centre, etc.
Prototype beneficiaries	3 rd and 4 th year Initial VET students
Main outcomes	Identification of the characteristics and functions of the EP (job profile and job description), including his/her positioning in the organization and relations with the other members of staff; organization of activities overseen by the EP; change in the organization of the VET centre with the inclusion of a member of staff (the EP) specifically dedicated to supporting and fostering immigrant students' entry in employment after initial VET; definition of instruments to monitor and evaluate outcomes deriving from the model; development of a model of best practice which can be replicated and disseminated. Moreover, further outcomes include: a) an increased percentage of employment among foreign students who completed initial VET; b) an increased level of education of foreign students who become more aware of their skills and abilities and consequently decided to continue on to a vocational diploma programme.
Elements of innovation	The main element of innovation of the prototypes is the dissemination, through the action of the EP, of the intercultural perspective among employers. This was achieved through the use of a questionnaire administered to employers with the double aim of verifying businesses' interest in employing foreign personnel and promoting the employment of immigrant personnel among more reticent employers.

The prototype *An analysis of foreign students' life cycles along the DDIF trajectory/path: highlighting strengths and weaknesses and imagining possible interventions* conducted by the Clerici Foundation in 2009/10 is not presented as it is described and analysed in Chapter 4.

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