Modern Italy

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Published online: 12 Feb 2015.

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Situated learning, post-migrant youth and ludic spaces in diverse urban environments in Italy

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The aim of this article is to offer introductory theoretical arguments in order to research the role that urban ludic spaces play in post-migrants' everyday processes of situated learning. I discuss how situated learning processes are embedded in everyday webs of relationships, with special reference to spatial construction of intersectionality within power laden spaces affecting the way in which communities of practice develop in urban areas. I draw on results from a previous research carried out in diverse neighbourhoods of central and north-east Italian cities as an example of the way in which public playgrounds could be laden by power and could in this way affect the opportunities to share everyday practices and to build up a community of practices in non-formal and informal learning environments.

Keywords: migration; urban environments; situated learning; youth; ludic spaces

Situated learning in diverse environments

Educational research in migrant and post-migrant urban environments in Italy is now increasingly understood as educational research in diverse environments and not just multicultural ones. This gradual shift in the perspective aims to save educational research from a merely culturalistic approach. That is, an approach that tends to favour the cultural sphere as the main analytical tool and as the main educational action field in educational contexts where there is a migrant and post-migrant population and which tends to neglect so many other important features (such as gender, social class, age) in people's lives – whether they are migrants, post-migrants or natives.

In fact, a culturalistic approach runs the risk of often relying on too rigid conceptions of cultures and in this way tends to assume that people could or should be framed in this narrow idea of cultures. In this way, this approach does not grasp the concreteness of the biographical paths of the people living in educational contexts who, on the contrary, go through a multiplicity of dimensions in their life.

On the other hand, another approach is to consider the migrant and post-migrant educational contexts, not just as multicultural contexts, but more generally as heterogeneous environments. This perspective aims to focus our attention on a multiplicity of elements and aspects. As a result, this approach does not put its focus on cultures which are assumed to predetermine the behaviour of people, but quite the opposite, it focuses on a huge range of practices that people

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share with others (migrants, post-migrants and natives) in their daily lives. In this way, a research approach that focuses on educational contexts as heterogeneous environments tries to focus mainly on those that the research has defined as 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), understood by researchers as all those people for whom a given practice is meaningful and accountable.

The boundaries of these communities do not correspond to the boundaries of the so-called 'cultures', but tend to cross them. In fact, these communities of practice tend to be modulated according to other kinds of boundaries, namely those based on other categories already mentioned, such as age, gender, social class, schooling or a combination of these and other factors. For this reason, people can quite often participate in many communities of practice at the same time, depending on the multiplicity of daily affiliations and everyday situations (Rogoff 2003).

From an educational perspective, the process by which people become participants of these communities of practice has been interpreted by scholars as a form of 'situated learning' or 'experiential learning' (Lave and Wenger 1991), which is a form of learning rooted in every-day situations in which a person takes part (Fenwick 2000). This kind of perspective seems to be particularly useful to describe, interpret and then to intervene within educational contexts, especially in those environments where there is a high migrant and post-migrant presence. One of the reasons for which this perspective could be so useful in this kind of context is that situated learning approaches or experiential learning approaches focus on the way in which the actual participation of people in a group (migrant, post-migrant or native) do affect the way in which they learn. Therefore this kind of approach connects learning and social participation or social exclusion in different groups.

However, as we have already had occasion to point out (Zoletto forthcoming [b]), critics have focused on the risks that approaches based on situated learning or experiential learning may sometimes have. The main risk is that sometimes these approaches fail to investigate accurately the different positions the different people do actually take part in within the community. These different positions will then influence the power relations within the community and therefore the ways of participation and learning of the different people who take part and become members of the community (Fenwick 2000, 256). This, of course, is a risk that could be quite dangerous in heterogeneous contexts where migrant and post-migrant people do actually live, since the means of access of these different people to the symbolic and material resources are often quite different, depending on the time of migration as well as on the presence of (and on the relationships with) native inhabitants.

So, if we have to work in these diverse environments there is the need to apply an approach which takes into account all the components of these diverse areas. Thus, in order not to overlook the different power relations which mark the actual interaction between the individuals within these diverse areas, we have to pay special attention to the specific and concrete positions from which people take part in the various communities of practice. As I have already mentioned elsewhere (Zoletto forthcoming [a] and [b]), it is in this perspective that some suggestions from scholars who focus on these issues also from a gender perspective, become particularly valuable, even from a pedagogical perspective. I refer, first of all, to the idea of 'intersectionality' (McCall 2005), or the importance of focus, in both research and pedagogical intervention, on studying the way in which a multiplicity of social relations intersect each other in the educational context. I also refer to another suggestion given by Gill Valentine who says that in order to understand the way in which these intersectionalities are built up, it becomes important to study the way in which these intersections emerge 'in the interaction between people within specific spatial

contexts and specific biographical moments' (Valentine 2007, 19). This means – quoting again Valentine's words – to focus our attention on those specific 'power-laden spaces within and through which we live our experiences' (2007, 19).

The implications of these perspectives seem particularly relevant in the field of educational research on diverse environments. In fact, a sort of double awareness seems to emerge: on the one hand, the need to describe and interpret the multiplicity of dimensions that intersect in the education of a person, and on the other hand, the need to describe and interpret the ways in which these intersections are connected and rooted in specific places and educational moments.

Post-migrant youth and public places

The importance for those who research in migrant and post-migrant environments to pay specific attention to research the role played by different positions in learning processes taking place within diverse communities of practice, is something that also emerges clearly in the research carried out in Italy on the ways in which biographical and educational paths of post-migrant youth interact with the specificity of very localised institutional and non-institutional educationally diverse environments.

I refer, in particular, to a book written by Anna Granata, *Sono qui da una vita: Dialogo aperto con le seconde generazioni* (*I've Been Here for a Lifetime: Open Dialogue with Second Generations*). This book contains numerous stories of post-migrant youth that illustrate 'a sort of existential gap, passing from a condition of approval by the group of peers, that characterizes the childhood of post-migrants, to a different feeling – one of alienation' (Granata 2011, 50). In this new situation, the gaze of the others seems to register a difference between 'us' and 'them' – between individuals who were perceived earlier in their life as sharing the same situation. Many of the voices collected by Granada in her book emphasise the role that specific biographical moments and places had in building up this feeling of strangeness in the children of migrant parents. As stated by the author, in fact, 'in the biographies of the second generation youth, there is a point of no return: the sudden and pervading discovery of their diversity compared with the peer group' (Granata 2011, 50). Granata refers to France Twine's (1996) research and observes that post-migrant individuals 'risk developing a negative identity, especially when they realize that in spite of the fact that they are trying to belong to the majority, they are always perceived as strangers' (Granata 2011, 51).

It was not incidental that in order to analyse this 'sudden and pervading discovery', this 'point of no return', Granata turns to various concepts found in France Twine's (1996) and Mythili Rajiva's (2006) research. These three concepts are those of 'boundary events', 'boundary moments' and 'boundary works'. Other Italian authors use a different concept which is however similar to the previous ones. They use the concept of 'block events' (Favaro 2009, and in particular Luatti 2009, 98–99). All these concepts analyse how in the perception of belonging to the group of peers a rift can be created and often this rift is created by the peers themselves. In this way, a boundary marking a series of differences is drawn within this previous perception of belonging. On this boundary line many different elements intersect each other – perhaps the first one being differences based on somatic traits (Granata 2011, 50). However, many other different elements related to gender, age, social class, forms of (re)ethnicisation, as well as to biographical diversity also intersect each other on this boundary line.

Research on post-migrant individuals in Italy (see, in addition to the aforementioned Granata 2011, also Ambrosini 2005; Colombo, Genovese, and Canevaro 2006; Queirolo Palmas 2006; Granata and Granata 2007; Giusti 2008; Gobbo 2008; Costa 2008; Galloni 2008; Galloni and

Naclerio 2008; Callari Galli and Scandurra 2009; Santerini 2009; Scandurra and Antonelli 2010; Zoletto 2010, 2012; Genovese, Zannoni, and Filippi 2011; De Luigi 2012a, 2012b; Fiorucci 2012; Zinant 2014), show that many of these block situations are often connected to specific spaces that are perceived as more power-laden than others. The spaces many authors refer to are the public places where, as Granata says 'body differences are immediately observed' (2011, 60–61).

This observation by Granata is confirmed, among others, in some considerations by the well-known Chicano anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, who, on the basis of his research in California, reported the consequences that can often occur when some differences become visible within the public space, especially those differences that are clearly 'those categories that are visibly inscribed on the body, such as gender and race' (Rosaldo 1997, 29). Rosaldo focuses on the consequences that we can see when these categories become more visible than others. In public places, these differences are very visible and it is for this very reason that we can consider them as one of the most power-laden spaces in the everyday life of these post-migrant individuals. Rosaldo states that: 'it is difficult to conceal differences of gender and race, and given the prejudiced norms under which we still live, inequities will come to the surface' (1997, 29).

Obviously, young migrants and post-migrants are well aware of these dynamics. This is revealed not only in the sad stories they tell about their lives, but this awareness can be noted from the way they try to reverse the consequences of differences in public places. I refer to specific situations where post-migrant individuals try to reframe the situation where body differences become visible and they try to renegotiate the effects of this visibility. This is demonstrated, for example, in some recent public events where second generation youth parade in public showing alongside their bodies marked by these somatic and gender differences, symbols (the Italian flag, blue shirts of the Italian national team, etc.) of that 'national identity' of which they feel to be part and claim (for a first analysis of these events see Zoletto 2012, 63–67; for an in-depth analysis in the US context cf. Butler and Spivak 2007).

Ludic places between 'appropriation' and 'allocation'

Ludic places are not free from this type of dynamics. Ethnographic research on public playgrounds (compare, for example, Goodwin 1990, 2006; Thorne 1993; for an introduction see Evaldsson 2009) shows that in these places games among peers effectively point out how different elements such as class difference, gender, age and physical aspect all intersect each other. On one hand, this research shows the way in which a range of micro-power relationships in these playgrounds can develop and the way in which these relationships can be connected with what Bronfenbrenner (1979) would have called micro-, meso-, eso- and macro-systems that interact in the everyday lives of children and youth. On the other hand, ethnographic research seems to suggest that play interaction also can be connected with what the micro-sociologists would call a 'situational co-membership' (Erickson 1995). The concept of situational co-membership focuses on 'the sharing of attitudes of social identity that were distinctive as commonalities relevant in the situation at hand' (Erickson 1995, 295–296). These situational co-belonging relationships would thus seem able to prevail other kinds of differences in play interactions between peers: that which unites them overrules that which divides them. Today scholars would see in the shared elements in play interactions, one of the features that characterise specific kinds of 'peer cultures' (Corsaro 2011), or cultures shared by players based on their daily play practices. It is on the basis of these daily practices and shared cultures that community of practice can develop (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 2004).

With regard to the Italian context, results of a previous research on public cricket playgrounds located in diverse neighbourhoods of central and north-east Italian cities, which have already been presented in detail elsewhere (Zoletto 2010, 2013, forthcoming [a]; Zoletto and Wildemeersch 2012), can be referred to in order to connect them to the topic of this article.[1] We can try to appreciate how, in the case of these cricket playgrounds, places truly affect daily practices, forms of situational co-membership and daily community of practice and in this way how situated learning can take place in this type of context and how migrant, post-migrant and native individuals can or cannot interact with each other. These results can be reviewed and discussed using various analytical tools suggested by the Italian anthropologist, Amalia Signorelli, in her methodological essay devoted to the interdisciplinary analysis of the relationship between subjects and places (Signorelli 2008). In fact, the relation between subjects and places is especially important in educational research. As we have already seen in previous paragraphs, in order to understand and then guide educational processes that take place in diverse environments (Mantovani 2003, 110), we have to describe and understand the very characteristics of the places and the relationship between non-formal and informal educational processes, as well as how educational places are built up on the basis of power relations and the intersection between differences.

Signorelli's analytical proposal is useful in this regard as it invites us to analyse the structures of relationships between subjects and places in the light of a scheme that allows three levels of reading: 'the relationship between subjects (individual and/or collective) and places; the relationship among subjects (individual and/or collective) within places; the relationship between places experienced and mental representations of those experienced places' (Signorelli 2008, 45). With regard to the first level of analysis, Signorelli suggests how the modes of relationships between subjects and places can be traced back in three different ways:

(1) The first mode is 'the allocations of subjects to places' (Signorelli 2008, 51). This means when there are some actions 'arising from unilateral decisions' and not based on the will of those who are assigned to a place. This first case is quite interesting because Signorelli says that allocation is one of the ways in which power works in the relationships between subjects and places (2008, 51–52).

(2) The second mode is 'the appropriation of places by subjects' when private, public or semi-public places are used by someone in order to 'solve any problems' of the users (Signorelli 2008, 52–54).

(3) The third mode is termed 'appaesamento' – an Italian term taken from the anthropologist Ernesto De Martino, which could be translated into English as 'the perception of feeling at home' (Signorelli 2008, 54). This perception gives these people a sense of belonging and the result is that 'they transform the place into a symbolic place of that same value' (Signorelli 2008, 54–56).

If we try to use these three concepts to analyse the results of the research on cricket playgrounds, we can say that in most of the situations we researched, the first step in the use of public places by young migrant and post-migrant cricket players can be understood as a form of 'appropriation', using the terms suggested by Signorelli. In fact, by playing cricket in public places, the young cricket players were trying to solve a problem they found in their daily life. It should be kept in mind, for example, that to play cricket players need a big playing field with good grass. So, their first problem was that they were unable to find adequate areas where they could play their favourite game. The second point in question is the form of appropriation or use of the public areas by the migrant and post-migrant cricket players. In most cases it was a

temporary appropriation that did not last more than a couple of hours or one or two matches. The result was that the players did not invest the place with any lasting symbolic value nor did they use any particular symbol to show some permanent form of 'appaesamento'.

This certainly does not mean that the game of cricket itself did not play a symbolic role in the everyday life of these cricket players, but this symbolic value was more often than not expressed through the use of objects such as their particular T-shirts, cups won by the players and banners or signs put up by the supporters for the occasion. All these things were temporary and therefore in most cases no 'appaesamento', but appropriation occurred.

Another equally significant point in these cases analysed, is the consequences of the appropriation of the public places by migrant and post-migrant players. In fact, this appropriation produced an increase in visibility of the migrant and post-migrant players. Referring to what R. Rosaldo said, it is quite difficult to conceal racial differences in public places and for this reason, perhaps after a while the local native Italian population started to complain against this appropriation by the cricket players (Zoletto 2010, 13–31, 2013). In these areas the various local authorities had to intervene in some way or other in order to solve the problem. Various solutions were considered depending on the cases, however, one of these was to allocate a specific place to the players where they could play cricket by themselves (Zoletto 2013, forthcoming [a]). The local authorities solved the problem by identifying an area and dedicating it permanently or occasionally to the game of cricket. Hence, following Signorelli's frame, cricket players were 'allocated' to specific places where they were allowed to play cricket. Because these formal playgrounds were often quite far from the original public urban areas dedicated to cricket, these migrant and post-migrant players could play cricket, but there were (and are still now) far less opportunities for Italian and migrant and post-migrant players to interact with each other playing cricket. This is especially so because it is difficult for young people to get to these assigned areas which are usually quite far from the town (see the above-mentioned Zoletto 2010, 2013).

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In this article I suggested that, if we want to describe, to interpret and to intervene educationally on the concreteness of everyday encounters and practices that take place within diverse urban environments, not only do we have to consider the cultural traits of migrant, post-migrant and autochthonous individuals and groups, but we also have to focus on the ways in which a multiplicity of aspects (such as gender, social class, age) intersect within concrete contexts that are often laden by a range of power relations. This multiplicity of intersections also concurs to arrange the ways in which everyday communities of practice develop, and – as a consequence – the chances that migrant, post-migrant and autochthonous individual and groups have or do not have actually to interact in everyday non-formal and informal educational environments. From this point of view, examining the concrete ways in which different power relations intersect within and around the public spaces in which migrant, post-migrant and native individuals play cricket, can help us to describe and understand some emerging characteristics of north-east Italian urban environments more than any analyses of alleged players' cultural differences do. In fact, playing cricket in public resulted in a growth of visibility for migrant and post-migrant players in north-east Italian neighbourhoods. And this growth of visibility led to the allocation of cricket and cricket players to specific areas which can be seen as something positive for playing cricket, but not so positive to promote communities of practice in which migrant, post-migrant and native players can interact with each other. In this perspective, we could say that as far as cricket is concerned, the communities of practice that can develop in north-east Italian

power-laden/power-allocated ludic spaces are not always a community of practice in which a situational co-membership between different populations can develop. Rather, these power-laden ludic spaces seem to be places where a feeling of exclusion can often be built up. There are, in fact, situations where an interaction could happen, but in most of the cases it depends on the intentional intervention of the educators or of the local social or cultural work carried out to try to reframe and re-organise these places in order to make them accessible for different kinds and categories of people and to promote communities of practice in which migrant, post-migrant and native players can interact with each other.

Acknowledgements

Note

1. I refer, in particular, to research carried out at different times between the summer of 2007 and the spring of 2009. The focus of this research was on different public playgrounds located in urban environments in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto, Emilia, Lombardia and Lazio. The common characteristic identified was that in all of these public playgrounds, migrant, post-migrant, as well as native individuals, used them to play cricket in public. Most of the areas in question were located in Italian regions and districts strongly affected by flows of migrants from the countries of South-East Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri-Lanka and Bangladesh). In most of the aforesaid playgrounds the areas where cricket was played (public parks, squares, green spaces) were not designed or equipped for cricket, and the game was mainly practised by migrant and post-migrant youth, sometimes – but not often – also together with native players. The main aim of the research was to identify examples (and actual ways) of interaction or non-interaction between migrant, post-migrant and native individuals, both within and around the cricket playgrounds. Special reference was set on the connections between 'inter-group' interactions and informal processes of citizenship learning both for migrant, post-migrant and autochthonous youth. As mentioned, the results of the research have already been presented in Zoletto (2010, 2013, forthcoming [a]; Zoletto and Wildemeersch 2012). I would like to thank all the players, the teams and the associations I met during the research, and especially the Federazione Cricket Italiana, the Associazione 'Genitori Scuoda Di Donato' in Rome, and all the players and managers of cricket clubs of Paese (Treviso), Piazza Vittorio (Rome), Pordenone and Venice.

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