Approccio Educativo alla Diversità nel Sistema Scolastico

Educational Approach to Diversity in the School System

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to promote a methodological approach able to foster greater education on the diversity in the school context. It is assumed that the educational and management strategy proposal can stimulate the acceptance and appreciation of "different" subjects, perceived as such for racial, physical, religious, ethnic reasons, even in the school system. If this were to happen, thanks to a work carried out at the origins of this social criticality, a cultural change aimed at integrating the diversity of considerable dimensions could be developed, with a consequent social and educational benefit.

Lo scopo del paper è promuovere un approccio metodologico in grado di favorire una maggiore educazione alla diversità nel contesto scolastico. Si ipotizza che la strategia educativa e gestionale proposta possa stimolare l'accettazione e la valorizzazione di soggetti "diversi", percepiti come tali per ragioni razziali, fisiche, religiose, etniche, anche nel sistema scolastico. Se ciò dovesse accadere, grazie a un lavoro svolto all'origine di questa criticità sociale, si potrebbe sviluppare un cambiamento culturale di dimensioni considerevoli volto ad integrare la diversità, con un conseguente beneficio sociale ed educativo.

Keywords

Diversity Management; School; Education.

Diversity Management; Scuola; Educazione

Introduction[1]

Over time, with the phenomenon of globalization and the technological development, which have filled in the gaps in the communication processes both at enterprise and personal level, we relate more and more with a plurality of experimental subjects considered different for a variety of features (racial, ethnic, cultural, social, physical, etc.) (Alberici, 2007; Ambrosini, 2001).

As a consequence, diversity management has become a crucial social and economic priority. In fact, at the enterprise level, a management approach to inclusion and to the enhancement of diversity has developed: the so-called Diversity Management.

The paper aims to analyze if this business model can be the appropriate tool for educating to diversity in the school context, which is the first, and main, place of interactions and relationships with others. Unfortunately, the "diverse" often represents a problematic issue that can be hardly managed with current methodologies, which fail to restrict the emergence of phenomena at school like bullying, homophobia, racism, religious intolerance, etc (Batini, 2010).

In this respect, Diversity Management could be the solution to this critical issues; by integrating any minority and working simultaneously on both the value of equality and on the awareness of diversity, it can greatly improve the "school "system, just like it happens in the "enterprise system". There are many advantages arising from the adoption of this management strategy, and it is assumed that they can be also contextualized and reproduced at school level too.

1. Educate to Diversity at School Context

School is the first, and among the most important, places of meeting and relationship; after all, every individual's didactic and educational experience is characterized by the continuous presence of the other. Entering into a relationship with others obviously means getting in touch with another identity, that is, with someone who is different from oneself (Giusti, 2012). In this way, in addition to knowing more about one's own identity, it is possible to enrich oneself thanks to otherness. We can affirm that there is an "I" precisely because there is a "You" from which to confront ourselves, a "He" from which to differentiate ourselves, and so on (Portera, 2006). Not always, unfortunately, this dialogue is properly recognized and valued. Diversity is often seen in a negative light, as something that can represent a threat to one's own identity and for this reason, the presence of the diverse frequently generates feelings of fear, anxiety and suspicion. Very often, this distorted perspective generates behaviors of violence and discrimination, and this is why it is essential to review the role of the main public place where the first and fundamental relations with others are established: the school.

In this regard, a few years ago, the Italian Ministry for Equal Opportunities has funded a project of public awareness and information, with a related work divided into three volumes, entitled "Educating to diversity in education", worked out by Beck (2013), based on a contract with the Italian National Bureau against Racial Discrimination).

Its initial objective, which is still of considerable significance, is that of educating to the understanding that every individual is different, so to the concept of uniqueness, but at the same we are all equal; Science and DNA prove it (Banks and Banks, 2009). Talking about oneself and listening to each other at school would make relationships, exchange and growth easier. Bul-

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1   The manuscript is the result of a collective work of the authors, the specific contribution of which is to be referred to as follows: introduction, paragraph n. 2 and conclusions are to be attributed to Domenico Tafuri; paragraphs n. 1 and 3 are to be attributed to Giulia Torreggiani.

lying, homophobia, racism, religious intolerance, abuses against women and against children originate from prejudice and ignorance. But prejudice is not innate; it rather has its foundation in family, environmental and social influences, and is structured from early childhood (Batini, 2010; Maritain, 2001; Palmieri, 2012). Therefore, if we believe it is right to try to minimize the occurrence of prejudices as much as possible, it is essential to intervene mainly at school, educational and family level to make diversity a real treasure, a new educational paradigm, and to encourage children to think critically (rather than telling them what they have to think about). Educating to diversity is therefore an ethical duty, especially in a school that wants to be defined as inclusive (Bo, 2016).

School has the characteristic of being one of the most important meeting places of the society. The diversity of presences inside it should be the reality of ever class. It would be important to check, for example, when the classes are set up, and that each class is extremely heterogeneous. A principle of "equi-heterogeneity" should be stimulated, i. e. a strictly fair heterogeneity in terms of composition, variety of social, sexual, religious, cultural origins and so on. School should be a place where diversities are reproduced. A place where diversity means extreme richness given by the originality of every one (Giusti, 2012; Lodge & Lynch, 2004). Instead, school often aims at massifying, homologating, assimilating the other in the group and conforming him. It must be understood and assimilated that our collective wealth is our diversity. The other, as an individual or as a group, is valuable insofar as he is diverse. In a socio-economic context like the current one, now more than ever, schools should educate students to consider the diverse not as a danger to their own security, but as a resource for their growth (Miron et al, 2010). However, an effective pedagogy of difference is certainly not expressed in sermons and indoctrination or through more or less sophisticated persuasion techniques, but above all by experiencing every day the reality of a school as a community of the diverse, thus not marginalizing those who are not equal or those who are not able to keep pace with the best ones.

Of course, for this to happen, it needs to consider as central elements of the educational relationship: listening, dialogue, the common pursuit and the use of active methodologies and techniques of animation, able to develop the critical skills to ask ourselves questions, to learn how to put ourselves in the others' shoes, to activate discussion networks, to think out of the box, to be creative and divergent. In this regard, the adoption of management principles, including at school level, of the innovative model of the Diversity Management already consolidated (mainly in the Anglo-Saxon countries) at enterprise level, are proposed.

2. The importance of Diversity Management Approch

The term "diversity management" dates back to 1987, when the Hudson Institute published the report Workforce 2000: the report informed the Americans that by 2000 the majority of their workers would have be Afro-American, Hispanic, Native American, woman, and belonging to other "minority groups."

This news surprised many American businessmen who, concerned by this, began to think seriously about the enhancement and support of their talents, belonging to different races, religions, ethnicities and lifestyles (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000).

Thus the concept was developed in reference to a human resources management model aimed at enhancing the various differences in US businesses, given the high diversity of the workforce."

For the American businesses, Diversity Management represents a strategic and operational solution. Working on two apparently opposite levels, the concept of equality and awareness of difference, Diversity Management makes the same opportunities accessible to any worker but in a different way. With this approach, every resource is strengthened according to his pace, competences and qualities (Buemi, Conte & Guazzo, 2016; Castellucci et al., 2009).

This management approach is a voluntary organizational program designed to create great-

er inclusion of all individuals into informal social networks and formal enterprise programs (Gilbert, Stead & Ivancevich, 1999). It tends to create a culture that values and appreciates diversities, although requiring a greater, systematic and planned effort as it means adopting an organizational paradigm that goes beyond a human resource model based solely on legal compliance, for the benefit of an organization committed in promoting the integration of any kind of minority, and the effective management of corporate diversity, at any level.

It is precisely this voluntary effort to address and deal with the issue of diversity that has led to the creation of the Diversity Management, understood as the set of actions of strategic use of business resources aimed at enhancing the traits of diversity (gender, age, sexual orientation and ethnical-cultural belonging) in the business, in order to promote better organizational conditions (Lauring, 2013).

the principles of the "Diversity Management" are becoming gradually more important in the business world, which must adapt, or rather act proactively, to be ready to face successfully the changes that are transforming (and have already transformed in part) the global socio-economic context, by evolving in synchrony with the environment that surrounds them and with which they must be able to operate and interact.

So this is a real business process of change that aims to enhance and make full use of the unique contribution that each employee can make to achieve business goals, and to help the organization meet the challenges and deal with the uncertainty from many external socio-cultural contexts.

3. The Potential Benefits of Diversity Management at School System

Many studies have shown that inclusion policies have a positive impact on several aspects, including improving management styles, competencies and performance in areas such as communication, staff management, objectives identification and planning (Buemi, Conte & Guazzo, 2016).

Benefits therefore affect the whole enterprise, and this is why the Diversity Management is defined as a "business case", that is, an approach that would lead to increased enterprise profits in the long run. In order to have a concrete idea, the European Commission conducted a research in 2003 entitled "Costs and Benefits of Diversity", in which, from sample of 200 community enterprises, the main perceived benefits that diversity can bring to the business of organizations were detected (Buemi , Conte & Guazzo, 2016; Castellucci et al., 2009; Laurinig, 2103).

In particular, purely socio-economic benefits were identified, such as:
• Increase in productivity.
• Encouragement to find innovative solutions;
• Ability to meet the most varied needs of consumers by increasing the customer base;
• Possibility to increase the competitiveness of the enterprise.
These must be matched the so-called "ethical" advantages, such as:
• Promotion of the interaction between different ethnic groups;
• Incentive to cultural change;
• Fight against prejudices;
• Increased commitment of employees;
• Set up of a more harmonious working environment.
Most socio-economic benefits, just like those ethical ones, are strongly contextualized to the school environment. In fact, the possibility of increasing human resource productivity, in relation to the school context, is equivalent to the ability to increase every student's performance regardless of his peculiarities.

The same goes for the search for innovative solutions that enhances resources characterized by any diversity, develops the possibility of diversifying training offerings and, on the other hand, of getting a series of new stimuli and prospects from students, which can culturally enrich the school environment.

Yet, succeeding in meeting a wider and varied range of needs from consumers corresponds to the ability of the education system to educate and equally form a wider pool of students, irrespective of their geographical origin, religion, the presence of physical or mental disability, etc, making the educational offer global and competitive. Greater competitiveness is, in fact, a clear consequence of the benefits gained through the adoption of the Diversity Management model at the school level; the term competitiveness may seem alien to the public education sector, but in an environment characterized by strong competition from private structures and an increasing pressure from European, US, and even Australian companies, it is of great importance. Being able to provide a school service, through the innovative management model described, able to welcome and enhance the many diversities of the current socio-economic context, would be a key strength for re-launching the whole system at international level.

With reference to the ethical and pedagogical advantages pursued in the corporate context, the transposition towards the school context is certainly more direct and explicit. In fact, they are all the conditions that maximize the individual' social well-being and, at the same time, increase the cultural level of the school environment. This creates a situation in which there are students with more developed human values, and professors and teachers encouraged to work in a more harmonious and stimulating context. The ethical benefits are also the basis for achieving economic advantages.

Finally, it is important to observe that the primary benefit achieved by the adoption of the Disability Management, in order to encourage a process of diversity education in the school context, is the ability to generate a social and cultural revolution for the benefit of the integration of the subject considered as diverse (Di Palma & Tafuri, 2017). In fact, by acting at a school level, a process of acceptance and appreciation of diversity is stimulated from the beginning; all this in a place, the school, where, otherwise, there would be the risk of consolidating the mental structures and prejudices which can hardly be modified later on.

Conclusions

In a social and economic environment characterized by a strong heterogeneity in several aspects, whether they are religious, cultural, racial, educational (and so on), diversity management takes on an increasingly important role.

In this regard, at enterprise level, in order to achieve long-term profit objectives, an innovative management model called Diversity Management has been developed. This approach aims at enhancing any form of diversity and pursuing a plurality of advantages, both economic and ethical.

The paper analyzed the potential that this managerial model would have if it were applied to the school context. It has been shown that most of the benefits produced in a corporate environment can be contextualized to the school one and, through the management of diversity, they allow increasing both the student's performance and the level of the educational offer, contributing to a greater competitive "school system".

Diversity Management, as a tool to educate the many stakeholders interacting daily in Italian schools to diversity, could be the key to a society characterized by a high degree of inclusion of "diverse" subjects and, thanks to them, enrich itself culturally and personally. This would maximize the outcomes already achieved by the various companies that have adopted the principles of this management model, which have succeeded in generating a sustainable social and economic benefit for the whole community over time.

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