Education in Multiculturality
Education to Interculturality

In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education
and in Formation Communities
for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy

Edited by
Enrica Ottone – Luca Pandolfi

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Front cover
Pavel Égüez, *Grito de los Excluidos*, mural en cerámica.
Cotacachi, Ecuador 2001
(Photograph by Luca Pandolfi, 2007)

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"

Diversity always proves a bit frightening, for it challenges our securities and the status quo. [...] In the face of cultural, ethnic, political and religious diversity, we can either retreat into a rigid defense of our supposed identity, or become open to encountering others and cultivating together the dream of a fraternal society.

"

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Intercultural Competences under Construction

Qualitative Analysis of Narration of Critical Incidents by a Group of University Students*

❖ Enrica Ottone

Abstract

This chapter presents the tool, the procedure and the results that emerged from the 'narration of critical incidents' experienced in multicultural contexts. The object of study is therefore the experience of multiculturalism and interculturality lived in educational, professional and life contexts and also the development of skills for experiencing a fruitful exchange – as it emerges in the narratives of a group almost entirely of university students. The analysis – conducted with qualitative methods – focuses on situations that give rise to critical incidents, immediate thoughts, emotions, actions and recognized skills. The aim of the activity and the survey is to focus on the development of intercultural competences in multicultural educational contexts.

Keywords

Intercultural skills – Intercultural competence – Intercultural education – Qualitative methods – Critical incidents

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* Translated from the original Italian by Vera Kopsaj

① The context

This chapter reports the results of the analysis of 'narration of critical incidents' obtained with the support of a qualitative tool used in the action-research-training project, entitled *Multiculturality and Intercultural Competences in Ecclesiastical Institution of Higher Education and in Formation Communities of Consecrated Life*[1]. The same tool was also used by the author for the collection and processing of the documentation prior to 2017[2].

In 2018, with the launch of the qualitative phase of the survey presented in this volume, the activity '*Narration of a Challenging Situation in a Multicultural Context*' was proposed as an optional activity to the participants during the third focus group meetings in which students – from a part of academic and ecclesiastical institutions and members of formative communities of Institutes of Consecrated Life located in Italy – participated. The intent was twofold: a) to have a formative impact on the participants and b) to gather information on how interculturality is perceived and experienced in educational and other multicultural life contexts, what competences are needed to live interculturality and how to develop them.

The initial inspiration for this work came from a comparison with the methods, tools and results of a survey conducted by researchers of the Catholic University of Milan through its Research Centre on Intercultural Relations. The team, directed by Milena Santerini, aimed to «trace – in the concrete professional practices of teachers and educational workers – the intercultural competences actually exercised»[3]; specifically, «three crucial competences for intercultural work were investigated: interpreting cultures, reducing prejudices, finding common horizons»[4]. The work presented here draws inspiration from the research of the University of Milan, but it was developed in a different context, with different aims and procedures, redefined in relation to a broader research of which it is a part.

② Hypothesis and purpose

The guiding hypothesis of this paper is in line with the action-research-training hypothesis set out in this volume. In educational contexts characterised by multiculturalism where the coexistence between people and groups belonging to other cultures is accepted – experienced as an opportunity and valued as a richness – one can detect an interrelated set of general or transversal competences (communicative basic relational competences) and specific or intercultural competences in the strict sense that attest to the fact that a dialogue and reciprocal exchange is taking place which opens up the possibility of experiencing interculturality as an intentional process that manifests itself when there are phenomena of interchange and reciprocal transformation/enrichment at a personal and institutional level[5]. These competences tend to develop over time and imply a *construction* work that is the task of the subject and is supported by the environment. The choice of using the verb *to construct* for specifying the work of personal development of intercultural competences recalls both the responsibility of the subject – who is the protagonist of this construction – and the contribution and support of various formative environments, in particular formal ones, but also non-formal and informal[6].

Education to interculturality is a current and urgent challenge that questions educational, professional and social contexts at all levels. In particular, it obliges institutions in which educators, teachers and other educational professionals are trained, to take stock of the education and teaching/learning actions and strategies put in place to promote and support the development of both personal competences to live interculturality and professional competences of a pedagogical nature to enable themselves to educate others to develop such competences.

After presenting the hypothesis, it is necessary to clarify the meaning attributed to the terms before proceeding to the description of the other aspects.

The construct 'intercultural competence(s)' has been the subject of research for decades in an international context: there are many convergences, but there is no agreement on an unambiguous definition that accounts for its complex nature[7]. In this work I use the expression in the plural[8] – intercultural living competences – referring to an 'interrelated set', conceived as a 'system', of competences, both specific (intercultural in the strict sense) and general or transversal (basic communicative and relational), that two or more persons put into action in the interaction and mutual interchange in multicultural contexts. These competences may be thought of as an articulated, interconnected and dynamic 'system' of proven capacities to use – in training, work, life situations in contact with people (and/or groups) who are bearers of cultural, linguistic, value diversity – knowledge, skills and internal dispositions (attitudes, values) enabling both to activate an appropriate, vital and fruitful interaction and interchange.

Intercultural competences are thus a dynamic complex of competences and subcompetences that are interrelated and 'interpenetrated'. The use of the term 'interpenetration' – recently re-proposed by Michele Pellerey who refers to John Dewey – draws attention to the integration of the person's stable internal dispositions, «understood as an interconnected and coherent set of attitudes, meanings, knowledge, skills and *patterns* or models of behaviour; neither single specific behaviours, nor disconnected sets of performances (Dewey, 1958)»[9]. The implications of this view for those involved in education are obvious: learning (and teaching) the competences to live interculturality requires a focus on promoting not only single components (knowledge, skills, internal dispositions) at various levels but also the interpenetration of all the components, the ability to manage them to the best of one's ability and the willingness and decision to continue to increase and develop them over time. A person who is competent in experiencing interculture manifests – as Milena Santerini states – a marked 'intercultural sensitivity'; he/she has a dynamic, open, plural vision of cultures understood as complex entities; he/she is aware of his/her own cultural identity and multiple affiliations and is willing to rediscover it in the confrontation and exchange with people different from him/herself; he/she is capable of interpreting and understanding cultures in a critical way, overcoming universalist and absolute relativist visions; he/she is able to recognise the various factors that come into play in the interaction; he/she is empathetic and able to decentralise, open to dialogue and self-disclosure; he/she knows how to listen and communicate in a correct, effective and appropriate manner; knows how to manage stereotypes and prejudices and is willing to accept others with trust, respect and curiosity; he/she knows how to seek/find together with others the reasons for living together in a balance between respect for difference and the search for common horizons and shared values[10].

An interculturally competent person is therefore able to interact in situations of high cultural differentiation both by activating, integrating, coordinating and operating one's own internal cognitive, affective-relational-communicative, motivational and volitional resources, – i.e. a set of consolidated knowledge and competences and other stable internal dispositions (such as curiosity and interest in the other, readiness to tell one's own story) – and by using the available external resources in a coherent and effective manner[11]. Authors have elaborated various models, frameworks, lists or repertoires of intercultural competences and agree in highlighting their multidimensional nature and in recognising that these competences manifest themselves with different degrees of maturity and develop over time, dynamically, in various formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts through long and articulated processes[12].

This conception of competences for experiencing interculturality is the basis of the present exploratory survey, which aims to probe how these competences are actually experienced in educational and other life contexts. The survey has a dual – *education and research* – purpose, i.e. it aims to:

- *raise partecipant's awareness* in the participants – through reflection on their own experience in multicultural contexts – of the challenges and opportunities posed by interaction with people from cultures different from one's own, and of the resources (knowledge, skills, internal dispositions) that are necessary to relate with an intercultural approach in educational, professional and life contexts in a perspective of mutual transformation/enrichment;
- *know and analyse* challenging situations experienced in educational, professional and life contexts in order to identify problems and opportunities related to the development and promotion of intercultural sensitivity, to bring out the resources (knowledge, skills, internal dispositions) that people consciously put (or could put) in place to realise truly intercultural encounters and exchanges and to identify effective educational paths and strategies.

③ Participants

There are 75 participants. The group consists of women religious and lay students and one male student[13]. The majority (69) attended the Master's Degree Courses at PFSEA in Rome and followed the teaching of Intercultural Pedagogy between 2017 and 2021.

The activity, which started in September 2018, was presented and proposed as an optional free activity to the participants in the third focus group of the research *Intercultural Competences in Universities and Consecrated Life*; 23 out of 167 had given their availability for the realisation of this activity, but only 6 of them completed the work as requested in the months of February to May 2020, in online mode with the guidance and support of a tutor[14].

A total of 75 participants completed the activity: 42 were Italian and 33 were of other nationalities. All the participants were resident in Italy either for reasons of study, mission in an Institute of Consecrated Life or previous migration. The 23 countries of birth of the participants, including Italy, distributed by continent are shown in Figure 1. By marital status, 41 lay women, 33 women religious and 1 man religious took part. The average age of the participants is around 30.

Fig. 1 – Geographical origin of the 75 participants (23 countries)
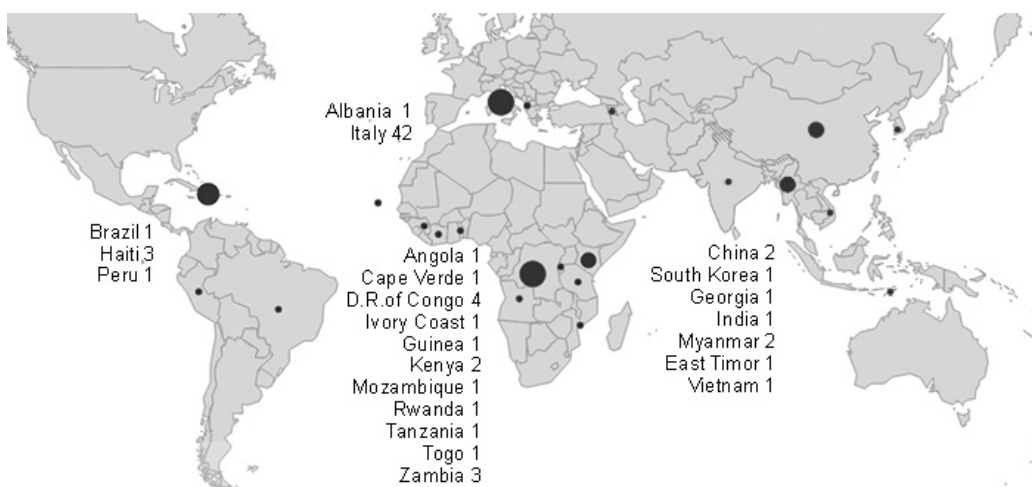
Participants (75) come from 23 countries: 11 from Africa (17), 3 from America (5), 7 from Asia (10), 2 from Europe (43). The 33 non-Italian students are temporarily resident in Italy for reasons of study or belonging to a religious institute. Some participants (3) emigrated to Italy from another country in a period prior to their study years.

④ | Methodology

The methodology draws inspiration from Italian and international research and various approaches including the narration of practices[15], the analysis of critical incidents[16] and the *atelier* of intercultural situations[17].

In the narration of practices, the narrative, explanatory and argumentative approach is often used with professionals. Scholars from the Catholic University of Milan who conducted the research, from which this paper has taken its cue, took up and adapted a Canadian model by Serge Desgagné and created a clear and effective working outline and procedure[18]. In the Canadian model described by Geneviève Audet, the narration of practices is «understood as a narrative of a situation-problem encountered by a teacher»[19]; the procedure consists of asking a group of teachers to formulate an initial draft of a narration of a practice experienced in a multicultural context, which is then rewritten by the researcher. In the next phase, the stories are analysed and grouped around certain stages that indicate the passage from a level of deficiency in the capacity for inter-subjective relations and consideration of the other to a level that denotes sensitivity and competence in establishing an inter-subjective relationship[20]. During the analysis, the researcher pays attention both to the facts told and to the meanings that the teller attributes to the facts[21]. The aim of the investigation is, therefore, to document and recognise (and teach to recognise) the knowledge that the person develops in the course of action by reflecting in action and on action in everyday life situations. It is a process of 'reflective conversation' with the situation, which practitioners carry out both when they have to solve a problem (reflection in the course of the action) and when they reflect on the action performed (reflection on the action)[22].

The Italian research presented by Milena Santerini and Piergiorgio Reggio takes the Canadian model described by Audet and adapts it, with the intention of favouring the emergence and description of implicit and hidden elements in the experience of the interviewees and, specifically, of «tracing – in the concrete professional practices of teachers and educational workers – the intercultural competences actually exercised»[23]. The researchers identified and proposed to the 45 participants to narrate practices related to three specific competences, understanding cultures, reducing prejudice and building shared horizons, and adopted a procedure based on Pierre Vermersch's technique of the action explication interview[24].

In the present project, the methodological framework takes up only some aspects of the model described above and integrates them with other approaches including the narration of critical incidents and – in some aspects – it also draws inspiration from the atelier experience of intercultural situations. The devised procedure consists in activating a process of individual reflection and writing, guided and supported at all stages by an educator or tutor, and of setting up moments of confrontation and exchange between colleagues within the group. The tool is a sheet containing the description of the work to be carried out in several stages or moments and the outline for the identification and detailed description of a challenging situation experienced first-hand by the person reporting[25].

Participants are asked to describe in a detailed, but concise manner, a challenging situation or event to be understood, not only as a problematic incident or event – i.e. an unusual, disconcerting, irritating event that may have generated misunderstandings, problems or conflicts – but also as an episode of effective and positive interaction and interchange in a multicultural context – i.e. an event experienced by the protagonist as surprising in a positive and pleasant sense.

When dealing with written narratives, it is useful to remember that these are interpretations arising from reflection on experienced events – i.e. remebered facts – to

which the narrator has attributed a meaning *a posteriori*. The very choice of identifying a given situation as challenging is already a fact that says something about the writer and this must be taken into account when analysing the stories since, as Luigina Mortari points out, "it depends on a plurality of factors: one's cultural background, one's educational history, the role one plays, the emotional situation one finds oneself in at that precise moment, the perspectives one nurtures"[26]. Without forgetting that the reader also has to deal with his own interpretations.

⑤ The procedure and the tool

When handing over the activity, participants were invited by the educator/tutor to narrate a challenging event or situation they had experienced in an academic, professional or everyday life context in interaction with a person (or persons) from a culture different from their own, in order to bring out the competences (knowledge, skills, internal dispositions) that the teller believes he/she put into practice in that situation. Through the story and with the help of an outline of questions and suggestions, either provided by the educator/tutor or emerged in the discussion with one or more colleagues, participants had the opportunity to reflect on their own experience, to analyse thoughts, emotions and actions, to clarify and make explicit the underlying dynamics and to bring out the competences they had implemented, often in a non-reflective and unconscious way, or those they could have implemented. They also questioned where and how the development of these competences takes place.

The tool – as already mentioned – is similar to the one designed and used by the researchers of the Catholic University of Milan[27], but it has been modified and adapted to be applied to different purposes and recipients and with a different procedure than the previous research. It is a form that contains the outline of personal work and the indications for drafting an account of a challenging situation – which the participants describe in detail – highlighting the experience they have gone through and the resources (knowledge, skills, internal dispositions) they have put in place. The drafting process includes moments of individual work guided by the educator and moments of discussion both in pairs and in groups with the person guiding the process (Fig. 3).

The drafting of the form entitled *Narration of a Challenging Situation in a Multicultural Context* is one of the activities required of students to pass the Intercultural Pedagogy course examination and is carried out in three stages through personalised tutoring and discussion with colleagues. In the experience carried out with the participants in the research *Intercultural Competences in Universities and Consecrated Life*, the procedure was revised and adapted to be offered entirely online: there was no exchange with the other participants, but there was a comparison and an exchange with the tutor; the tool and the activity remained substantially unchanged. Figure 2 shows the presentation sheet of the activity and the procedure; Figure 3 shows the outline that the participants used to write their story.

Fig. 2 – Presentation of the activity and online procedure

PURPOSE OF THE ACTIVITY

Describe the resources and competences deployed by the author in a challenging and/or problematic incident experienced when interacting with people from a culture different from your own in your everyday life context (university environment, work context, consecrated life community).

METHODOLOGY

The activity uses the methodology of narrating practice. Initially, the participants are asked to narrate in written and detailed form an incident experienced in a multicultural context; subsequently, they are asked to reflect on the intercultural competences implemented to deal with the situation described, i.e. the thoughts, emotions, actions implemented in the interaction with one or more people belonging to a culture different from one's own.

STAGES, TIMING AND PROCEDURE

TIMING	ACTIVITIES
First Stage: Narrate a challenging event or situation	
30 minutes*	• Identify in your life experience in the multicultural educational context in which you are embedded (living community or university environment) a single incident you experienced as challenging that relates to the interaction between you and one or more members belonging to a culture different from your own. • Once chosen, please describe it in detail using the attached form. • Once finished, kindly send your story by e-mail.
Second Stage: Reread and enrich your story	
15 minutes*	*If necessary,* • based on the reply you receive by email – in the light of the comments and follow-up questions sent to you – revise your narrative, enriching it with details, to make it clearer and more comprehensive. • Once finished, kindly send your narrative by email.
Third stage: Analyse intercultural competence	
15 minutes*	• Reread the final version of your narrative, identify one or more skills you implemented in the challenging and/or problematic situation you narrated and write them down in the space provided. • Describe the resources you activated, i.e. the knowledge, skills and internal dispositions (attitudes, values) you put into action in the situation. • Afterwards, if you wish, you may also fill in the section 'Any remarks'. Finally, assign an evocative title to the narrated event, which is representative of the listed competence(s). • Once you have finished, kindly send your narrative by email.
Fourth Stage: Submit final version	
15 minutes*	*If necessary,* • in the light of the comments and suggestions provided to you by email, revise your 'Form', draft the final version and kindly send it by email.

* The requested work must be completed no later than 1 week from the date of receipt of the reply email. The time indicated in the first column is only an indication.

Fig. 3 – Working track

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A CHALLENGING INCIDENT OR PROBLEMATIC EVENT YOU EXPERIENCED IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT *Describe the situation in detail, dwell on concrete details and avoid generalisations; describe the context in which the incident took place and explain how it happened; dwell on each stage; describe your experience and possible interpretations of the event (yours and those of the people involved).*	*First stage* *The following questions can help you clarify and describe the situation:* • When and in what context did the episode occur? *Please describe briefly.* • Who are the persons involved? *Describe the protagonists, clarify their role and, if necessary, state whether other people witnessed the event.* • What happened? *Describe the event by detailing what happened at the beginning, during and afterwards.* • What did you think? What did you feel? How did you behave? • *Tell your thoughts, your emotions, what you said and/or did.* • What meaning do you attribute to the event? *Please explain what the event meant to you.* • In your opinion, what significance did people from a different culture than yours attribute to the event? *Imagine how he/she experienced the event (what he/she thought and felt) and describe his/her interpretation of the event.*
TITLE OF THE EVENT *(you can assign it at the end of the activity)*	*Second stage* *Write a title, i.e. a concise and effective expression to summarise your narrative.*
CONTEXT, PERIOD	*Indicate the context and period in which the incident occurred (e.g. community of life, or university or work environment...).*
COMPETENCE *taken into consideration*	*Third and fourth stages* *Write down the main competence you implemented (e.g.: I was able to decentralise, or I understood the other person's point of view, or I was able to recognise my own prejudices...).*
RESOURCES YOU ACTIVATED IN THE SITUATION	
Knowledge	*Ask the tutor to send you some examples if you need help filling in this and the following lines.*
Skills	
Internal Provisions *(values, attitudes)*	
ANY COMMENTS	

The stages shown in the overview in Figure 2 are the same as those followed in the first part of the project, although it was not possible to include group exchange moments in the online experience. The educator or tutor – in each phase – had the task of giving written feedback to the participants through comments or questions to clarify the narrative or questions to stimulate further reflection. In the following two examples, the tutor's questions are put in square brackets.

"*After a long discussion together with the other group members, we agreed on the steps we could take* [What did you discuss? Summarise what you said to each other, how the discussion took place, what did you do]" (31_Rel).

"*The rejection* [Are you sure it was rejection? Could there have been a misunderstanding?] *that I encountered from the parents initially in the interview was that they did not believe that their child could behave in the way I described to them because he did not behave like that at home*" (2_IT_Lai).

⑥ Analysis of the results

The analysis of texts, already available in written form, requires a qualitative research approach that allows the deployment of a set of interconnected interpretative practices, in order to achieve a better understanding of reality in its complexity. In education and training, it is important to provide for the personal involvement and participation of the researcher, with a view to a better understanding of the object of investigation.

The 75 narratives written by the participants in this research were collected by the author over a period of three years and then subjected to content analysis (*Qualitative Content Analysis*), a qualitative approach based on explicit rules of analysis and interpretation of written texts. This approach involves the refinement and use of categories or codes that the researchers can establish in three ways:

- a priori, on the basis of a previously provided theory or outline of questions (deductive or *top-down* approach);
- during the analysis, through an inductive process starting from the material itself (inductive or *bottom-up* approach);
- by combining the two previous approaches, i.e. by considering both the research questions defined a priori and the categories that emerge during the analysis phase that allow the codes to be refined[28].

The analysis of the content of the written forms that the participants handed in on file was carried out through a labour-intensive process and coding procedure. First of all, the forms were sorted, numbered, analysed, classified and recorded in a database in which some general information useful to describe the characteristics of the participants (type, sex, age, marital status, country of origin, work position) and the general aspects of the narrated incident (title attributed to the event, year, place, context, focus, role of the narrator, origin of the other person/group) were collected[29].

In a second step, the 75 documents were imported into the MAXQDA software[30] and were organised into subfolders according to the 'context' variable in which the incidents described took place (university, workplace, communities of consecrated life, other contexts)[31]. The work of reading, selecting sentences or entire paragraphs and assigning codes then began. The content encoding process in qualitative research is complex and the coder can make mistakes in interpretation, which is why in this specific case the coding was done by two people in order to detect convergences and possible discrepancies[32]. In order to 'make sense' of the large amount

of research data (the text corpus consisted of 44,432 words), a mixed approach was adopted: bottom-up, typical of *Grounded Theory*, and top-down. After analysing slightly less than half of the documents, the coding work was interrupted in order to relate the created codes, unify some of them, create aggregations and specify certain codings. The MAXQDA software that transposes the coding into graphic form was useful both during the work and for visualising the aggregations in maps.

In the analysis phase, in addition to the quantitative aspects, the qualitative aspects that emerged from the variety of situations and contexts described were mainly noted. The qualitative analysis of the narratives required an initial assessment of the documents based on the questions posed in the question outline that participants followed in writing their narratives; the analysis was conducted in an open manner through the problematisation and classification of the various parts of the text and the identification of subcategories which – since they were not defined a priori – were subject to continuous revision and clarification.

The questions proposed to the participants in the work tool (Fig. 3) were the starting point for the analysis of the narratives which then focused on the following issues:

1. What kind of *challenging situations* did they narrate?
2. What was their *first thought*?
3. What *emotions* did they feel?
4. What *actions* have they taken?
5. What *skills* did they apply?
6. How did they *develop the competences* they demonstrated?
7. What *effects* did the activity have on the narrator? Has there been an evolution?

The summary table of the code system of the analysis carried out with MAXQDA software is shown in Figure 4. The encoded segments – on the total textual body which was composed of 44,432 words – are in total 845, divided into seven macro-categories that refer to the questions listed above. Each category is structured within it into subcategories. In total, the codebook is made up of 130 codes (Appendix).

Fig. 4 – The code system: seven macro-categories

Code System		845
> KIND OF SITUATIONS		91
> What did you think immediately? THOUGHTS		93
> What have you done? ACTIONS		197
> What did you feel? EMOTIONS		148
> What skills have you put in place? COMPETENCES		186
> How did you develop this competence? DEVELOPMENT		98
> How has the situation evolved? EVOLUTION		32
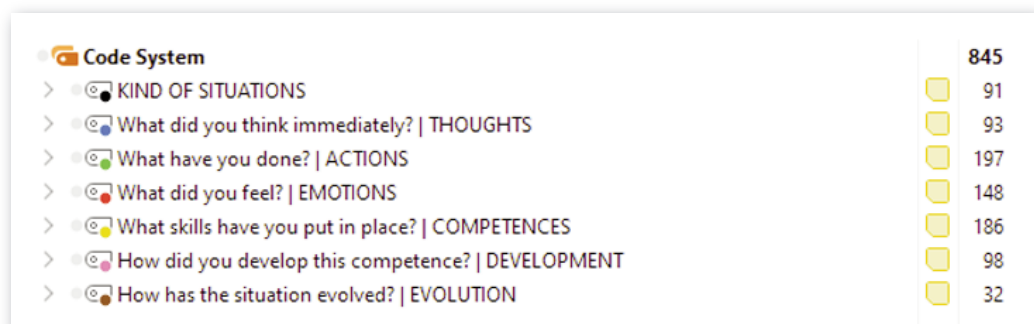
Source: 'Critical Incidents' project developed with MAXQDA software (15/12/2021)

The seven macro-categories listed in Figure 4 (*Situations, Thoughts, Actions, Emotions, Competences, Development, Evolution*[33]) were used to analyse the content of all documents in order to identify the respective categories and subcategories of codes inherent to the questions posed to the participants. In the first stage of the analysis, a hybrid approach was followed – i.e. initially open codings were assigned and then the codes were reorganised and systematised within each macro-category in a hierarchical manner[34]. The figure below provides an overview of the categories identified with reference to the first five macro-categories (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 – The code system: seven macro-categories with their respective categories

Code System		845
KIND OF SITUATIONS		0
Communication		31
Social behaviors		41
Social attitudes		19
What did you think immediately? | THOUGHTS		0
about the other		42
about me		0
"I don't know and I don't know what to expect"		3
"I don't understand why he says (or behave) like this to me"		12
"I am unable to handle this situation"		10
"I made a mistake"		3
"I confirmed my stereotype"		7
about the situation		16
What have you done? | ACTIONS		0
Interchange: absent or problematic		38
Interchange: weak or superficialy		48
Interchange: towards interculturality		111
What did you feel? | EMOTIONS		0
I felt bad: I felt...		111
I felt good: I felt ...		37
What skills have you put in place? | COMPETENCES		0
Communication and relational skills		64
Dealing with prejudices and conflicts		44
Understanding one's own culture and that of others		57
Finding common horizons		21
How did you develop this competence? | DEVELOPMENT		0
various experiences: family, friendships, sports, migration, tr		18
community experiences of consecrated life		20
internship and volunteer experience		16
work experience		25
experiences in an international university context		19
How has the situation evolved? | EVOLUTION		32

Source: 'Critical Incidents' project developed with MAXQDA software (15/12/2021)

In the next sections, I will present the results of the qualitative analysis conducted on the first five macro-categories in the following order: the types of challenging situations, the thoughts formulated in the immediate situation, the emotions felt, and the actions and skills that the participants recognise having implemented in the narrated episodes. Finally, I provide some results on the development and effects of the activity.

6.1   Challenging situations

The situations described by the participants describe a varied set of interaction experiences lived in educational, professional or life contexts that led – depending on the case – to a meeting and an exchange and/or – in most cases – to a misunderstanding

or a real clash between the narrator and one or more persons with linguistic and cultural differences. Almost all the students at the time of compilation resided in Italy, so most of the events narrated are set, in fact, in Italy; just over a dozen participants report experiences that took place in other geographical contexts, as depicted in Figure 6.

Fig. 6 – The geographical context in which the events are set
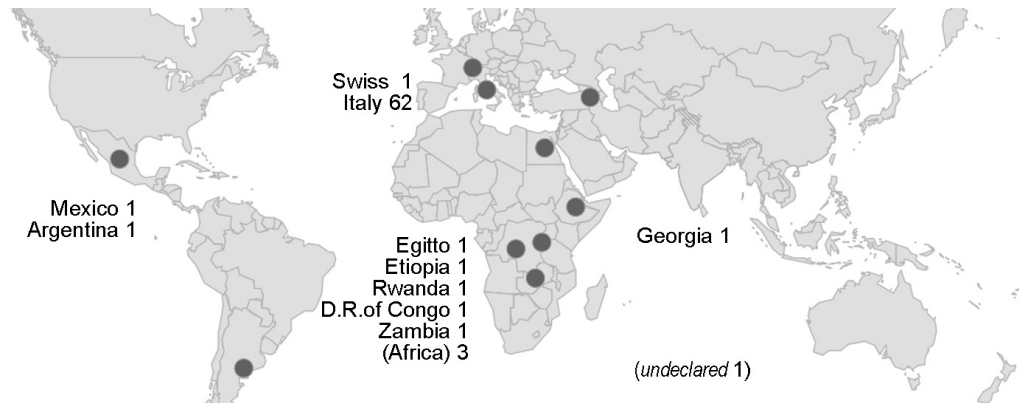
Participants (75) narrate events that took place in 10 countries: 8 in Africa, 2 in America, 1 in Asia, 63 in Europe of which 62 in Italy.

Events are thus distributed in relation to the life contexts in which they occurred:

- 24 in workplaces (nursery schools, schools, residential communities for minors, gyms);
- 20 in communities of Institutions of Consecrated Life;
- 16 in places of training (summer camp, catechesis), voluntary work and mission;
- 8 in university settings;
- 7 in other contexts (family, public establishments).

Most of the narrated events occurred in Italy (83%). Only 17% of the incidents occurred in other geographical contexts: in the country of origin (4 non-Italians); in volunteering experiences or international travel (4 Italians); on a mission (5 non-Italian men/women religious).

The narratives of challenging situations were analysed and labelled or coded and then the various typologies were grouped into three categories. Some narratives referred to more than one type of challenging situation: in 15 cases, 2 different codes were therefore assigned in the same form and in one case 3. In total, coded segments referring to the type of situation are thus 91 and are distributed in the following three categories:

- *Communication* (31), with 7 subcategories (Fig. 7);
- *Social behaviours* (41), with 10 subcategories (Fig. 8);
- *Social attitudes* (19), with 4 subcategories (Fig. 9).

Analysing the cases in which two or more codifications referring to the type of situation were attributed to the same narrative, it is interesting to note that 10 out of 15 cases refer to communicative aspects (of which 7 linguistic) that are combined with other communicative aspects or with aspects concerning social behaviours and social attitudes. The linguistic aspect (lexical poverty, short and confusing conversations) is the most recurrent not only in relation to the *Communication* category but also to the other two (Chart 1).

6.1.1 Communication[35]

Communication category could have been included as a subcategory of *Social behaviours*, but due to its high frequency it was considered separately. There are, in fact, 31 incidents centred on challenging situations concerning interpersonal communication – both verbal and non-verbal – which generated confusion, misunderstanding, disagreement, prejudice and – in some cases – even conflict. Figure 7 shows the frequency with which the 7 subcategories relating to *Communication* recur in the stories.

Fig. 7 – Types of challenging situations grouped under the category Communication
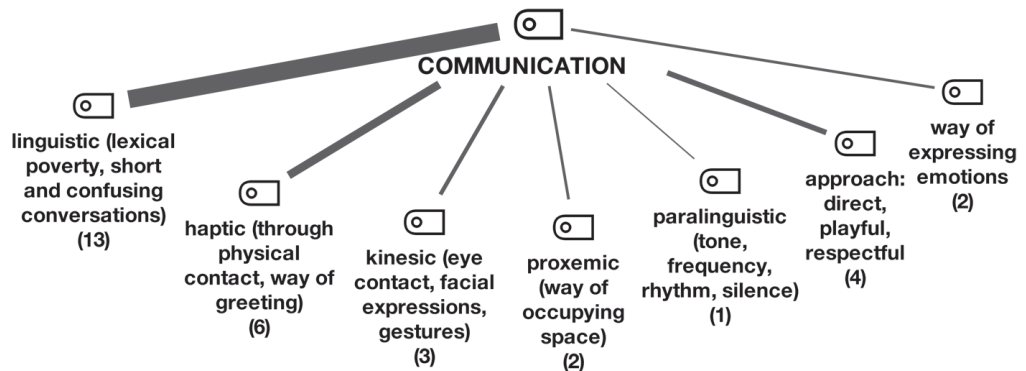
Source: The figure is generated with the MAXQDA software using the code-subcode hierarchical model function.

The verbal and non-verbal communicative aspect is the most recurrent challenging factor and appears in more than a third (28) of the 75 narratives. The percentages of codings referring to this category are distributed as follows: 17.3% of the participants question the lack of knowledge of the language and lexical poverty that generate short and confusing conversations; 8% indicate the haptic dimension (i.e. misunderstandings due to a different way of greeting or handling physical contact); 5.3% refer to misunderstandings inherent to a different communicative approach (direct, joking, or reserved and respectful style); finally, a few others indicate aspects concerning kinesics, proxemics, paralinguistics, the way of expressing emotions (Graf. 1).

The linguistic difficulties that appear in 13 narratives refer to a lack of knowledge of Italian or the other person's language; lexical poverty hinders or prevents communication and mutual understanding, and is a source of unease and closure. An Italian educator, working in a nursery school, expresses it this way:

> "Last year, however, I felt a sense of difficulty, incomprehension and embarrassment interacting with a Filipino mother. It was September, during one of the most delicate periods at the nursery school, that of acclimatisation. Usually, in this circumstance, I confront the parents to get more information about the habits and, in general, the way of being of the children. The mother's lack of knowledge of the Italian language and my unwillingness to accept the difficulty she showed had initially made this stage impossible. In fact, I could not understand what she wanted to tell me and I could not communicate my thoughts to her and so our conversations were brief, fleeting and confusing" (17_IT_Lai).

A Zambian woman religious living in a formation community of an Institution of Consecrated Life in Italy narrates the communication difficulties she encounters:

> "Because of the language difficulties, it is tiring for me to participate because when it comes to speaking in a discussion or reading a text in public, some sis

Graph. 1 – Percentages of codes in the subcategory of challenging situations (out of total documents)

linguistics (lexical poverty, short and confusing…	17,33
compliance with rules and regulations	9,33
ethnic and religious stereotypes and prejudices	9,33
haptic (through physical contact, way of greeting)	8,00
relationship with colleagues and superiors	8,00
educational styles and interventions	6,67
corporeality (skin tone, weight, hair, clothing…	6,67
gender stereotypes (woman / man relationship,…	6,67
food / drink / smoking	5,33
traditions (use of things)	5,33
reprimand / warning	5,33
approach: direct, playful, respectful	5,33
sensitivity to the experience of migration	5,33
belonging / separation to / between ethnic groups	4,00
kinesics (eye contact, facial expressions, gestures)	4,00
liturgy (rhythm and pronunciation)	2,67
way of expressing emotions	2,67
personal hygiene (shower, smell)	2,67
privacy management	2,67
proxemics (way of occupying space)	2,67
paralinguistics (tone, frequency, rhythm, silence)	1,33

Source: The figure is generated with the MAXQDA software using the statistics function.

> ters want words to be pronounced correctly and expect speakers of another lan-
> guage to read exactly like Italians. So, knowing this, I stopped participating"
> (19_ZA_Rel).

In the participants' narratives, body language – which is partly innate and partly learned through socialisation processes – also generates incidents and challenging situations and is a source of misunderstandings due to one or more aspects of communication: paralinguistics (tone, frequency, rhythm and silence); kinesics (eye contact, facial expressions, gestures); proxemics (way of occupying space); haptics (communicative messages expressed through physical contact, e.g. greeting gestures). The following is an example narrated by a Congolese woman religious:

> "On the day of the feast [...] one of us gave a shout of joy as is usually done in
> sub-Saharan tradition. Unfortunately, this shout was not pleasant for a person
> who directly expressed his displeasure. I was hurt and immediately felt that we
> were being judged. In my context this shout is an honour, a sign of blessing, a
> wish, a 'being with', it is acceptance of the person, it is telling the person that
> we love them. A particular event without this shout is a sign of a hidden prob-
> lem" (69_CO_Rel).

6.1.2 Social behaviours

In the category of grouped situations – labelled *Social behaviours* – there are ten subcategories concerning habits and customs in taking food and drink or smoking; aspects related to corporeity (considering skin tone, weight, hair, clothing parameters); customs in personal hygiene; rules for the management of privacy; the way of relating to colleagues and superiors; the way of expressing and/or receiving a reprimand/rebuke; attitudes towards respecting rules and regulations; ways and styles of educational intervention and other customs and traditions (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8 – Types of challenging situations grouped in the Social behaviours category
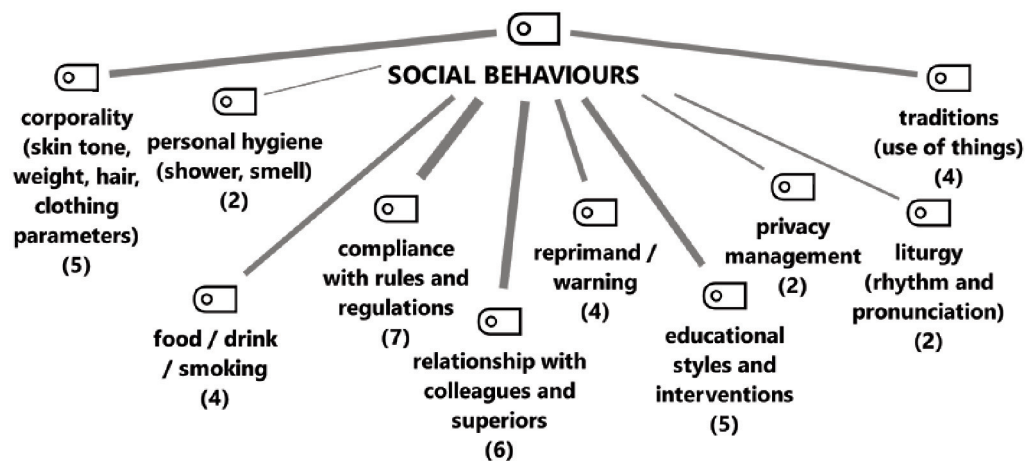
SOCIAL BEHAVIOURS

corporality (skin tone, weight, hair, clothing parameters) (5)

personal hygiene (shower, smell) (2)

food / drink / smoking (4)

compliance with rules and regulations (7)

relationship with colleagues and superiors (6)

reprimand / warning (4)

educational styles and interventions (5)

privacy management (2)

traditions (use of things) (4)

liturgy (rhythm and pronunciation) (2)

Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the hierarchical code-subcode model function

The situation that recurs most often (7) in the narratives of this category concerns *compliance with rules and regulations*. Here is an example given by a Haitian nun.

> *"There were two of us giving catechesis to a group of First Communion children. During two meetings, one of them behaved inappropriately: he didn't listen, disturbed the other children and did the opposite of what we catechists were proposing to the group. After the second time, when the mother came to pick him up, we explained the situation and the mother said: "I'm sorry" and gave the boy a kiss. This behaviour annoyed me and I got angry because I expected her to reprimand the boy and ask him not to repeat the behaviour he had had, instead she gave him a kiss. I thought this behaviour would incentivise the boy to continue doing the same. For me it is wrong to react in this way when faced with such behaviour from the boy"* (24_HA_Rel).

In interpreting the incident, the student does not mention other factors that may come into play such as the age of the children or other contextual variables; on the contrary, by reporting her thoughts, she expresses a judgement that seems to put an end to the possibility of dialogue.

In other episodes, too, the narrator sometimes does not seem aware of the complexity of the factors that come into play and draws hasty conclusions attributing the misunderstanding or the difficulty or the distance of positions to presumed and stereotyped differences that might exist in the style and way of behaving without actually knowing and investigating them. Another example that has been codified in *educational styles and interventions*[36] is the following:

"One problematic situation I faced was at the summer centre in my role as co-ordinator of the primary school sector. During a day of intensive training while we were analysing together the activities that the animators were to carry out with the children during the summer centre, a Vietnamese nun approached me to tell me that she did not agree and would not carry out the activity described, as in her culture the game – in particular one of the gestures required of children during play (passing under the spread legs of a companion) – was inappropriate" (49_IT_Lai).

6.1.3 Social attitudes

In the third category, denominated *Social attitudes*, critical incidents but also interchange incidents have been grouped into four subcategories (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9 – Types of challenging situations grouped under the Social attitudes category
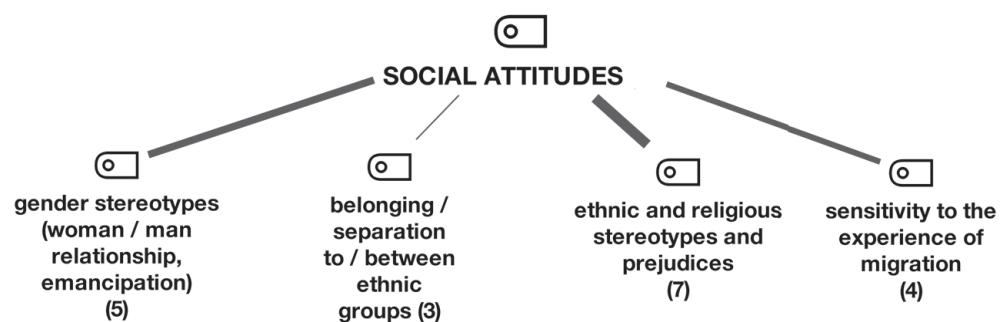
Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

The most frequent situation concerns *ethnic and religious stereotypes and prejudices* (7). Here is an example described by an Angolan nun.

"The episode I am narrating happened at a catechism meeting [...]. A boy, addressing me but in front of everyone so that the others could hear him, told me: 'I don't want to be with you in the group because you are a 'coloured person' and cannot speak Italian'. I personally did not have time to say a word while his companions reacted immediately reprimanding him for the words he said to me. Two girls, in particular, said to him: 'A. you cannot say that word'. There was confusion in the whole group. [...] The catechist took A. with her because he was crying desperately and first tried to console him. I stayed with the rest of the group and did not know what to say, but at that moment the thing that came to my mind was to tell them about my family so I could get their attention" (13_AN_Rel).

The other codes of this category collect episodes that denote the tendency to evaluate specific social objects positively or negatively: *gender stereotypes (woman-man relationship, emancipation)*; *belonging/separation to/between ethnic groups* (3); *ethnic and religious stereotypes and prejudices* (7); and, a last aspect, coded as *sensitivity to the experience of migration* (4) (Fig. 9).

The work of classifying the narrated situations made it possible to identify some recurring situations in the educational contexts in which the research was carried out, which can be provided as examples to help trainers and trainees to identify, recognise and learn how to consciously handle those situations in which critical incidents could be generated. This collection may be continued and compared with the results of other completed and ongoing investigations[37].

| ## Immediate thoughts

Participants were not limited to describing the difficult situation in detail, but were stimulated and guided to remember what they thought in the immediate, initial moment of the described episode. In relation to this aspect, 93 statements[38] concerning the cognitive component were coded as follows:

- thoughts '*about the other*' (42), with 6 subcategories;
- thoughts '*about me*' (35), with 5 subcategories;
- thoughts '*about the situation*' (16), with 4 subcategories (Fig. 10).

Fig. 10 – Immediate thoughts into three categories
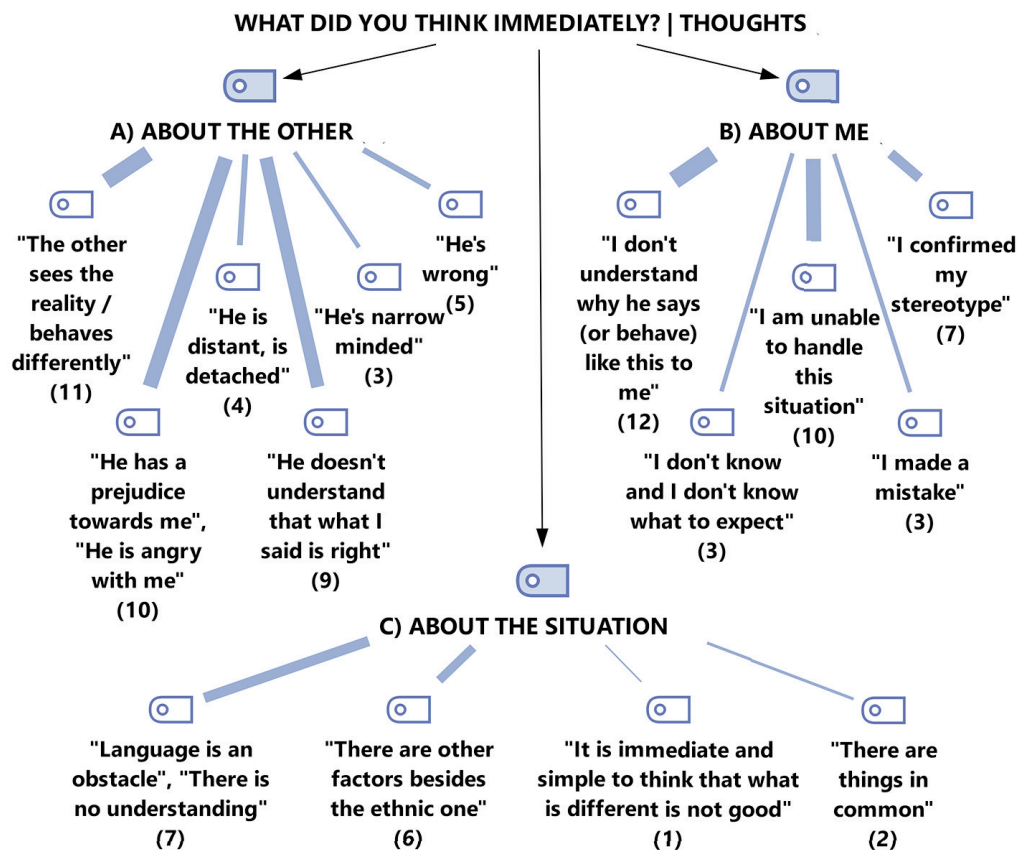
Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

6.2.1 Thoughts 'about the other'

As can be seen in the figure, this first category collects a substantial number of codes compared to the other two. Almost half of the statements referring to immediate thoughts (42) refer to a thought 'about the other', i.e. to expressions in which who narrates detects and attributes to the other an intention or makes a judgement about him: *The other sees reality / behaves differently* (11); *He is distant, detached* (4); *He has a prejudice towards me / He is angry with me* (10); *He doesn't understand that what I said is right* (9); *He's wrong* (5); *He's narrow minded* (3) (Fig. 10).

In the immediate, diversity is perceived as a problem; there is an inability to consider other factors in the situation and the person is unable to decentralise. In many cases – when reading the narratives – it can be seen that the initial thought was then changed in the course of the narrated event, as shown in the following example. An Italian student narrates an episode that occurred on the last day of her stay in Ethiopia at the end of an international volunteering project.

"I explained to him that it was a cry of happiness and gratitude, but I don't think he understood. He made no sign of understanding and his attitude remained cold and detached. At that moment I felt embarrassed but above all annoyed. In fact, at first, I thought the uncle was insensitive and could not understand how touched I was by that moment" (72_IT_Lai).

In this case, the student – reflecting on the episode with the help of colleagues – later claims to have judged without knowing; in other cases, the person remained firm on her initial position. Below is an episode of misunderstanding experienced by the catechist with the mother of a child in her group, already mentioned. The Haitian nun, who carries out her service in a parish in Rome, was surprised when she saw that the mother not only did not call the child back, but rather embraced him and immediately activated a thought about the mother:

"For me it is wrong to react like this in the face of this boy's behaviour" (24_HA_Rel).

Choosing to narrate this episode as an example of a challenging situation experienced in a multicultural context, the woman religious seems to attribute this diversity to a different way of approaching respect for rules that she links to ethnic factors – but this interpretation is beyond the scope of the narrative. The expression used is, in fact, '*For me it is wrong...*' and not '*For my culture...*'.

6.2.2 Thoughts 'about me'

The second subcategory groups the codes here referred to as *thoughts 'about me'*. There are 35 expressions in which the narrator turns her thoughts and an introspective gaze first on herself than on the other, reflects on her own experience, becomes aware of what she is experiencing and searches within herself for the source of misunderstanding and error. There are five subcategories:

I don't know and I don't know what to expect (3*); I don't understand why he says me (or behaves) like this to me* (12); *I am unable to handle this situation* (10); *I made a mistake* (3); *I have confirmed my stereotype* (7) (Fig. 10).

An example is as follows: a woman religious tells of having had a recall whose meaning she did not understand.

"One evening, at assessment time, we were all sitting on the floor in a circle. I sat quietly holding my legs to my chest. A Samoan sister approached me and told me to sit properly. At that moment I was bewildered, I did not understand why she was telling me as follows. At the same time I felt humiliated (even though she said it to me in a whisper). I thought about my way of sitting and I did not find anything improper, on the contrary it seemed to me a polite and respectful way" (56_MY_Rel).

The initial difficulty of accepting the recall and understanding the reasons for it emerges in three narratives, but this is the only incident in which the narrator immediately turns her thoughts to herself. She feels humiliated, but does not feel anger and suffering towards the other. The incident, unlike the other two, has a positive epilogue.

6.2.3 Thoughts 'about the situation'

The third category groups consist of four subcategories, in which 16 codings are gathered, referring to immediate thoughts that suggest a more attentive reading of the complexity '*of the situation*' and from the outset aware of the factors that come into play. If one looks at the numbers, there are few (only 20%) who say that they were aware from the very first moment that in the situation perceived as challenging various factors come into play in addition to the ethnic one (6), including that of the lack of knowledge of the language (7); who are able to recognise from the outset that they were tempted to think with distrust of the different from themselves (1); who immediately turn their thoughts to the search for aspects in common (2) (Fig. 10). I propose two examples. The first refers to the awareness that there may be other triggering factors besides ethnicity in the observed situation.

> *"I don't know whether the issue may have been generated by cultural factors or whether there was already a past between the two women, but it seemed to me that there was prejudice on both sides"* (1_IT_Lai).

The second example gives a consideration that the narrator developed while reflecting on the incident and her immediate thoughts and describes the conclusion she came to.

> *"I have considered that when we see something different from our point of view, it is immediate and easy to think that it is not good. But I have learnt that we have to wait and question to understand and have the disposition to learn and decentralise to grasp those different cultural aspects that can help us enrich our knowledge and understanding of the human conduct of others"* (7_VT_Rel).

In comparison with the hypothesis – on the basis of the analysis carried out – it can be seen that, in the challenging situations narrated by the 75 participants, the tendency to formulate thoughts that immediately focus on diversity as a 'problem' and the propensity to attribute the causes of the 'problem' to the other (39) are more recurrent in the immediate thoughts prevailing over the ability to suspend judgement and stop and reflect on oneself (35) and the situation (16) in order to identify other factors in addition to the ethnic one.

This result highlights the need and usefulness of helping trainees to reflect on their thinking cycle, to turn their thoughts on themselves and other factors (as well as the other) and to become aware of how immediate thoughts are interconnected with emotions and actions.

6.3 Emotions

Expressions referring to emotions were identified 148 times in the narratives and were organised into two categories:

- *I felt bad* (111), with 8 subcategories,
- *I felt good* (37), with 7 subcategories (Fig. 11).

Comparing the numbers, the "weight" of emotions referring to states of unease (75%) is immediately apparent. In fact, the participants chose to narrate mainly problematic critical incidents despite the fact that they had been asked to refer both to challenging incidents experienced as an enriching interchange and to events experienced as adverse and problematic.

Fig. 11 – Emotions into two categories*
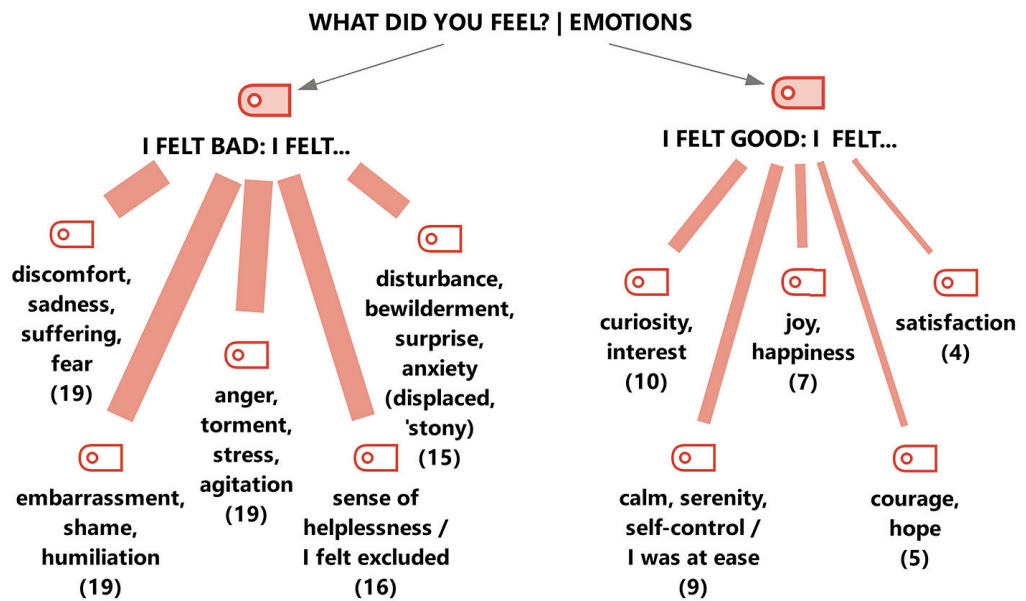
Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

6.3.1 I felt bad

There are 111 expressions grouped in the category *I felt bad*, i.e. 75% of the macro-category *Emotions*. In 66 (out of 75) narratives the participants report having felt bad at one or more moments of the narrated incident, i.e. they remember having felt, especially at the beginning of the episode, one or more emotions or moods of discomfort. The five subcategories illustrated in Figure 12 group together 78% of the expressions of discomfort detected: *discomfort, sadness, suffering, fear* (19); *anger, annoyance, torment, stress, agitation* (19); *embarrassment, shame, humiliation* (19); *sense of helplessness and exclusion* (16); *disturbance, bewilderment, surprise, anxiety (feeling displaced, 'stunned')* (15). The remaining codings, which are not represented in the figure because they are less frequent than the previous ones, refer to other states of mind such as feeling *others' prejudice against one's self* (7) and feeling *observed, strange, misunderstood, criticised, mocked* (8) or *discouraged, disheartened, challenged, exhausted* (8).

There are therefore numerous examples that could be given, but I will limit myself to two. In the first, an Italian student recalls the emotions she experienced following an incident at university with a fellow student an African country. One aspect that is evident in this narrative, as in others, is the need to allow time to pass.

> *"I tried at first to have a dialogue with my colleague, but she preferred to leave, at that moment I got down, and [I felt] impatient and angry, because we had not clarified the situation. In the days that followed, she and I were distant and did not make eye contact. It had been three weeks since the incident happened, I remember as if it was yesterday that my colleague approached me and in that instant we had a dialogue and eventually we embraced"* (57_IT_Lai).

The second example concerns an episode that occurred in a mission context. A Congolese nun narrates a critical incident that occurred between her and a young Italian volunteer who was serving in the educational work she was coordinating, and highlights a sense of helplessness that she experienced in not being able to understand the reason for the girl's suffering.

"[...] when sisters came to ask me what the problem was with this girl's behaviour, then I asked myself: What did I say? Why did she get angry with me? At that moment I thought back to the times we had spent together to find the reason for her suffering, but nothing came to mind" (35_CO_Rel).

Again, as in the previous case, after some time, through dialogue the situation evolves into a mutually enriching interchange.

Looking at the relationship between the codes assigned to emotions and those assigned to challenging situations, I highlight other considerations. For example, by cross-referencing the most recurrent types of situations (7 or more frequencies) and the states of mind of discomfort, one notices that the difficulty of communicating verbally (which, as I have already pointed out, is also combined in some cases with respect for rules and norms) is connected with almost all the emotions in the '*I felt bad*' category and in particular with a *sense of helplessness and exclusion, discomfort, sadness, suffering, fear* (Fig. 12).

Fig. 12 – Relationships between codes with multiple frequencies
(categories 'Situations' and 'Emotions-discomfort')
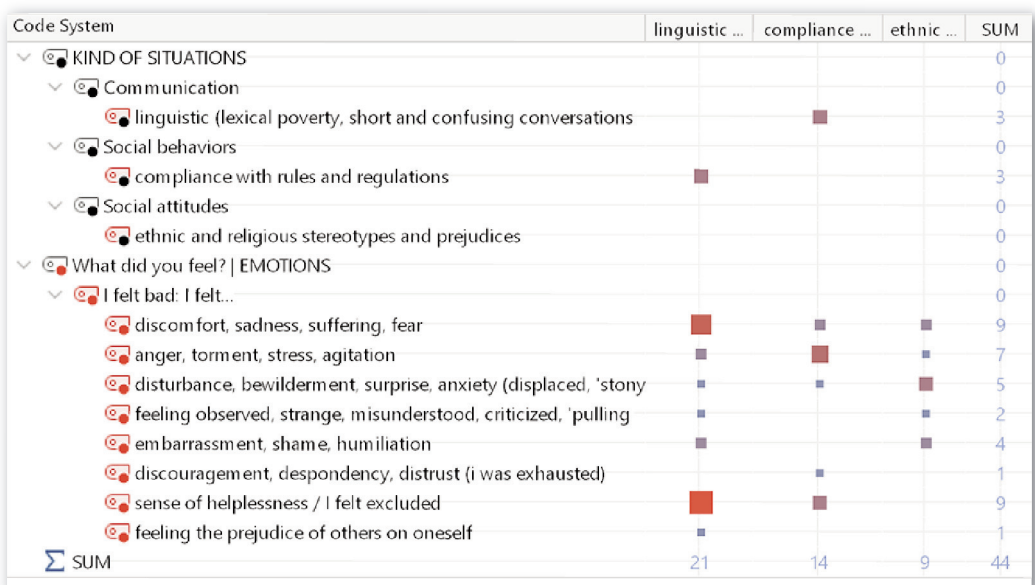
Source: The figure is generated using MAXQDA software with the code relationship exploration tool.

Continuing to explore the correlations – in particular those between emotions and thoughts – it is interesting to see the map depicting the relationships between emotions that generate states of discomfort and immediate thoughts. As can be seen in Figure 14, the emotions generating unpleasantness are mainly related to the subcategory named the *thoughts about the other* and in only one case with *thoughts about me* ('*I do not understand why he says or behaves as follows*') (Fig. 13).

The mood of embarrassment, shame and humiliation is connected to other moods of discomfort such as *anger, torment, stigma, discomfort, fear, sadness, feeling misunderstood, displaced, in pain, powerless, excluded*. These emotions are linked to thoughts that emphasise non-knowledge and non-understanding, the realisation of the diversity of the other, interpretations or judgements about the other. These are situations in which the immediate thought is not about the other but is directed at oneself and the situation is more closely related to emotions that appear less intense such as, embarrassment or surprise and to states of well-being such as calm, curiosity, courage.

Fig. 13 – Map of the codes of relationships between Emotions-Discomfort and Thoughts
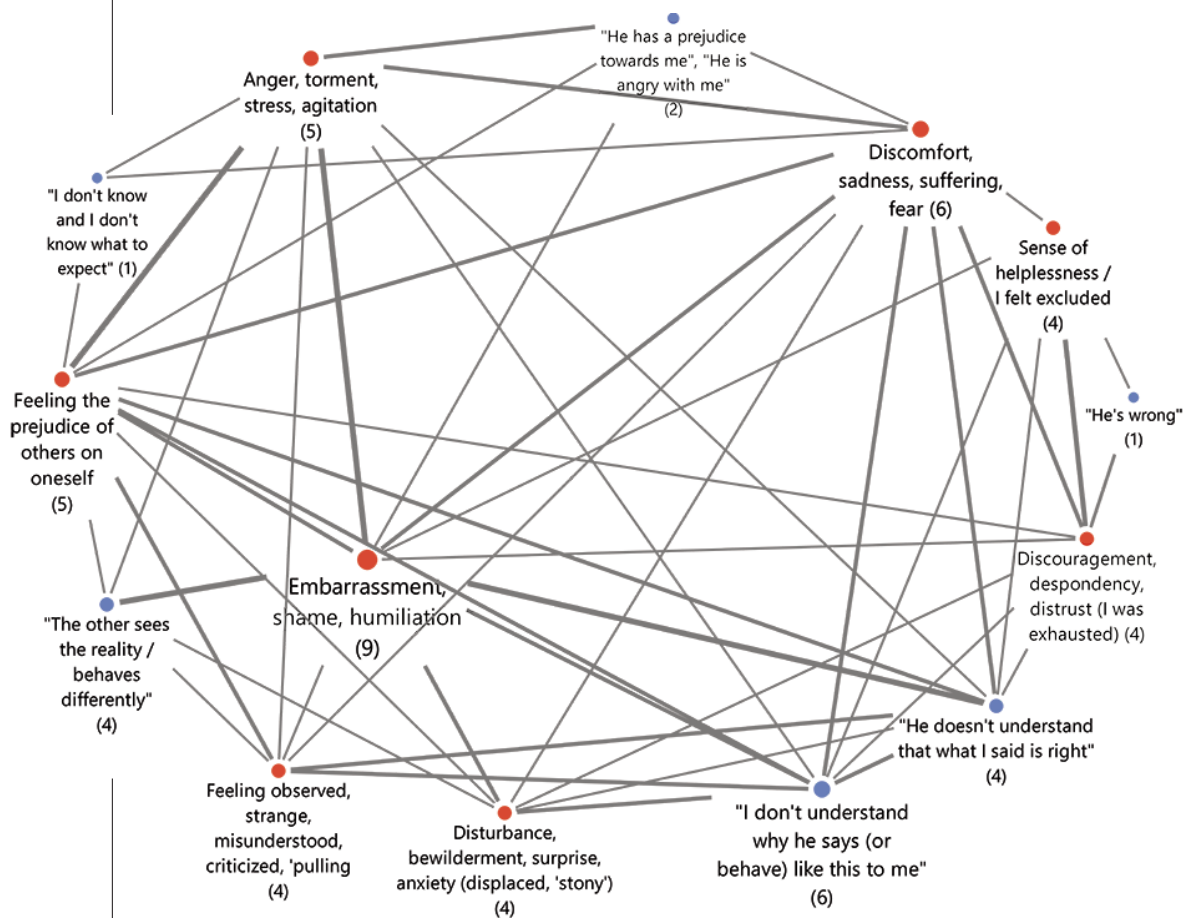
Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the Code Map function.

"*I looked at them and caught in their eyes the emotion they were feeling at that moment, which was one of discomfort and disapproval. And I wondered what specifically had not seemed right to them on my part. I felt uncomfortable and almost embarrassed but then I realised that I had to be the one to clarify what had just happened*" (26_IT_Lai).

6.3.2 I felt good

In 25% of the cases (37 expressions), the participants report having experienced emotions that made them feel good: *curiosity and interest* (10), *courage and hope* (5), *joy and happiness* (7), *calmness, serenity, self-control, being at ease* (9), *satisfaction* (4), (Fig. 11). The two remaining codings, which are not represented in the figure, refer to *astonishment and surprise* (*in a positive sense*) (1) and *gratitude* (1).

In many narratives the 'feeling good' is found after an initial phase in which emotions that generate a state of unease predominate: it takes time, patience, reflection and dialogue to allow the situation to evolve and a state of well-being to take over. An example of this transition from states of discomfort to states of well-being is provided in Figure 15 in which the expressions and their respective codes assigned in MAXQDA are shown. The Italian student narrating a challenging event she experienced with an Egyptian boy in a foster home, describes in a few lines her initial altered emotional state, then her choice to move away in order to manage her irritation. Finally, she admits to having regained calm and self-control (Fig. 14).

Fig. 14 – A coding example
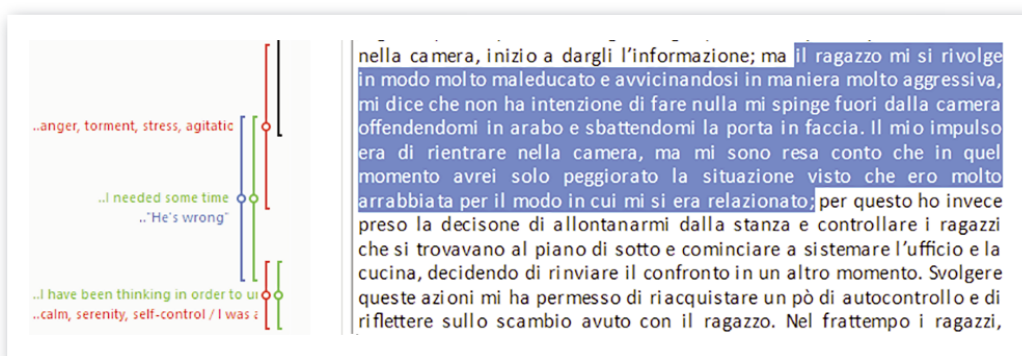
Source: The image shows codes created with MAXQDA on the document 47_IT_Lai.

In another episode narrated by an Italian student, curiosity and interest and a state of well-being shine through from the very beginning of the narrative. A course colleague from India, before leaving for her country, gives her a gift: a cloth. Thinking back on her emotions, the student writes as follows:

> "*If I was curious before, when she explained to me in detail how it is used in her country, I felt joy because I realised the great value of the gift that had just been given to me. Of course, if she had not explained to me the importance she and her culture give to this type of cloth, I would have simply seen a beautiful centrepiece. In fact, I think it was her introduction and explanation of the gift that was crucial for me to fully embrace it*" (40_IT_Lai).

This last example is the only case that refers to an interchange situation that does not present, as in other cases, an initial problematic experience.

In conclusion, the net result obtained through the analysis of the narratives (75% of the coding on emotions and states of discomfort and only 25% on emotions and states of well-being) – which certainly stemmed from the choice to narrate mainly critical problematic incidents – deserves attention and highlights the need to promote the ability to recognise and manage one's emotions and to become aware of the interconnection or interpenetration between emotions, thoughts and actions. It is a challenge that calls on educational contexts to pay attention and utmost care to this aspect. The decision to implement pathways and strategies that help promote the ability to recognise and manage emotions could help people avoid investing/wasting energy, time and resources in having to manage states of discomfort that may arise from misunderstanding, lack of knowledge or superficiality of assessment or from different ways of expressing and manifesting emotions.

6.4 Actions

The analysis of the expressions concerning the narrator's behaviour in the course of the incident made it possible to identify 197 statements which – on the basis of the general hypothesis that guided the research – were grouped into three subcategories of *Interchange* as follows:

- *absent or problematic* (38), with 9 subcategories;
- *weak or superficial* (48), with 4 subcategories:
- *towards interculturality* (111), with 5 subcategories (including one with 4 other sub-codes) (Fig. 15).

Again, as already noted in the analysis of emotions, in the 75 narratives the majority of participants indicated several actions. Some of them refer to the immediate behaviour enacted in the first stage of the incident and in many cases indicate an initial difficulty or closure, which, however, is overcome later on through the decision to 'take time' for reflection, observation, listening, dialogue and the search for explanations.

In the coding phase, it was decided to consider all the actions as it was not possible to distinguish between those in the trigger phase of the event, those implemented during and those at the end (Fig. 15).

Fig. 15 – Actions into three categories
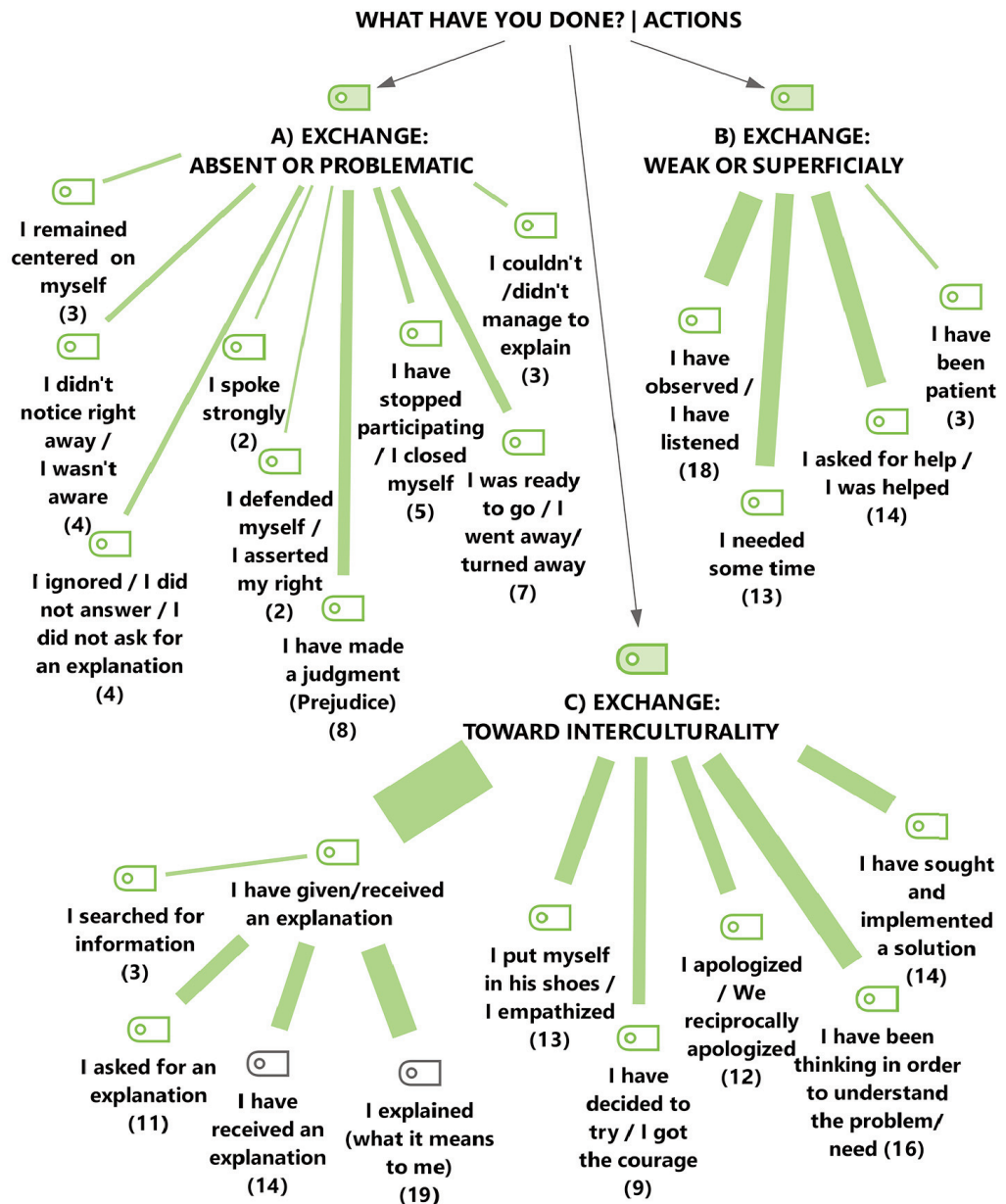
Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

In many narratives, there is an evolution *from* actions that indicate an inability to enter into a relationship *to* others that support the choice to seek an exchange in a conscious and intentional way. If one looks at Fig. 15 as a whole, it is immediately evident the substantial number of actions coded with the label *I gave/received*, an ex-

planation that highlights the need to know, understand and comprehend. This action lies in many cases between two types of action: after an initial refusal or closure, the decision *to explain/explain oneself* allows the person to decentralise, to understand, to tell, to apologise. In relation to this aspect, before describing each category with its respective subcategories, it is useful to introduce a consideration that transpires from an analysis carried out with an analysis tool that has different characteristics from MAXQDA, the *IramuteQ*[39] software that was used for a statistical analysis on the textual corpus of the 75 narratives, formed by the 44,384 occurrences[40]. The analysis served to identify the frequencies of the headwords and also to explore certain relationships. An initial result can be seen in Figure 17 in which only the 20 most recurrent verbs in the entire corpus are listed, to which the verb 'to do' with 348 frequencies is added in first place in the order[41].

Graph. 2 – First 20 verbs in descending order (excluding the verb 'to do'=348)
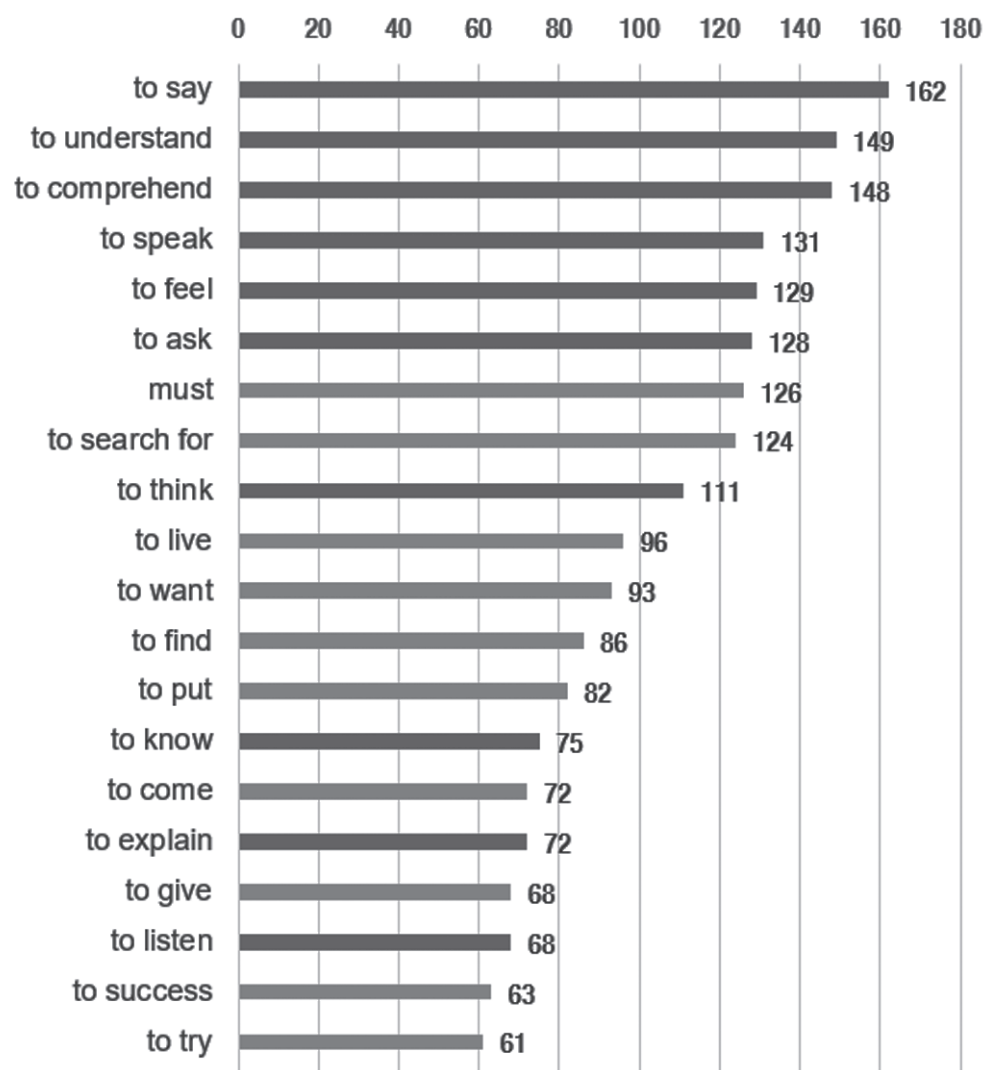
Source: The graph is generated with IramuteQ

The most recurrent verbs indicate going towards the other (*to say, to speak, to ask, to explain, to know, to listen*), the need to interpret (*to know, to understand, to feel, to search for, to think*) and to experience (*to live, to want*).

The analysis of the co-occurrences graph of all the lemmas in the corpus makes it possible to better grasp the context in which the actions represented by the most

recurring verbs are placed, those linked to acting through understanding/compre-hending/searching for/knowing the culture/the different with a movement that goes towards the other through communicating (saying/speaking, but also feeling, think-ing, asking) (Graph. 3).

Graph. 3 – Co-occurrence graph of corpus lemmas
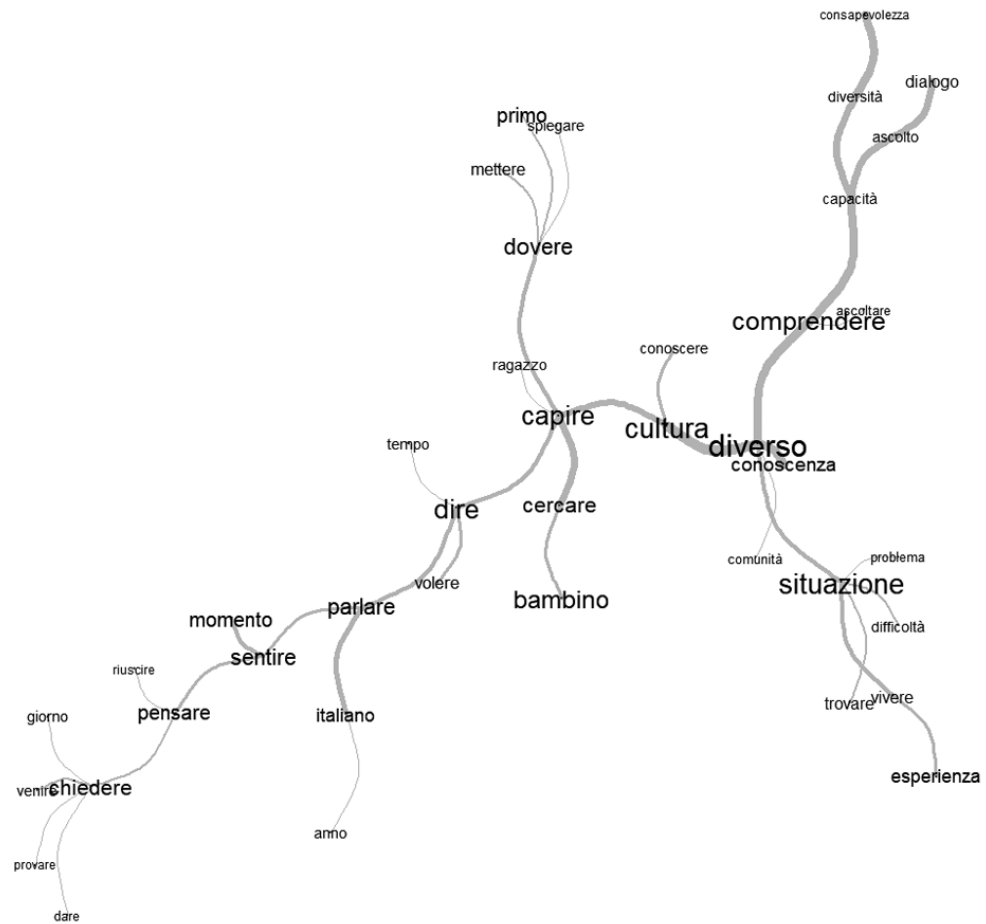
Source: The graph was created by selecting up to 70 occurrences (excluding the lemma 'to do').

The exploration with *IramuteQ* through the analysis of the most recurring verbs provides an initial, more general approach to the analysis of actions, which will be better clarified in the following points in which I will analyse the result of the encod-ings resulting from the analysis conducted with MAXQDA.

6.4.1 Absent or problematic interchange

The first subcategory, *Interchange: absent or problematic* contains 38 actions (19% of the total) which were grouped into the following 9 subcategories: *I remained centred on myself* (3); *I made a judgement/Prejudice* (8); *I defended myself/I asserted my right* (2); *I spoke strongly* (2); *I was ready to go/I went away/I turned away* (7); *I ignored/I did not respond/I did not ask for an explanation* (4); *I stopped participating/I shut down* (5); *I did not notice right away/I was not aware* (4); *I couldn't/I didn't manage to explain* (3).

An example is provided by a student who works as an educator in a residential community for minors. She describes a tense situation between her and an Egyptian teenager in which she says she chose to walk away and admits that she 'needed time' to manage her emotions before intervening.

"My impulse was to go back into the room, but I realised that at that moment I would only make the situation worse as I was very angry at the way he had related to me, so I instead made the decision to leave the room and check on the guys downstairs and start tidying up the office and the kitchen, deciding to postpone the confrontation until another time" (47_IT_Lai).

The analysis of the correlations between emotions or moods of discomfort and actions of the subcategory *Interchange 'absent or problematic'* highlights two aspects. On the one hand, there is a relationship between closing and blocking behaviour – *I stopped participating/I closed myself off, I was ready to go/I went away/I turned away; I ignored/I did not answer/I did not ask for an explanation, I did not notice at once/I was not aware* – and emotions such as embarrassment, shame, humiliation, a sense of helplessness, discouragement and distrust. On the other hand, there is a connection between moods of discomfort and defensive and oppositional reactions – *I defended myself/I asserted my right, I spoke strongly, I made a judgement/Prejudice* (Fig. 16).

Fig. 16 – Code map: correlations between 'Unease Emotions' and Actions – Absent or problematic interchange
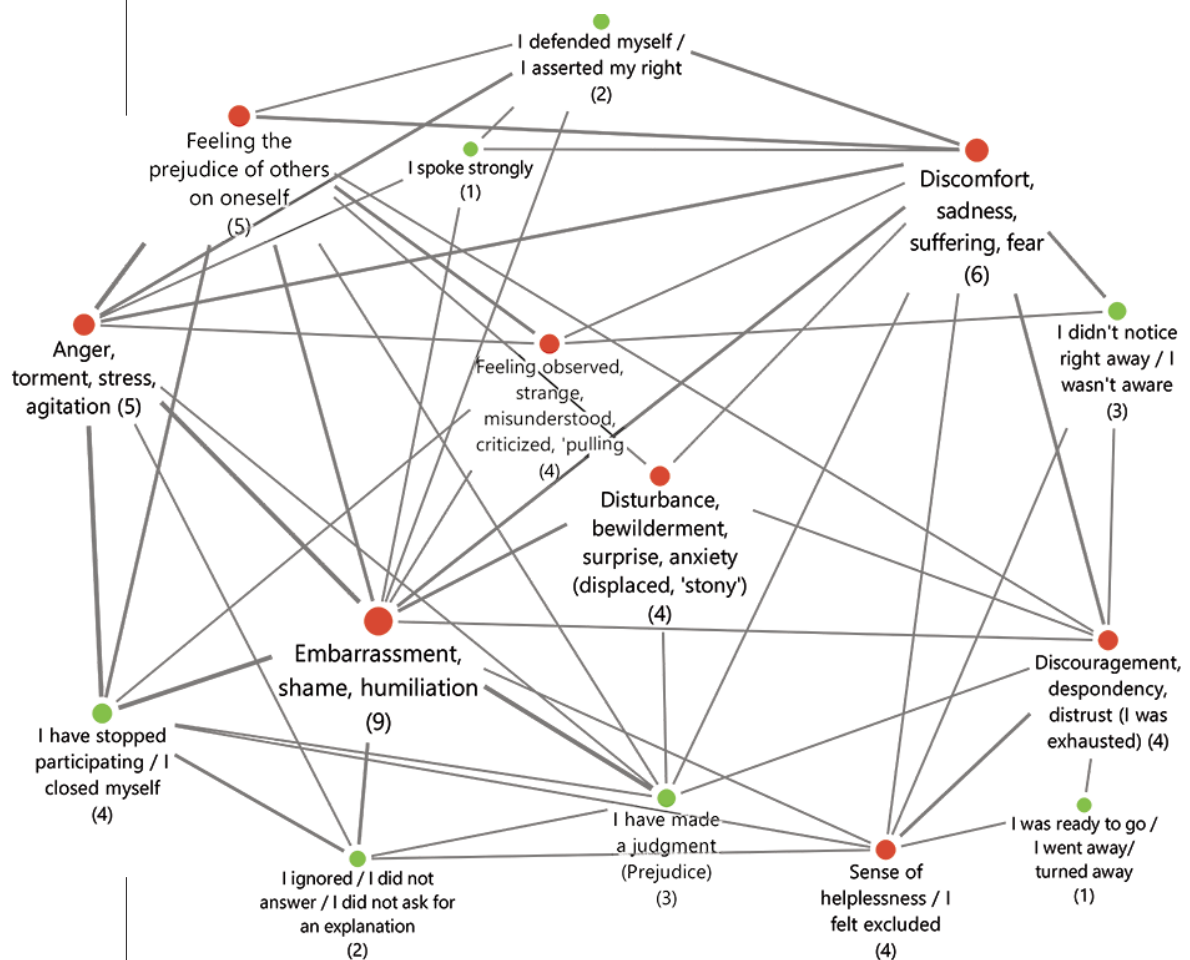
Source: The figure is generated by the MAXQDA software with the *Code Map* function.

In the narrative of a Congolese woman religious confronted with the contempt expressed by some 'non-African' sisters for a food she had cooked, the relationship between strong emotions ("*Taken by anger and feeling sorry*") and actions ("*Immediately after dinner I went to my room, I did not participate in the recreation which is obliga-*

tory for us") is evident. Walking away, stopping participating and needing time to change one's mind are linked in this incident (and also in others, as can be seen by looking at the dots and lines on the left-hand side of Figure 16), to 'feeling the prejudice of others on oneself'. In this case, the incident is resolved only after the intervention and mediation of an external person.

> *"The next day the superior, realising I was angry, asked me to tell her what had happened. I explained and let her know my decision not to cook any more. The following week I did not go to the kitchen and continued so until the General Mother and the superior persuaded me and, at a community meeting, emphasised the subject of diversity. Since then I have changed my mind"* (21_CO_Rel).

Another example – taken from a narrative already quoted – refers to an incident at a party where a confrontation was lacking and a simple gesture triggered sadness and anger. A woman religious narrates her reaction and state of mind of discomfort in response to a reaction of disappointment she perceived from a sister for expressing her joy with a form of vocal sound, between singing and howling, as is the custom in some African countries.

> *"I was hurt and immediately felt that we were being judged. [...] I felt sadness and anger inside realising that people did not know about different cultures. In response, I reminded the person concerned that we live in an international community so all cultures have the right to express themselves"* (69_CO_Rel).

Starting from this last expression in which the narrator claims the right to expression, one can make a twofold reflection. On the one hand, in fact, it is necessary to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to express their own diversity, but on the other hand one sees the risk of opposing, of absolutizing aspects of one's own traditions by claiming one's own space and one's own 'turn', as Santerini acknowledges by noting the emergence of new temptations of 'colonialism' in internal relations in contexts such as that of international Institutes of Consecrated Life[42].

In fact, the response she claims to have given seems to close rather than open dialogue, and runs the risk of leaving no space and not creating the conditions that foster dialogue, interchange and the search for common ground.

6.4.2 Weak or superficial interchange

The remaining 80% of codified actions refer to an interchange that can be placed on a continuum from a weak and superficial level of intercultural experience to a more mature and conscious one.

The actions that have been grouped in the subcategory '*Interchange: weak or superficial*' are 48, equal to 25% of the total of the codings: they range from taking and giving the other person time – *I needed some time* (13), *I have been patient* (3) – to reflection that requires observation and listening – *I have observed/I have listened* (18) – to the recognition of needing the help of others – *I asked for help/I was helped* (14).

I will give an example of this last aspect: a young woman religious from northern India, noticing the tension present in her community between two subgroups of novices belonging to two ethnic groups who live in a situation of open conflict there, turns to the educator not knowing what to do.

> "*I made some gestures and talked to another group in order not to bring external problems into the community, but I felt unable to mediate. Therefore, I confronted the educator in secret to solve this problem. I told her how I lived the sit-*

uation we were experiencing between us that she had not realised. I told her my feelings, that is, how I felt. I explained to her that I felt bad seeing young people preparing to enter religious life behaving like that in the community. Then I asked her to be attentive and to help them. The educator was not aware of the situation we were experiencing in the area and the repercussions in the community, and she thanked me for having the courage to share this with her. Afterwards, there was a dialogue between the educator and those who were involved in this situation. I observed that the situation improved day by day, the educator met the girls personally, dialogued with the group and slowly the situation became positive and normal. After that it was easier because even outside in the society the conflict was lessened" (70_IN_Rel).

In this case, the narrator apparently does not play an active role in the situation, but nevertheless performs a mediation that enables the others to deal with the problem.

6.4.3 Interchange towards interculturality

In the third category, more than half of the codings were included. There are 111 (or 56% of the total) expressions coded as '*Interchange: towards interculturality*' (Fig. 15). If one looks carefully at the third section – reproduced in the figure below – one immediately notices a consistent grouping around the subcategory called '*I gave/received an explanation*', which contains 47 codings and is divided into four further subcategories: *I searched for information* (3); *I asked for an explanation* (11); *I have received an explanation* (14); *I explained (what it means to me)* (19) (Fig. 17).

Fig. 17 – The third subcategory of the category 'Actions'
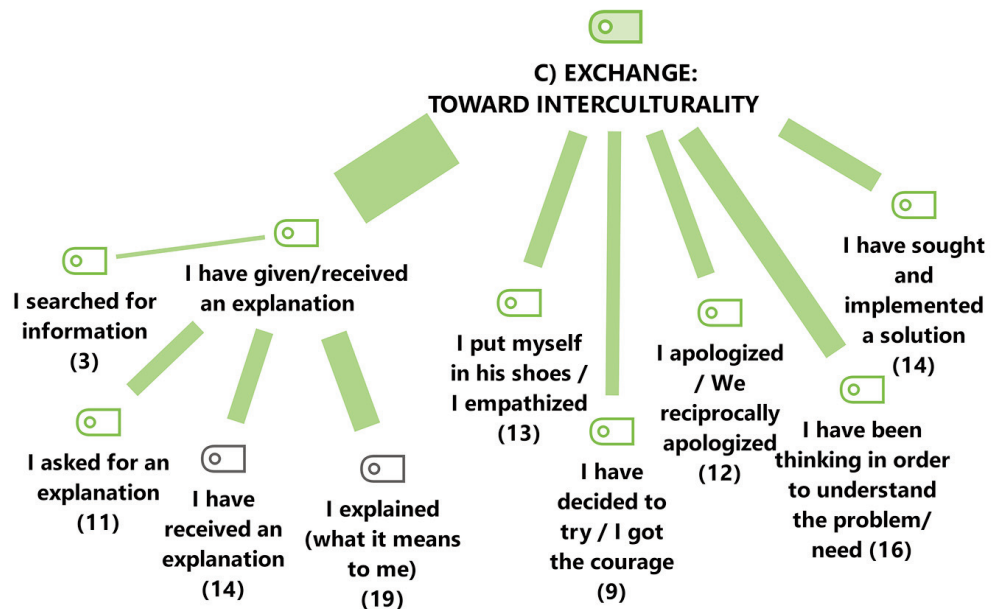
Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

The action of explaining or seeking/receiving explanations recurs frequently in the narratives[43] and is enacted in order to know, interpret, understand. In many cases, the decision to explain oneself and to ask for explanations is decisive and leads to the alleviation of incomprehension, discomfort and unease. However, it is not always sufficient – as narrated by a Zambian missionary visiting a village in Tanzania after experiencing a way of welcoming very different from the one she was used to.

"Even after the explanation I still felt a little bad. Only after a few months, I began to understand and accept the Shangani culture" (37_Zambia_Rel).

The other actions coded in this third core already anticipate the specific competences for experiencing interculture that I will analyse in the next section: decentralising (*I put myself in his shoes/I empathised*) which also implies reflecting on the problem and the needs of the other (*I have been thinking in order to understand the problem/need*); acknowledging to have made a mistake and apologising (*I apologized/We reciprocally apologized*); having courage and deciding to go towards the other and to find a solution together (*I have decided to try/I got the courage; I have sought and implemented a solution*). An example of the latter is narrated by an educator interacting with a Filipino mother who does not know Italian well.

"I asked myself what strategy should be put in place to accommodate the mother and stem the communication barrier. I listened not only with my ears but mainly with my heart. I read in the mother's eyes several times a veil of embarrassment that I imagine she was trying to hide behind smiles. I started to speak very slowly, articulating the words well with the help of facial expressions. As the weeks went by, communication definitely improved although it was still not very fluid and fluent" (17_IT_Lai).

The following example describes well the evolution from a zero interchange in the initial phase of the narrative to a slow and gradual opening towards an interchange tending towards interculturality. A Vietnamese student narrates two different phases she experienced at the beginning and at the end of her internship experience in an Italian school (Fig. 18).

Fig. 18 – The third subcategory of the category 'Actions'
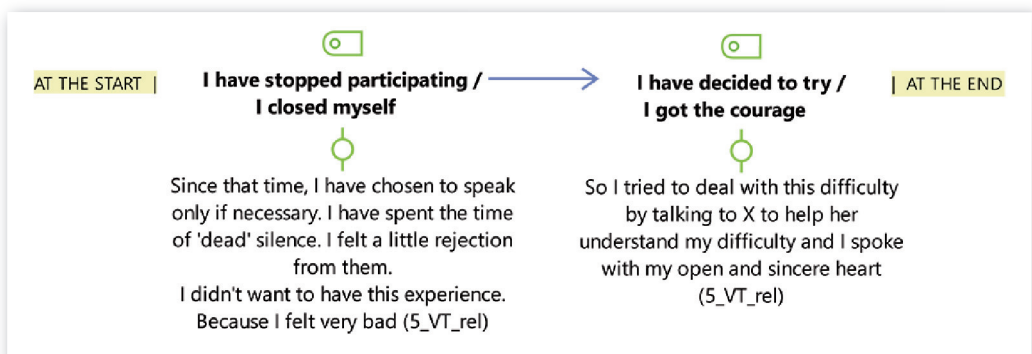
Source: The figure is generated by the MAXQDA software with the map function.

The difficulties experienced are linked to the educator's lack of knowledge and understanding of the Italian language and context. The initial attitude is one of closure, she feels rejected and in turn rejects the experience; the state of mind of unease grows and lasts for a certain time that the student describes as a 'time of dead silence'. When she finds the courage to seek dialogue with an 'open and sincere heart' and to communicate to the class teacher what she was experiencing, a possibility of a solution is glimpsed. In this incident, one grasps the difficulty of entering into a process that must be sought and desired by both parties. Sometimes there is a need for one of the two parties to take the first step. The volitional and motivational aspect and the fostering of attitudes of openness and readiness to initiate an interchange is another dimension on which – from an educational point of view – attention must be paid, in the knowledge that there is still confusion about the concept of interculture.

Nina Deliu, reporting the results of the qualitative analysis of the answers to the question of the first focus group on the perceived difference between multiculturality and interculturality, acknowledges that in the participants' view the first concept seems to refer to "a clearer and more easily explained phenomenon, whereas interculturality requires more effort (and difficulty) in providing details and examples to reach the depth of the concept"[44]. Multiculturality is seen as a static phenomenon, seen as a starting point, while interculturality is understood as a point of arrival, but it is not as evident what is its "final realization and ultimate result this union, sharing and individual transformation leads to"[45].

The result of this analysis of the actions described in the narratives – while making clear the effort and tension towards an interchange tending towards interculturality – nevertheless attests to the fact that the experience of an interchange, involving reciprocal contamination and transformation, takes place through long and complex processes and implies the possession of specific and transversal competences.

6.5 Competences

The basic or transversal and specific intercultural competences that were listed by the participants in the narratives are more numerous than those that were coded in the analysis phase with MAXQDA and are the subject of presentation here. The criterion followed in the selection was to consider those that were concretely acted out in the storyline, i.e. the competences that were identifiable by the researcher in the development of the incident[46]. This work was done by two researchers at different times; at the end, the results were discussed and compared in order to arrive at a single choice with the awareness that the narratives are the result of a reconstruction *a posteriori* on the basis of an interpretation made by the author, and the reader in turn also interprets and must be aware that these are always interpretations.

In the analysis of competences, the work of coding and creating the categories and subcategories was more laborious and complex than for the other macro-categories (situations, thoughts, emotions and actions) and required combining the two inductive (*bottom-up*) and deductive (*bottom-down*) approaches. It was necessary to deepen the theoretical framework on intercultural competences and to refer to other research in order to organise the coding and arrive at a convincing classification of the competences that emerged in the narratives. At the same time, what emerged in the analysis allowed for further clarification of certain aspects of the construct.

I recall some concepts I presented at the beginning of this contribution.

Fruitful interaction between people and/or groups of one or more cultures different from one's own requires both parties to put in place an articulated set or system of intercultural competences. *Basic intercultural competences* are a set of communication and interpersonal competences and the ability to deal with prejudice; *advanced competences* are the ability to interpret one's own and others' culture and the ability to find points of contact, common meanings and shared horizons.

After carrying out an analysis and initial classification and organisation of the competences acted out in the documents, the competences were then grouped into four categories, three of which were similar to those identified in the research conducted by Reggio and Santerini[47]. The researchers from the University of Milan analysed the reports that dealt with situations that emerged in school educational practice and considered three groups of competences – *To reduce prejudices*; *To interpreting cultures*; *To find shared horizons* – and noted the presence of other relational and professional competences typical of educational work in general, including listening in particular. These resources were considered as "foundational competences for educational and didactic work"[48], as illustrated in Figure 19.

Fig. 19 – Model of the competences identified in the research by P. Reggio and M. Santerini

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES

To reduce prejudices	*To interpret cultures*	*To find shared horizons*
to personalize	to contextualize	to seek convergences
to decentralize themselves	to diverge for converge	to contextualize conflicts
to recognize prejudices	to generate narratives	to bring out prejudice

to listen

EDUCATIONAL COMPETENCES
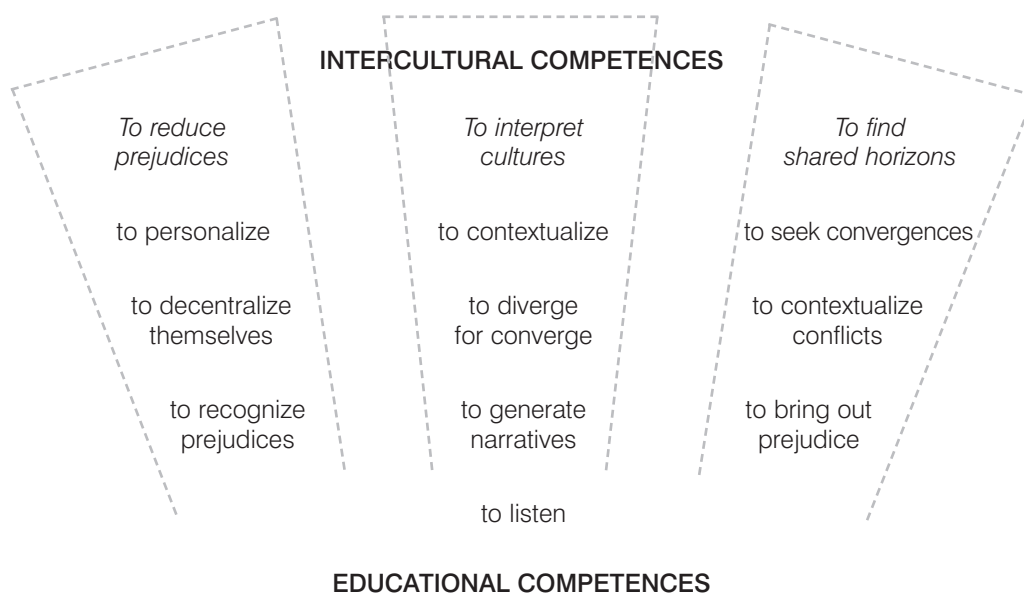
Source: Figure 7.1. *From educational competence to intercultural competence, in* Reggio, *The Outcomes* 131.

The comparison with the hypothesis and research results of the University of Milan was useful. As in the Milan University model, this survey identified some more general transversal or basic competences and three more specific competence groupings which are similar to those depicted in Figure 19, albeit with differences in the distribution of subcategories. There were 186 codings and they are grouped into the following four categories:

1. *communication and relational skills* (64), with 6 subcategories;
2. *dealing with prejudices and conflicts* (44), with 3 subcategories;
3. *interpreting one's own culture and that of others* (57), with 4 subcategories;
4. *finding common horizons* (21), with 5 subcategories (Fig. 20).

The first category includes competences that concern aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, and management of emotions that are necessary in all types of interaction, not only in those that take place in multicultural contexts.

These aspects, as described in the following points, are closely linked and interconnected with more specific aspects that refer to intercultural competences. For example, the abilities to observe, to listen, to dialogue and to explain are linked and interconnected with the categories of competences considered more specific. These competences are indispensable resources and conditions for an interchange towards interculturality.

Fig. 20 – Competences into four categories

WHAT SKILLS DID YOU APPLY? | COMPETENCES

1. Communication and relational skills

To communicate through various languages (12)

To talk/clarify/explain/ask for explanations (12)

To observe / actively listen / pay attention (14)

To reflect / Don't be satisfied with the first intuition (7)

To manage my emotions (13)

2. Dealing with prejudices and conflicts

Decentralizing / Being empathetic / Overcoming self-centerednes (20)

To recognize one's own prejudices and those of others and make (14)

To suspend the judgment (10)

3. Understanding one's own culture and that of others

Curiosity in learning different customs (14)

Getting to know / Making oneself known (habits, experience) (10)

To comprehend the other's point of view (12)

Awareness of factors' multiplicity / Contextualizing (18)

4. Finding common horizons

Awareness that cultural identity is dynamic (1)

Find a common point (13)

Search for a common horizon/meanings (5)

Exchange of reciprocal transformation (2)

Source: The figure is generated by the MAXQDA software with the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

6.5.1 Basic communication and relational skills

Out of a total of 186 codings, the competences most frequently acted upon (64, 34% of the total) refer to *basic communication and interpersonal competences*, often indicated in combination with other more specific competences for the intercultural approach.

The coded competences are as follows: *To observe/Actively listen/Paying attention* (14); *To communicate through various languages* (12); *To talk/clarify/explain/ask for explanations* (12); *To manage my emotions* (13); *To reflect/Don't be satisfied with the first intuition* (7); *Problem solving* (6)[49].

I will give two examples that highlight an already obvious aspect: communicative competence is crucial for interchange. In the first episode, a volunteer takes stock of the competences she implemented in an encounter she had with a non-Italian boy aged 11-12 who was a guest in a residential community for minors.

"It was an experience in which I was able to apply skills such as listening, empathy, knowing how to manage my emotions in front of him, and a set of communication skills, although not in the way I would have liked. In fact, I could have better managed communication with him at that time by making him understand that I was close to him and that he could talk to me about everything" (9_IT_Lai).

The second example has already been reported for the category 'actions'. A student working at the nursery school narrates as follows the competence she implemented in interacting with a Filipino mother with little knowledge of Italian.

"I listened not only with my ears but mainly with my heart. I read in the mother's eyes several times a veil of embarrassment that I imagine she was trying to hide behind smiles. I started to speak very slowly, articulating the words well with the help of facial expressions. As the weeks went by, communication definitely improved although it was still not very fluid and fluent" (17_IT_Lai).

In this category, in addition to communication competences, other resources are listed that refer to internal dispositions (attitudes, values). These resources attest to the need to put in place an indispensable condition: the disposition to invest energy in the relationship with others, i.e. not to pass over, to choose to devote time and energy to observing, listening, reflecting, not to stop on first intuition, to seek dialogue, to want to clarify, to give/seek/ask for information/explanations. All these skills are indispensable in order to manage prejudices and conflicts, to interpret and understand and, finally, to realise an effective interchange and to seek/find common horizons together.

6.5.2 Dealing with prejudices and conflicts

The second category, *Dealing with prejudices and conflicts*, has 44 codings and 3 subcategories: *Understanding one's own and others' prejudices and making them explicit* (14); *Decentralizing/Being empathic/Overcoming self-centredness* (20); *To suspend the judgement* (10) (Fig. 20).

There were 12 narratives in which a stereotype and/or prejudice was detected. Two cases narrated a real conflict experienced by the narrator with a person from another culture; in one of the two cases the conflict was not resolved, in the second the narrative-writing activity allowed the student to make the decision to clarify the situation years after the event.

Here are two examples. In the first, an Italian educator, reflecting on her own behaviour in an episode that occurred in the foster home (a disrespectful and violent reaction by an Albanian teenager whom she had called out for not respecting the rules), acknowledged that she had formulated an ethnic prejudice within herself (belonging to "*a people of arrogant and rude people*") and that she needed time to manage her emotions and become aware that she had made a mistake and had not considered other personal and contextual factors.

"Initially I was caught by prejudice, but then in 'cold blood' I reflected and thought that there must have been a problem behind that behaviour, a need of the boy" (48_IT_Lai).

In the second, an Angolan woman religious narrates how she reacted to an ethnic prejudice expressed by a boy against her and how, with resilience, calmness, decentralisation and empathy, she helped the other to come out of the prejudice.

"And I also said to myself, maybe this boy was the first time he had seen an African person or it was the first time he had come into contact with a person

different from him and so he was frightened or maybe he was used to calling African people by the expression 'coloured' as some adults also call us. [...] I imagine that the boy experienced this event with surprise and astonishment because he had changed his attitude towards me, he was no longer distrustful but was curious, he wanted to know, understand, share and listen" (13_AN_Rel).

6.5.3 Interpreting one's own culture and that of others

The third and fourth subcategories group together the more specific competences denoting greater sensitivity to interculturality.

A reflection on the competence 'to be able to critically interpret cultures' has already been introduced in relation to what emerged in the analysis of the actions described in the narratives, in particular the action *explain yourself/to explain*.

If we consider that – as Paul Ricoeur states and Santerini reiterates – from a hermeneutic perspective oriented towards understanding the other "human action is in many respects a quasi-text"[50], it is illuminating to recall the reasoning of the French philosopher who suggests not to contrast 'explaining' and 'interpreting' as a function of understanding, but to see them as moments that are both necessary to proceed 'in the direction of meaning'[51].

Knowing how to interpret and wanting to do so, concerns willingness, curiosity, interest in the other, taking action to get to know the other, seeking dialogue, obtaining/providing useful information to be able to interpret and, therefore, understand and comprehend the situation, the behaviour, the experience of the other and equipping oneself to help the other understand one's own.

The category *Interpreting one's own culture and that of others* has 57 codings (31% of the total) and four subcategories: *Getting to know/Making oneself known (habits, experience)* (10); *Curiosity in learning different customs* (14); *Awareness of factors' multiplicity/Contextualising* (18); *To comprehend the other's point of view* (12) (Fig. 20).

An example of an exchange of interpretations on a simple incident concerning the aspect of corporeality is narrated by a Chinese woman religious who relates an episode she experienced with an Italian sister.

"One day an Italian woman religious from my community told me that I had tanned. While talking to me she smiled, but I still felt mocked. I did not understand why she was doing this to me, I felt bad. In my culture you don't directly tell a person that they have dark skin, especially girls or young women, because all women like to have light or white skin, (not a disease-ridden white colour, of course), but being white for us is a great beauty for women. At that moment, I was hurt but I did not want to talk to her about it" (42_CI_Rel).

Being told: "You are tanned" arouses immediate unease in her, she remains centred on her own experience, on the customs learnt in her context that she knows (and which she tends to ethnicise: "In my culture"), but she does not close herself off completely, she takes time to get to know and understand. It is only after some time that, thanks to another event, she realises her misunderstanding, acknowledges that she was wrong, seeks a dialogue, explains her point of view and interpretation, and listens to the other's interpretation.

The passages of this narrative are depicted in Figure 21 which shows the coding system: three code segments can be read that refer to *the exchange of interpretations* and the search for common meanings that the student recognises she has put in place.

Fig. 21 – An Example of Interpretations Exchange

"I don't understand why he says (or behave) like this to me"

I needed some time

Feeling observed, strange, misunderstood, criticized, 'pulling the leg'

I didn't notice right away / I wasn't aware

To recognize one's own prejudices and those of others and make them explicit

Actions

Actions

Thoughts

Emotions

Competences

I apologized / We reciprocally apologized

Actions

Competences

Exchange of reciprocal transformation

42_Cina_Rel

«I explained to her that in my culture having fair or white skin is a great beauty especially for women, therefore, in China, in the summer, when women leave the house, they usually carry an umbrella alone so as not to get a tan».

Actions

Competences

«She explained to me that it is very different in the Italian context when one tans and the skin turns dark is a sign of good health and beauty. Our mutual and sincere sharing led us to ask ourselves what criteria there is to define the beauty of the person»

I have received an explanation

Search for a common horizon/meanings

«Our mutual and sincere sharing led us to ask ourselves what criteria exist to define the beauty of the person? I think it's an open answer for everyone. For us, the discovery of the diversity that exists in this aspect in Chinese and Italian culture has been a wealth, a bridge to build friendship with respect for oneself and for others. In the end we thanked each other and we understood and got to know each other more».

Source: The figure is generated by the MAXQDA software using the single-case model function with code segments.

6.5.4 Finding common horizons

In the narrative, the Chinese woman religious, although referring to an incident that may seem of little importance for the type of situation, clearly narrates the process of self-reflection and explicitly refers to three of the four categories of competences identified in this investigation. In fact, the first one can also be discerned in the narrative, although it is not made explicit. Also in the other narratives recording the competences coded in this category, the presence of several competences belonging also to one or more of the other categories can be detected.

The fourth and last category, *Finding common horizons*, was coded only 21 times (11% of the total) with the following subcategories: *Awareness that cultural identity is dynamic* (1); *Find a common point* (13); *Exchange of reciprocal transformation* (2); *Search for a common horizon/meanings* (5) (Fig. 20).

This is the clearest category, as it emphasises mutual interchange and makes manifest whether there has actually been an intercultural experience. If one were to

absolutize a view that considers intercultural competence on a continuum from a minimum level of competence to a maximum one, this fourth category might appear as the one in which a high degree of 'cultural sensitivity' is recorded. Following this view, the interpretation of the results obtained in this survey would lead one to note that there are few cases (only 11%) in which the participants demonstrate a high level of 'intercultural sensitivity' (Graph. 4), and in conclusion it could be said that there was a lack of intercultural competences in the participants.

However, in line with the hypothesis – if one considers intercultural competences as a system in which various competences and sub-competences interpenetrate – at that point, one can propose a more articulated interpretation of the latter outcome that enhances and incentivises the development of all competences, both the more general and the intercultural specific ones.

From a pedagogical point of view, this interpretation emphasises that there are 'multiple points of attack' and that the development of intercultural competences passes through various experiences and training paths that value formal and non-formal experiences, as well as informal ones as I suggest in the final part of this contribution.

Graph. 4 – Distribution in % of subcategories referring to 'skills'
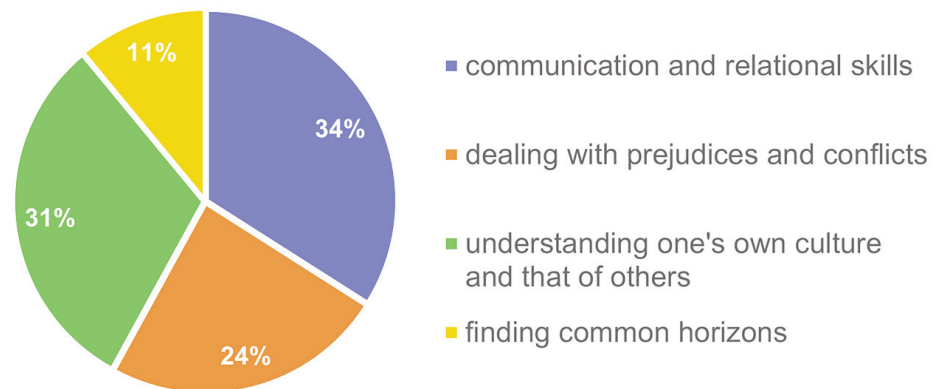
Source: The graph is generated by the MAXQDA software

The examples I propose for this last category are three. The first narrates the epilogue of an incident that occurred during pastoral work in an Italian parish. A Kenyan woman religious – who had perceived an attitude of rejection on the part of a group of Italian adolescents towards her and had told the animators with whom she worked about her discomfort – narrates that the dialogue led to a confrontation that resulted in a change of strategy with the adolescents and a transformation on both sides.

> *"By dialoguing, I discovered that diversity gives us the opportunity to discover common values that we sometimes do not know. I then realised that I had done well to continue using my way of communicating and trying to gain respect, but I realised that it was basically the desire of the other educators as well"* (12_KE_Rel).

At the end of the narrative-writing activity, in her final remarks, the student reflects on the incident and its development. She becomes aware that in interpreting the difficulty she experienced at the beginning with the boys, she had focused mainly on the ethnic factors and less on other aspects including the boys' age-related characteristics.

"The activity made me realise that my cultural identity is really an ongoing process and that it is born and developed in dialogue with others or other cultures and therefore to grow in my identity requires real dialogue that leads to a better relationship with others" (12_KE_Rel).

A second example is that of an Italian student and refers to the university context.

"When faced with people of a different nationality and culture from my own, I must first speak softly, explain well what I am saying. If it were to happen to me again, I would put people in a position to understand me better by explaining the reasons for certain behaviours, I would grasp their discomfort even earlier, and I could make a premise at the beginning of our relationship. This experience taught me to become more aware and also to learn more about my way of doing things, which is typically Italian, and I learnt more about Indian and Vietnamese culture" (26_IT_Lai).

A third example, relates to the experience of the student who receives a cloth as a gift from a fellow Indian student, which I mentioned earlier. In one of the few narratives that has a positive outcome, the student writes as follows:

"After three years in Italy, she was able to get to know and deal with Italian culture. I guess she compared my culture with hers because when handing over the gift my friend made an introduction explaining that it was an important thought according to her culture and that it came from her own land" (40_IT_Lai).

In conclusion, the result of the analysis on the skills acted upon confirmed what also emerged in other parts of the research presented in this volume, in particular in the activity proposed in the third focus group through the filling in of a form in which participants were asked to select the intercultural skills they considered necessary to live in multicultural contexts. The answers focused on basic aspects (welcoming, dialogue, listening, respect, patience, flexibility) and to a lesser extent on specific skills such as (decentralising, reducing stereotypes and prejudices, understanding meanings, finding common horizons). This result confirms that there is a need to initiate systematic educational courses geared towards the development of intercultural competences.

6.6 The development of competences

At the end of their narrative-writing activity, participants also provided some information on how they believe they developed the described competences.

There are five subcategories grouping together the contexts in which the participants recognise having had experiences that fostered the development of competences in them: work experience (25); community experiences of consecrated life (20); experiences in an international university context (19); internship and volunteer experience (16); various experiences: family, friendships, sporting activities, travel for migration or tourism (18) (Fig. 22).

Here are some statements that highlight the value of a theoretical-practical approach that involves both the acquisition of knowledge and awareness and the exercise of competences in the university environment and in field experience. Two Italian students, both laywomen, point out an aspect that they consider central to the education received in the university context of the PFSEA[52]: the importance of the anthropological conception and of an integral vision of the person, which they recognise as a fundamental aspect for the development (and for the exercise) of intercultural competences.

Fig. 22 – Contexts and experiences that have contributed to the development of intercultural competences

HOW DID YOU DEVELOP THIS COMPETENCE?

work experience (25)

internship and volunteer experience (16)

experiences in an international university context (19)

various experiences: family, friendships, sports, migration, travel (18)

community experiences of consecrated life (20)
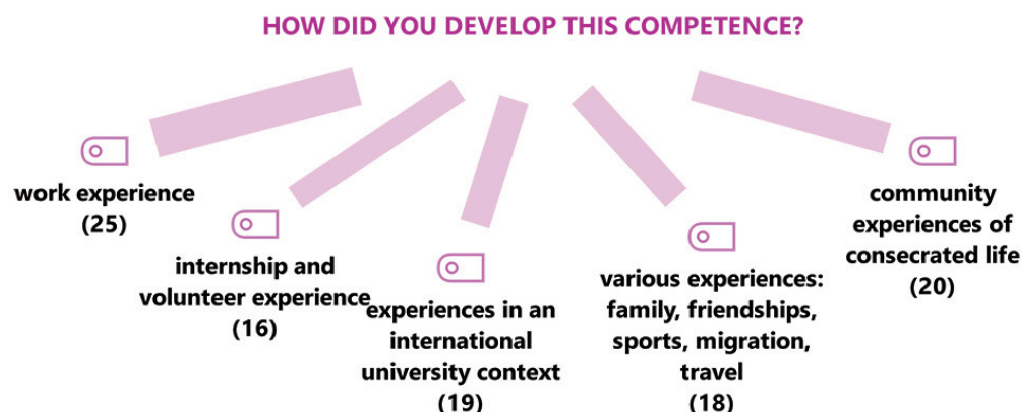
Source: The figure is generated in MAXQDA with the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

> *"Thanks to university, I have had the opportunity to consciously use and increase this competence at both an experiential and theoretical level through the study of disciplines that have increased my awareness of who the person is"* (63_IT_Lai).

> *"I [...] have had the opportunity to consolidate this competence in my university career, during which I have been able to reflect on issues concerning the person and his or her value, and I have acquired notions that are enabling me to use this competence in a more conscious manner"* (51_IT_Lai).

Others value internships and life experiences in various contexts including the family.

> *"I have developed this competence first and foremost through various personal experiences that have led me to always listen to those in front of me (without dwelling on initial prejudices), but also through internship activities that have given me greater confidence"* (46_IT_Lai).

> *"[I developed it] thanks to the upbringing I had from my family, which helped me to minimise prejudice and, therefore, to accept and understand (by decentralising and empathising) others who are not the same as me"* (63_IT_Lai).

Reflecting on how intercultural competences are developed, there is an awareness that

> *"the skills put in place are the result of time"* (45_CdA_Rel),

and that it is a process always in progress and never concluded:

> *"One must never think that these skills can be acquired once and for all, but one must be aware of the dynamism and flexibility they require, while being rooted in strong and solid values"* (8_IT_Lai).

Moreover – as emerges from an overview of these last considerations and of the results inherent to the various aspects presented in the previous points – the process of developing intercultural competences requires a 360-degree approach oriented to-

wards the acquisition of a combination of cognitive and metacognitive, motivational, volitional, affective aspects. It also requires commitment and responsibility in *building* in oneself (and promoting in those undergoing education) an interrelated set of knowledge and notions, awareness, values and motivations, attitudes and skills that grow through experience and encounters with people and situations that "*open one's mind*" and the testimony of significant people.

> "*Reflecting on my life journey, I realised that first of all, my family, especially my mother, had a great influence on the development of this competence. Her way of being and relating to others was a great example for me to never stop at appearances but to go deep and understand the emotions and thoughts of others*" (49_IT_Lai).

7. The use of critical incidents in educational contexts

A question arises at this point: 'Can the *narration of challenging situations or critical incidents* help to promote the development of some basic and specific competences necessary for experiencing interculture?'. The balance of the three-year action-research-training that made possible the collection of the 75 critical incidents analysed here allows me to affirm – also on the basis of the results of the broader research in which this project is inserted – that the work to be done first personally and then in confrontation with others through autobiographical narratives and listening to the other's narrative allows one to exercise reflexivity, the ability to return to oneself and to the experiences lived, and to become aware of the competences required to live interculture.

7.1 A first assessment

By reflecting on significant incidents experienced in the first person and reconsidering the other person's point of view in addition to one's own, the person can come to better explain/interpret and understand one's own way of acting and that of others. In this way, a transformative learning process can be activated through reflexivity[53]. The experience of writing about a critical incident experienced, and/or reading about an incident experienced by others can itself be a learning resource in view of future experiences.

Reflection and re-elaboration of a case experienced in the first person or narrated by others, which can be approached in a group or individually with the methodology of case analysis, can lead the person to elaborate acquisitions that can be useful in view of future experiences in which he/she can apply old and new competences and skills. The memory of what was learnt in the experience becomes a springboard for future experiences in a different way. Here are two examples:

> "*I am more aware of this situation and remembering that fact makes me approach people from different cultures from my own with the knowledge that this adds a richness to my personal and professional life*" (5_VT_Rel).

> "*When I think back on the moments of misunderstanding I experienced, I think that those moments served me as an experience and will certainly help me in the future in dealing with other situations in which I will feel misunderstood and unable to communicate*" (25_IT_Lai).

The effectiveness of learning *in the* and *from* experience has been theorised by various scholars, including John Dewey and David Kolb. The latter described learn-

ing as a circular succession of four phases: the making of concrete experience; the reflection on lived experience; the abstract conceptualisation and generalisation of what has resulted from the experience and, finally, the implementation of what has been learnt in a new concrete experience by knowing how to deal with it and consider it with a new approach[54].

The experience of the 75 participants, mostly female students in education as educators, consisted in writing a narrative about a critical episode they had experienced. In doing so, they were guided to understand the effectiveness of this methodology and its possible applications in formation and educational contexts.

A limitation of the present investigation is that it is not possible, due to the scarce documentation collected, to verify the education effectiveness of the critical incident writing experience and the effects of this activity on the participants. However, on the basis of the available information, it is possible to make some observations on the effectiveness of the tool used in line with what has already emerged in other studies, surveys and similar training projects[55].

There are 34 codings referring to the effects of the activity on the participants. Some of the information was written in the 'Any observations' section of the form containing the outline for drafting the narrative; others were received in e-mail messages and in informal interviews held at the end of the experience, which were transcribed by the educator/tutor at the bottom of the respective forms. Here are a few examples that attest to the effect the activity had on the narrator.

Taking stock of the usefulness of the activity of writing her own story, a student writes:

"I did not immediately realise that my colleague's attitude was one of cultural difference. Thanks to this activity, which allowed me to look at the fact from the outside, I learnt to decentralise and that it is important to reflect in a detached manner on events that one does not fully understand in the moment one is experiencing them" (63_IT_Lai).

Another student recognises that she has gained a new awareness through the work of re-reading her experience and highlights one of the aspects learnt:

"Re-reading this incident, I realised that the key moment was the confrontation with the other volunteers. If I had limited myself to my first reading of the incident, I would still be convinced by now that the man was insensitive. Instead, the fact that I questioned myself and tried to understand whether there was something else going on made me realise that everything was due to a gesture to which I and the girl's uncle attributed a different meaning" (72_IT_Lai).

The last example refers to a decision that the narrator claims to have implemented. Recalling an experience of suffering in a community life context, in which there had been repeated incidents of misunderstanding, the student – after completing the drafting of the form – decided to write a letter to the person with whom she had had a difficulty. Afterwards, she narrated how she had felt at the time and that (thanks to the activity) she had realised she had made a mistake; in the letter of reply she received, she was able to learn that the incident had also been challenging for the other person, who was also aware of having made mistakes with her (16_AL_Lai). Finally, some participants felt the need to thank the educator/tutor for the activity performed. I give just one example of a woman religious who joined the online activity.

"I thank you because collaborating has enriched me so much and given me the opportunity to put myself on the line. For me it was also a test of myself" (30_IT_Rel).

7.2 | A case analysis

Some of the 75 critical incident narratives, of which many examples have been given in this report, could be used in various educational contexts as cases to be analysed either individually or in small groups, with a final sharing in which the process and what has been learnt from the analysis activity is reflected upon. The selected narratives could be introduced with a short video interview and an outline of questions could be constructed to guide the case analysis work. Examples of the use of critical incident cases in multicultural contexts are numerous and case catalogues can also be found[56]; the use of case or critical incident analysis as an educational tool is confirmed by studies and research[57].

In this last point, I provide an example that I selected from the 75 narratives collected in this research. It is a case that stands out for the clarity of the narrative and the narrator's ability to recognise and describe her emotions. The student, a young Haitian woman religious, recalls an incident that relates a different way of understanding an aspect of corporeality. Narrating what she thought immediately after the incident, she writes:

> *"I told an Italian fellow, 'You've put on weight!'. I immediately understood from her reaction that I did something wrong. [...] She looked at me without answering and moved to another desk. Two other students who were nearby observed the scene laughing. I was surprised, I did not understand the girl's reaction, it was a sincere compliment I was paying her. I approached her to ask the reason for her attitude and if she had any problems, but she did not answer me. I also asked her if I had said something wrong, but she continued to ignore me. I felt sad and rejected, I did not insist and went back to my seat"* (29_HA_Rel).

After specifying a custom learnt in her home context – "*in my culture, thin people, women especially, are not considered attractive*" – the student describes the development of the situation. In the narrative, one can see the interweaving of thoughts, actions, emotions and the ability to reflect on oneself and seek dialogue.

> *"One day I got the idea to ask the two students who had witnessed the scene what they thought. Since they were hesitant to speak, I said I wanted to understand their reaction and explained to them the concept of female beauty in my context. They looked at each other laughing and then explained to me that in Italy they had a different idea of beauty.*
> *At that point I began to realise the big mistake I had made. At first I was a little angry because in my opinion, she had behaved as someone who was not very mature, she could have told me that she did not like it. Later, I remembered seeing her cry and told myself that the wound must be deeper or hiding another problem. I waited another week before I found the courage to approach her to ask for a moment of dialogue, I was afraid she would reject me again, but this time she accepted"* (29_HA_Rel).

The analysis of emotions and, more generally, of the various aspects of the incident is rich in detail. In the last part of the narrative, the uneasy moods are alleviated, the dialogue (sought and desired by both of them) allows the misunderstanding to be clarified. Reflecting on the effects, the student notes that the incident – which on an external reading could be seen as a misunderstanding about a minor incident – led to a 'loss of spontaneity' in her.

> *"We resolved the conflict, but I must admit that this event made me take a step back in my spontaneity towards others, and made me more cautious. Paradoxically, I have grown in observing, in listening to others and especially in asking questions about different aspects of a new culture in which I find myself"* (29_HA_Rel).

In conclusion, taking stock, the student writes:

"Now, with the passage of time, the situation seems easier to me, not even as tragic, but at the time I experienced it, it was really painful" (29_HA_Rel).

Figure 23 shows the map of the entire narrative generated with MAXQDA, i.e. the set of codings that were assigned to the parts of the narrative. By looking at the individual aspects, one can detect the resources of an intellectual, emotional and behavioural nature that the student put into action and the general and specific competences that she acknowledges having acted.

The narrative could be proposed as a case study in a workshop. The full text of the narrative and an outline of questions to guide reflection could be provided, with a time for individual work and a time for group work, assigning the task of codifying the narrative by constructing a grid similar to the one provided in Figure 23.

Fig. 23 – Single case model: the narrative of a Haitian student
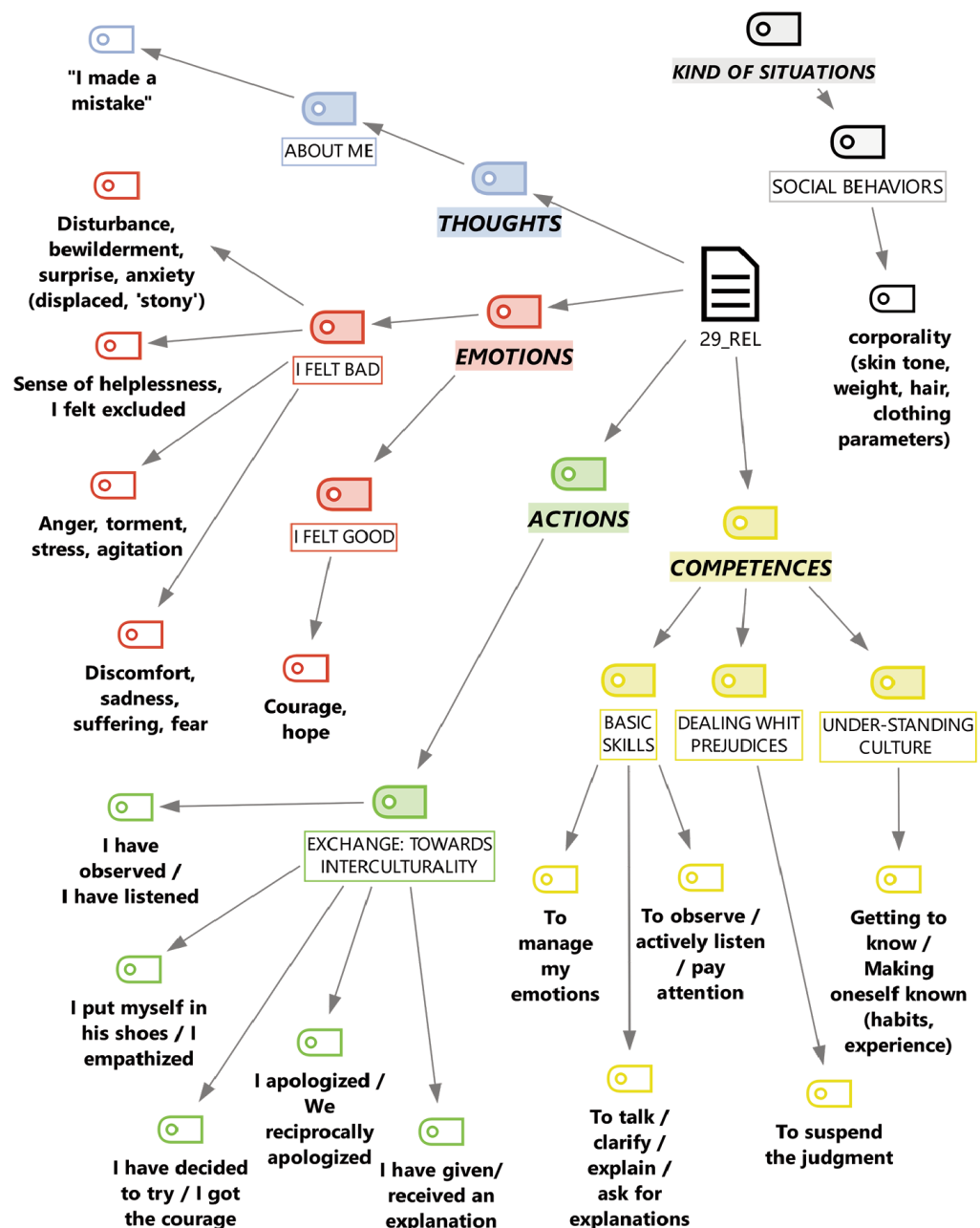
Source: The Figure is generated by MAXQDA software with the single-case model function, code hierarchy.

(8) | Conclusions

At the end of this research report, the metaphor of *building*, which appears in the title of this contribution to evoke the experience and the *work* (of self-education and education) that is required for the development of intercultural competences, reveals all the complexity of this *undertaking*.

The protagonist of the *enterprise* of 'becoming competent' in living interculture is certainly the person who is called upon to consciously assume the responsibility of self-education in a perspective of lifelong learning as a necessary condition for self-development and active, responsible and supportive participation in society[58]. If the awareness of the need and urgency to develop (and promote) this and other key citizenship competences is evident and unquestionable in all spheres of life, study and work – for decades there have been quality educational experiences in various spheres – nevertheless, as emerges in other contributions to the research presented in this volume, in many contexts the initiatives that intentionally and systematically promote the development of intercultural competences are not yet widespread, are often sporadic and not integrated in broader institutional projects[59].

Educational institutes and educators who have the task and responsibility to encourage and foster this intercultural competence-building enterprise should:

- *promote* a reflection on the need (and urgency) to take charge of the promotion of basic and specific competences to experience interculture from a *lifelong learning* perspective and with a global approach that does not end with the introduction of a course or a few occasional and disconnected initiatives but permeates the entire *curriculum* and/or educational project;
- *converge* on common objectives centred on the promotion of communication and interpersonal competences and the ability to recognise and deal with emotions and prejudices; know and critically interpret one's own and other people's culture; search for/find common values walking towards a 'critical humanism'[60];
- *foster experiential learning* involving workshop experiences by enhancing methodologies such as case studies, critical incident narratives, *storytelling*[61], e-portfolios;
- *allocate* spaces, create opportunities, devote time to the realisation of formal, non-formal and informal activities to encourage and enable experiences of interchange and interaction;
- *collect and network* good practices, projects, educational tools[62].

For decades now, experts have been indicating that educational action that seeks to promote the development of intercultural competences requires a global approach. It cannot be introduced as a marginal, stand-alone project, as one of the educations – to global citizenship, to sustainable development, to ecology – but is to be discovered, *invented* and organised as a central dimension running through all formation and educational action in multicultural contexts.

The development of intercultural competences is a job that deals with the construction of personal identity interconnected with the social and professional one, it requires «the awareness of one's own individuality and diversity with respect to others, often called distinctiveness; continuity as permanence of one's identity over time; coherence as permanence of it in different experiential situations»[63]. Each of us constructs himself in interaction with others, experiences belonging at the same time to a plurality of affiliations, to more than one reference group, not only cultural, but also political, social, religious.

Educational environments have the duty and responsibility to support the person in this enterprise of self-building with attention to cognitive, affective and motivational aspects and to the ethical and value dimension in a challenging, enriching and trans-

forming interchange with the other(s). The costs that could result from not taking on this educational and formation task are high. In the present context it should be evident to all that the lack of competences to live interculture (i.e. *intercultural incompetence*[64]) has repercussions on our being human persons and on our living together in the world.

Today, «in this time that we are given to live, recognising the dignity of every human person, we can revive among all a worldwide aspiration for fraternity as *'brothers all'*»[65]. At present, with realism – but looking to the future – we can practise thinking of the Covid-19 pandemic as a 'vital catastrophe'[66], that is, a catastrophe that can be and become 'educating' for us to the extent that we become aware that it *opens up* a process of personal growth.

For this reason it is necessary and urgent to educate in particular educators, teachers, trainers so that they themselves develop the intercultural competences that they have the duty and the responsibility to promote in young people with the awareness that not only intercultural education, but education itself «*is realised in the relationship*, in the authentic meeting of persons in full respect of reciprocal freedom, in a fundamentally personalising, mediating and animating action. In this process, the commitment to foster in young people the growth of the capacity to live together, in harmony with everyone, in solidarity for the common good becomes fundamental»[67].

Appendix

Full codebook of the file "Incidenti critici_backup.mx20" (generated by MAQDA, 23/01/2022)

1. KIND OF SITUATIONS	**0**
1.1 Communication	0
1.1.1 linguistics (lexical poverty, short and confusing conversations)	13
1.1.2 paralinguistics (tone, frequency, rhythm, silence)	1
1.1.3 kinesics (eye contact, facial expressions, gestures)	3
1.1.4 proxemics (way of occupying space)	2
1.1.5 haptic (through physical contact, way of greeting)	6
1.1.6 approach: direct, playful, respectful	4
1.1.7 way of expressing emotions	2
1.2 Social behaviors	0
1.2.1 food / drink / smoking	4
1.2.2 corporeality (skin tone, weight, hair, clothing parameters)	5
1.2.3 personal hygiene (shower, smell)	2
1.2.4 privacy management	2
1.2.5 relationship with colleagues and superiors	6
1.2.6 reprimand / warning	4
1.2.7 compliance with rules and regulations	7
1.2.8 educational styles and interventions	5
1.2.9 traditions (use of things)	4
1.2.10 liturgy (rhythm and pronunciation)	2
1.3 Social attitudes	0
1.3.1 ethnic and religious stereotypes and prejudices	7
1.3.2 gender stereotypes (woman / man relationship, emancipation)	5
1.3.3 belonging / separation to / between ethnic groups	3
1.3.4 sensitivity to the experience of migration	4
**2. What did you think immediately?	THOUGHTS**	**0**
2.1 about the other	0
2.1.1 "The other sees the reality / behaves differently"	11
2.1.2 "He is distant, is detached"	4
2.1.3 "He has a prejudice towards me", "He is angry with me"	10
2.1.4 "He doesn't understand that what I said is right"	9
2.1.5 "He's wrong"	5
2.1.6 "He's narrow minded"	3
2.2 about me	0
2.2.1 "I don't know and I don't know what to expect"	3
2.2.2 "I don't understand why he says (or behave) like this to me"	12
2.2.3 "I am unable to handle this situation"	10
2.2.4 "I made a mistake"	3
2.2.5 "I confirmed my stereotype"	7
2.3 about the situation	0
2.3.1 "Language is an obstacle", "There is no understanding"	7
2.3.2 "It is immediate and simple to think that what is different is not good"	1
2.3.3 "There are other factors besides the ethnic one"	6
2.3.4 "There are things in common"	2

3. What have you done? | ACTIONS	**0**
3.1 Interchange: absent or problematic	0
3.1.1 I remained centered on myself	3
3.1.2 I have made a judgment (Prejudice)	8
3.1.3 I defended myself / I asserted my right	2
3.1.4 I spoke strongly	2
3.1.5 I was ready to go / I went away/turned away	7
3.1.6 I ignored / I did not answer / I did not ask for an explanation	4
3.1.7 I have stopped participating / I closed myself	5
3.1.8 I didn't notice right away / I wasn't aware	4
3.1.9 I couldn't/didn't manage to explain	3
3.2 Interchange: weak or superficial	0
3.2.1 I have observed / I have listened	18
3.2.2 I needed some time	13
3.2.3 I have been patient	3
3.2.4 I asked for help / I was helped	14
3.3 Interchange: towards interculturality	0
3.3.1 I have given/received an explanation	0
3.3.1.1 I searched for information	3
3.3.1.2 I asked for an explanation	11
3.3.1.3 I have received an explanation	12
3.3.1.3.1 The explanation was not enough for me	2
3.3.1.4 I explained (what it means to me)	18
3.3.1.4.1 I asked questions to make him understand	1
3.3.2 I have been thinking in order to understand the problem/need	16
3.3.3 I put myself in his shoes / I empathized	13
3.3.4 I apologized / We reciprocally apologized	12
3.3.5 I have decided to try / I got the courage	9
3.3.6 I have sought and implemented a solution	14
4. What did you feel? | EMOTIONS	**0**
4.1 I felt bad: I felt...	0
4.1.1 Discomfort, sadness, suffering, fear	19
4.1.2 Anger, torment, stress, agitation	19
4.1.3 Disturbance, bewilderment, surprise, anxiety (displaced, 'stony')	15
4.1.4 Feeling observed, strange, misunderstood, criticized, 'pulling the leg'	8
4.1.5 Embarrassment, shame, humiliation	19
4.1.6 Discouragement, despondency, distrust (I was exhausted)	8
4.1.7 Sense of helplessness / I felt excluded	16
4.1.8 Feeling the prejudice of others on oneself	7
4.2 I felt good: I felt ...	0
4.2.1 Amazement, surprise (in a positive sense)	1
4.2.2 Curiosity, interest	10
4.2.3 Courage, hope	5
4.2.4 Joy, happiness	7
4.2.5 Calm, serenity, self-control / I was at ease	9
4.2.6 Gratitude	1
4.2.7 Satisfaction	4
5. What skills have you put in place? | COMPETENCES	**0**
5.1 Communication and relational skills	0

5.1.1 To observe / actively listen / pay attention	14
5.1.2 To reflect / Don't be satisfied with the first intuition	7
5.1.3 To talk / clarify / explain / ask for explanations	12
5.1.4 To communicate through various languages (verbal and non verbal)	12
5.1.5 To manage my emotions	13
5.1.6 Problem solving	6
5.2 Dealing with prejudices and conflicts	0
5.2.1 To recognize one's own prejudices and those of others and make them explicit	14
5.2.2 To suspend the judgment	10
5.2.3 Decentralizing / Being empathetic / Overcoming self-centeredness	20
5.3 Understanding one's own culture and that of others	0
5.3.1 Getting to know / Making oneself known (habits, experience)	10
5.3.1.1 Examples of exchange of undestandings	2
5.3.2 Curiosity in learning different customs	14
5.3.3 Awareness of factors' multiplicity / Contextualizing	18
5.3.3.1 Negative example	1
5.3.4 To comprehend the other's point of view	12
5.4 Finding common horizons	0
5.4.1 Awareness that cultural identity is dynamic	1
5.4.2 Find a common point	13
5.4.3 Exchange of reciprocal transformation	2
5.4.4 Search for a common horizon/meanings	5
6. How did you develop this competence? | DEVELOPMENT	**0**
6.1 Various experiences: family, friendships, sports, migration, travel	18
6.2 Community experiences of consecrated life	20
6.3 Internship and volunteer experience	16
6.4 Work experience	25
6.5 Experiences in an international university context	19
7. How has the situation evolved? | EVOLUTION	**0**
7.1 Skills in the making	1
7.2 Adaptation | Welcome, inclusion	5
7.3 Opening / acceptance / contamination	8
7.3.1 A fact / person that opens my mind	6
7.3.1.1 Intervention of the formator with the whole community	1
7.4 Loss of spontaneity	1
7.5 Impact of the activity	9
7.6 Incomplete narratives	1

* The code system is the result of Enrica Ottone's coding work in collaboration with Francesca Fratarcangeli.

Endnotes

1. The action-research-training project *Multiculturality and Intercultural Competences in Ecclesiastical Institution of Higher Education and in Formation Communities of Consecrated Life* was carried out in Italy during the years 2018-2021, involved educators and members of formation communities of consecrated life, as well as teachers and students from a number of ecclesiastical institutions of higher education studies. The project, funded by the GHR (Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhorst) Foundation, was coordinated by Luca Pandolfi, full professor at Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome, and the Author of the present contribution, Enrica Ottone, professor at PFSEA.

2. The majority of the participants in this activity come from the PFSEA in Rome, which has joined and participated from the very beginning in the research *Intercultural Competences in Universities and Consecrated Life* promoted by the PUU. In the academic year 2020-2021, PFSEA students, faculty and staff were from more than 50 countries: 40% of the students (mostly men and women religious) and 27% of the staff are of non-Italian origin. The female component is predominant.

3. Translated from the Italian original: P. REGGIO, *La ricerca sulle competenze interculturali di insegnanti ed educatori*, in P. REGGIO – M. SANTERINI (eds.), *Le competenze interculturali nel lavoro educativo*, Carocci, Roma 2013*,* 53.

4. Translated from the Italian original: M. SANTERINI, *Introduzione. Competenze interculturali: ricerca e formazione*, in REGGIO – SANTERINI (eds.), *Le competenze,* 12.

5. Cf. E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI, *Interculturality in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: An Action-Research-Training Project in Italy*, in IID (eds.), *Education in Multiculturality, Education to Interculturality in Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy,* Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 39-40.

6. Cf. M. PELLEREY, *L'identità professionale oggi. Natura e costruzione*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2021, 14.

7. Cf. D.K. DEARDORFF, *Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization*, "Journal of Studies in International Education" 10 (2006) 3, 241-266; A. FANTINI, *Exploring and Assessing Intercultural Competence* (CSD Research Paper No. 07-01), Washington University – Center for Social Development, St. Louis, MO 2007; B.H. SPITZBERG – G. CHANGNON, *Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence*, in D.K. DEARDORFF (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA 2009, 2-52; M. SANTERINI, *Intercultural Competence Teacher-training Models: The Italian Experience*, in OECD (ed.), *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Meeting the Challenge*, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris 2010.

8. The expression is frequently used in the plural to account for the complex interrelationships of so many elements. Cf. UNESCO (ed.), *Intercultural Competencies. Conceptual and Operational Framework*, UNESCO 2013, 16. The question of whether to decline the construct 'intercultural competence(s)' in the singular or plural is addressed and resolved differently in M. BAIUTTI, *Protocollo di valutazione Intercultura. Comprendere, problematizzare e valutare la mobilità studentesca Internazionale*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2019, 62.

9. Translated from the Italian original: PELLEREY, *L'identità*, 50. Cf. J. DEWEY, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, Modern Library, New York, NY 1922, 15-42 (It. transl.: *Natura e condotta dell'uomo: introduzione alla psicologia sociale,* Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1958, 38-42).

10. Cf. M. SANTERINI, *Intercultura*, La Scuola, Brescia 2003; EAD., *Competenze interculturali e pluralismo sociale*, "Studi Emigrazione/Migration Studies" 49 (2012) 186, 275; EAD., *Introduzione* 11-12.

11. The definition combines contributions from various authors and is based on the concept of *competence* formulated by Michele Pellerey as follows: «A competence manifests itself because one is able to set in motion and coordinate a set of knowledge, skills and other internal dispositions in order to successfully perform a task or activity to be undertaken; moreover, to perform one's task well, one must be able to identify, use and coordinate very often not only the necessary internal resources, but also the available external ones». (Translated from the Italian original: M. PELLEREY, *Le competenze individuali e il portfolio*, RCS Libri, Milano 2004, 64).

12. Cf. P. REGGIO – E. DODI, *Le competenze interculturali di insegnanti ed educatori*, "OPPInformazioni" (2017) 123, 18; SPITZBERG – CHANGNON, *Conceptualizing*, 2-52.

13. The course in Intercultural Pedagogy is a one-semester education activity for a total of 5 ECTS (*European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*) that forms part of the curricula of the Master's degree courses in Pedagogical Sciences and Pedagogy and Didactics of Religion at the PFSEA. The author has been teaching since the 2004-2005 academic year.

14. In this part of the activity, individual story-writing work was accompanied by a tutor trained by me. The difficulty in completing the work can be attributed at least in part to the lockdown and containment measures of the Covid-19 pandemic that affected Italy in the months in which this part of the research took place.

15. Cf. G. AUDET, *Intervention pédagogique et diversité ethnoculturelle: théorisation de récits de pratique d'enseignantes et d'enseignants, et défis de formation*, "Éducation et francophonie" 46 (2018) 2, 92-108; S. DESGAGNÉ, *Récits exemplaires de pratique enseignante: analyse typologique*, Presses de l'Université du Québec, Québec 2005.

16. The term *critical incidents* is used by J.C. FLANAGAN [*The Critical Incident Technique*, "Psychol Bull" 51 (1954), 4, 327-358. doi: 10.1037/h0061470] in reference to a technique of gathering information on critical situations in order to understand their consequences and develop improvements. In the field of education, critical incidents are used not only as an investigation technique, but also as an educational tool in various contexts including professional development. Cf. C. LECLERC – B. BOURASSA – O. FILTEAU, *Utilisation de la méthode des incidents critiques dans une perspective d'explicitation, d'analyse critique et de transformation des pratiques professionnelles*, "Éducation et francophonie" 38 (2010) 1, 11-32.

17. Cf. B.W. WHITE – D. GRATTON, *L'atelier de situations interculturelles: une méthodologie pour comprendre l'acte à poser en contexte pluriethnique*, "Alterstice" 7 (2017) 1, 63-76.

18. The project entitled *Récits et formation* of the Faculty of Education of the Canadian University of Laval is presented on the website: http://www.recitdepratique.fse.ulaval.ca/; https://archive.is/IqN5N.

19. Translated from the Italian original: G. AUDET, *La diversità culturale nei racconti di pratiche di insegnamento*, in REGGIO – SANTERINI (eds.), *Le competenze*, 36.

20. *Ibid.,* 41.

21. Cf. *ibid.,* 36.

22. Cf. *ibid.,* 35; D.A. SCHÖN, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Basic Books, New York, NY 1983, 49-51 (It. transl.: *Il professionista riflessivo. Per una nuova epistemologia della pratica professionale*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari 1993, 76-78). The account of practices in this case involves the narration of a problematic situation encountered in multicultural school contexts and includes moments of individual reflection and moments of group reflection. Cf. S. DESGAGNÉ, *Appropriation d'un savoir délibératif en formation à l'enseignement à partir d'une approche d'analyse de récits en groupe*, "Revue internationale de pédagogie de l'enseignement supérieur" 29 (2013) 2, 1-23.

23. Translated from the Italian original: REGGIO, *La ricerca*, 53.

24. Cf. *ibid.,* 54, 58; P. VERMERSCH, *Descrivere il lavoro. Nuovi strumenti per la formazione e la ricerca: l'intervista di esplicitazione*, trad. it. a cura di V. CESARI LUSSO e A. IANNACCONE, Carocci, Roma 2005.

25. The use of critical incidents in an educational context is presented in L. MORTARI, *Apprendere dall'esperienza. Il pensare riflessivo nella formazione*, Carocci, Roma 2005, 118 ss.

26. Cf. P. Angelides, *The Development of an Efficient Technique for Collecting and Analyzing Qualitative Data: The Analysis of Critical Incidents*, "International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education" 14 (2001) 3, 429-442.

27. The tool is published in Reggio, *La ricerca*, 60.

28. Cf. R. Semeraro, *L'analisi qualitativa dei dati di ricerca in educazione*, "Giornale Italiano della Ricerca Educativa" 4 (2011) 7, 93; Angelides, *The Development*, 429-442; R. Viganò, *Pedagogia e sperimentazione. Metodi e strumenti per la ricerca educativa*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2002, 238-243.

29. The qualitative analysis software MAXQDA (Analytics Pro 2020 version) from the German company Verbi GmbH was used in combination with a matrix created in Microsoft Excel for the classification of the forms and the qualitative analysis of the data contained therein.

30. Cf. U. Kuckartz – S. Rädiker, *Analyzing Qualitative Data with MAXQDA: Text, Audio, and Video,* Cham, Springer 2019.

31. A code is a string that on MAXQDA can contain up to 63 characters.

32. The coding was done by the author and was revised and integrated by Dr Francesca Fratarcangeli.

33. The answer to the question on the effects of the activity and the possible evolution was not explicitly asked to the participants, especially at the beginning of the project, and that is why the number of codings is limited to 32.

34. Cf. N. Deliu, *Multiculturality and Interculturality: A Qualitative Analysis of the Perspective of Focus Group Participants*, in Ottone – Pandolfi (eds.), *Education*, 118.

35. The term "communication" (and later communication competence) is used to refer generally to situations of interchange of a message between two or more people and joint construction (or co-construction) of meaning (UNESCO, *Intercultural competencies*, 12). There are numerous studies on the concept of adequate and effective communication in multicultural contexts that use the expression 'intercultural communicative competence'. Cf. M. Byram, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, Multilingual Matters, Clevendon 1997.

36. Under the label *educational styles and interventions*, a number of episodes have been grouped together referring to factors inherent in the way a person is educated from/into a cultural context different from one's own.

37. An example of a survey that resulted in a list of sensitive areas that can give rise to critical incidents in educational contexts is the following: Aa.Vv, *Culture Shocks in Higher Education. A Reader for International Students and Faculty: How to Turn Critical Incidents into a Learning Opportunity*, Solvic – Solving intercultural conflicts with international students, 2020. In: http://solvinc.eu/results/; https://archive.is/70GKp.

38. Also in this category, in some of the 75 documents, many expressions referring to immediate thoughts have been coded.

39. For a description of the *IramuteQ software* and its specifications see: F. Deriu, *Intercultural Competences in Education and Formation Communities: Key Concepts Identified by the Text Analyses of Focus Groups*, in Ottone – Pandolfi (eds.), *Education*, 72-79.

40. The 75 stories were merged into a single document and the entire corpus was subjected to the automatic parsing and normalisation processes. The main lexicometric measures (as reported in the rows below) were calculated to validate the database. The text corpus of 44,384 occurrences is small in size (but still over 20,000) and there are 3,326 different graphic forms. There are 1,388 hapax. The TTR and %Hapax measures confirm the suitability of the *corpus* for automatic processing:
TTR (*Type Token Ratio*)
V / N • 100   3,326/44,384 • 100 = 7.5%
% Hapax
V_1 / V • 100   1,388/3,326 • 100 = 41.7%

41. The verb 'to do' does not appear in the list, which is clearly in first place with 348 frequencies, more than double the number of other verbs in the list (the verb 'to say' appears 162 times). It has been excluded from the graph in order to highlight more clearly the distance between the other verbs, but it should not be overlooked since also in this corpus, as in the one analysed by Fiorenza Deriu in this volume, the verb 'to do' has a strong practical connotation: it indicates, for better or for worse, what has been done; it allows one to take stock of the situation, as well as to emphasise certain concepts, for example: 'the fact of welcoming', 'the fact of dialoguing' (Cf. DERIU, *Intercultural*).

42. The risk is highlighted by Milena Santerini. Cf. M. SANTERINI, *Critical Intercultural Education between Similarities and Differences: Points of no Return, Choices and Strategies for Teaching Intercultural Competences*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 324.

43. In the analysis phase, after noting that the verb *to explain* and the noun *explanation* recurred frequently in the narratives to refer to actions, an automated search was carried out in all documents to identify and screen all occurrences of words containing the characters *spieg**.

44. DELIU, *Multiculturality*, 123.

45. *Ibid.*, 147.

46. The reason for the choice can be better understood from the following reference that was written at the bottom of a form. The student, after having narrated the episode, takes stock of the skills she has put in place, indicating the ability to put herself in the other person's shoes. The tutor writes to her to review the narrative and asks her a question "*Did you put it into action*?", or "*Would you have liked to put it into action*?" (19_ZA_Rel) because in the description the stated competence does not seem to be evident.

47. Reggio, in presenting the results of the research, divides intercultural competences into 3 nuclei: *Reducing prejudices*, *Interpreting cultures*, *Finding shared horizons*. Cf. REGGIO, *Gli esiti*, 113.

48. *Ibid.,* 112.

49. The last subcategory, *problem solving* (6) – which is not shown in Figure 23 (in order to make the other labels in the category more readable) – groups together aspects relating to the ability to analyse the situation and to find and implement suitable interventions.

50. P. RICOEUR, *Dal testo all'azione. Saggi di ermeneutica*, Editoriale Jaca Book, Milano 2004[2], 168.

51. Cf. *ibid.*, 151; SANTERINI, *Intercultura*, 74.

52. At university level, the commitment to cultivate "a *Weltanschauung* worthy of the human person" is closely intertwined with the creation of an environment that fosters at all levels (formal, non-formal and informal) the development and exercise of intercultural competences. Cf. H.-C.A. CHANG, *Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione "Auxilium": un'istituzione internazionale "laboratorio" di formazione interculturale*, "Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione" 45 (2007) 3, 90-97.

53. Cf. S. BROOKFIELD, *Using Critical Incidents to Explore Learners' Assumptions*, in J. MEZIROW et ALII (eds.), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA 1990, 177-193.

54. Cf. P. REGGIO, *Il quarto sapere. Guida all'apprendimento esperienziale*, Carocci, Roma 2010.

55. Cf. SANTERINI, *Critical*, 323-324.

56. A recent European project provides a guide and catalogue of critical incidents as an educational tool for health professionals in multicultural settings. Based on the case analysis method developed by Margalit Cohen-Emerique, the tool serves to reflect on the reasons for tension and to identify concrete solutions. Cf. https://healthydiversity.eu/it/manual-critical-incidents/; https://archive.is/udi3k.

57. In the Italian context, in addition to the research by Reggio and Santerini, see: M. DAMINI – A. SURIAN, *L'uso degli incidenti critici nella valutazione dello sviluppo delle competenze interculturali*, "Giornale Italiano della Ricerca Educativa" 5 (2012) 291-302; C. TARCHI – A. SURIAN, *Promoting Intercultural Competence in Study abroad Students*, "European Journal of Psychology of Education" (2021) 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-021-00554-0; https://archive.is/LcCiM.

58. *Competence in Cultural Awareness and Expression* is one of the eight key competences of the European citizen listed in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning.

59. Cf. L. PANDOLFI, *Formation in Multiculturality, Formation towards Interculturality: Challenges to Embrace and Necessary Transformations*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 254.

60. The concept of critical humanism is used by Milena Santerini who recalls Selim Abou. Cf. S. ABOU, *Diritti e culture dell'uomo*, SEI, Torino 1995.

61. Cf. D.K. DEARDORFF, *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles*, UNESCO and Routledge, Paris 2020.

62. There are numerous projects promoted by international organisations.

63. Translated from the Italian original: PELLEREY, *L'identità*, 12.

64. Cf. UNESCO, *Intercultural Competencies*, 38.

65. FRANCESCO, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti* (3 October 2020), n. 8.

66. Cf. C. GIACCARDI, *"Vita tua, vita mia". Che sia vitale il tempo virale. L'individualismo è astrazione*, "Avvenire" 19 marzo 2020: https://www.avvenire.it/opinioni/pagine/che-sia-vitale-il-tempo-virale-lindividualismo-astrazion-063dab5f075c4b2eb3603729c1fe870e; https://archive.is/h8zMZ).

67. H.-C.A. CHANG – M. SÉÏDE, *Essere con i giovani oggi in contesti multiculturali. Implicanze per un educatore salesiano*, in M.A. CHINELLO – E. OTTONE – P. RUFFINATTO (eds.), *Educare è prevenire. Proposte per educatori*, LAS, Roma 2015, 203.