



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI MILANO



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In Collaboration with

University of Milan, Italy

PRESENTS

PANEL DISCUSSION

ON

CHALLENGE TO MULTICULTURALISM. EXPLORING INDIAN AND ITALIAN EXPERIENCES

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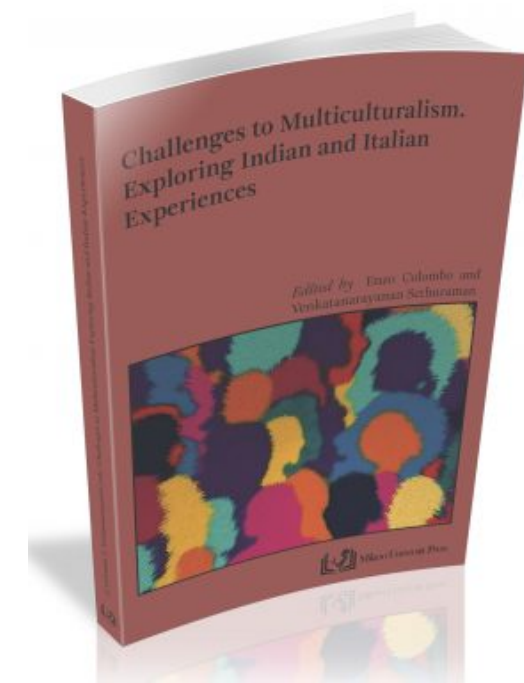
09-07-2025 | 2PM IST | SEMINAR HALL

MULTICULTURALISM IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES THE ITALIAN CASE

Angela Biscaldi & Anna Chinazzi



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Book
Chapter 7



Educational systems play a crucial role in building truly inclusive multicultural societies.

Schools are more than places of learning. They are spaces where ideas about identity, belonging, and difference are produced – and challenged both through explicit or more implicit practices (its ‘hidden curriculum’).

MULTICULTURALISM – BUT WHAT IS CULTURE?

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL LENS

“Culture” often becomes:

- Taken-for-granted
- A catch-all explanation
- A fixed label

But culture should be understood as:

- A heuristic tool
- Dynamic and relational: **lived, negotiated, and constantly shifting.**

“The multiculturalist gap risks freezing cultures, favouring the idea that ‘stable cultures’ exist over time and that the people who belong to them have an identity that is always the same”

Biscaldi & Chinazzi, 2025, p. 113

BUT...

**HOW DO THESE IDEAS TRANSLATE INTO
THE EVERYDAY REALITIES OF ITALIAN CLASSROOMS?**

METHOD: ANTHROPOLOGICAL DECONSTRUCTION AND ETHNOGRAPHIC CASES

- Anthropological deconstruction to **critically unpack** how the concept of culture is used, questioning its assumptions.
- Use of powerful **ethnographic vignettes** from Italian schools to illustrate the risks associated with an uncritical approach to multicultural education. Qualitative micro-stories can be **analytically powerful**, illuminating broader trends and tensions.

**“SMALL FACTS SPEAK
TO LARGE ISSUES”
GEERTZ**



THREE PITFALLS OF (UNCRITICAL) MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Three key risks that arise from a naive or uncritical conceptualisation of culture in education:

1. Generating Excesses of Culture

Over-emphasizing cultural differences where they may not exist

2. Reifying Culture

Treating cultures as fixed and unchanging

3. Overlooking Internal Differences

Ignoring diversity within cultural groups and missing other factors
(gender-, socio-economic, individual idiosyncratic differences)

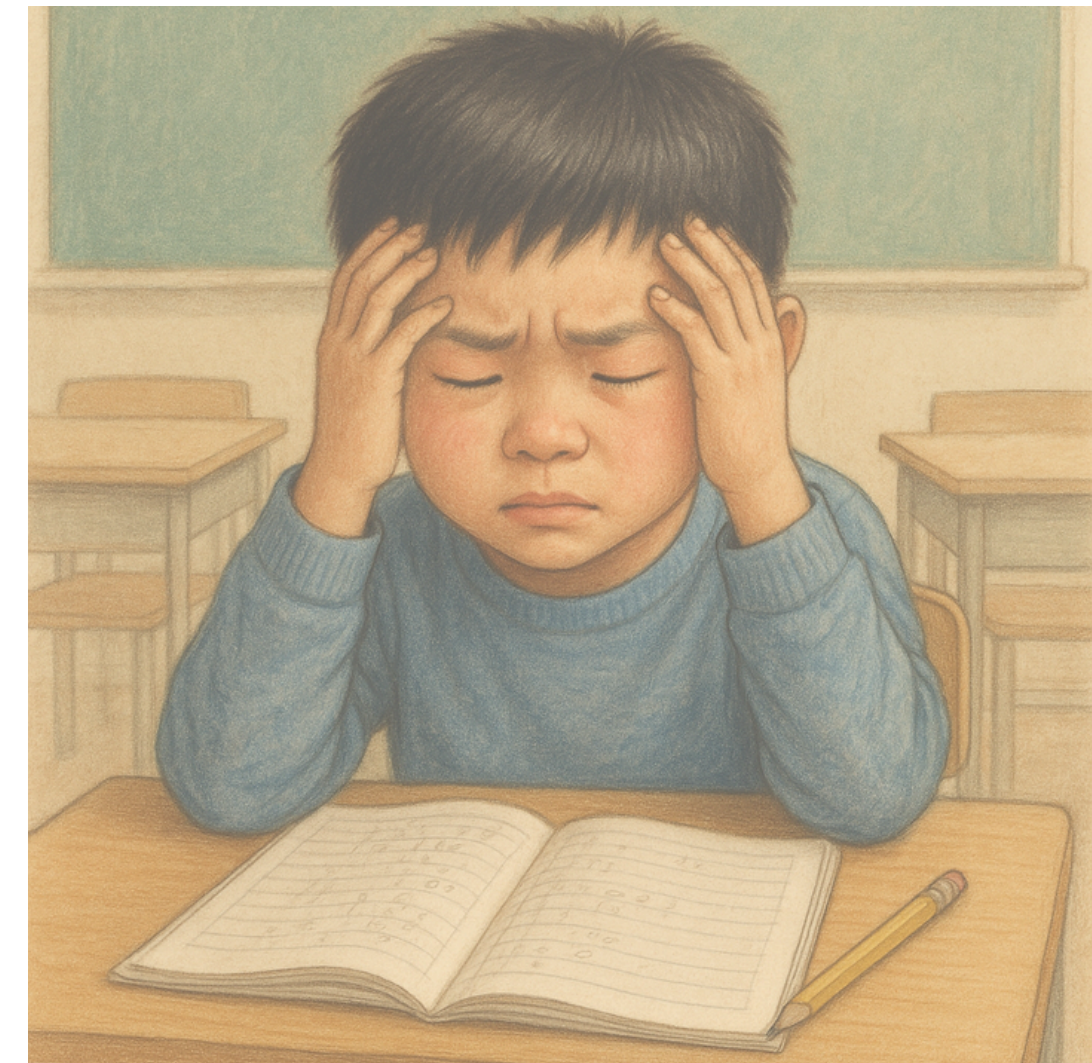
CASE 1: THE EXCESS OF CULTURE

Case drawn from Mazzetti (2003)

The 'excess of culture' refers to situations where culture is overemphasised as the primary explanation for behaviour or difference.

When cultural difference is made to explain everything, it can obscure other important factors.

Lin, age 8, new to Italy: teachers seek cultural explanation, but doctor diagnoses otitis (ear infection)



When 'culture' explains too much

CASE 2: REIFYING CULTURE

Case drawn from Angela Biscaldi's experience

- Mothers' daily connection
- School introduces "multicultural round dance"
- Mothers reduced to fixed identities

**Culture is lived and changing -
not symbolic display**



CASE 3: OVERLOOKING INTERNAL DIFFERENCES

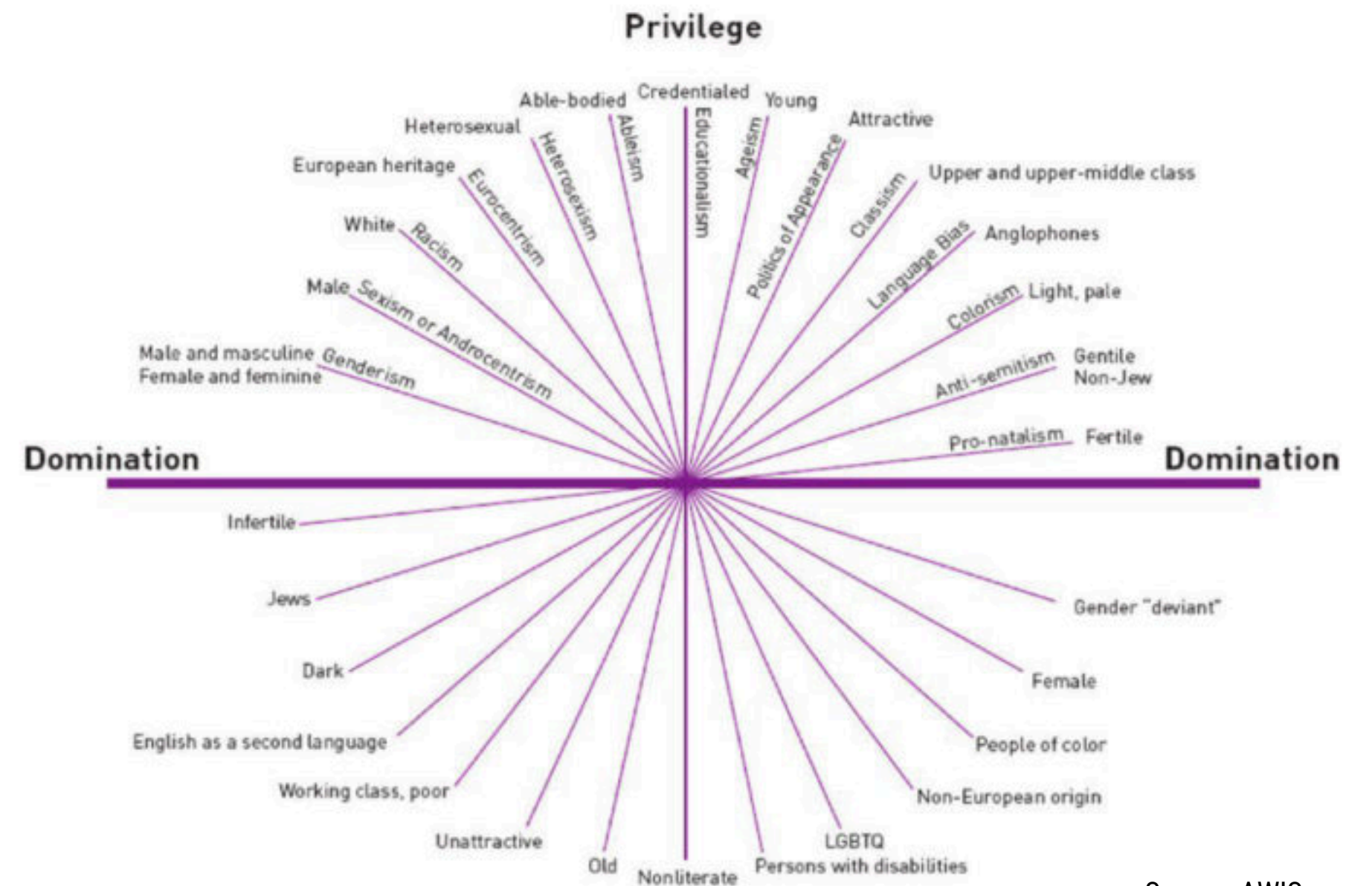
Flattening Identity → Ignoring Inequalities

Culture ≠ Homogeneous group

What about:

- Gender?
- Class?
- Power within communities?

Intersectionality and superdiversity



Source: AWIS

IN EUROPEAN AND ITALIAN EDUCATIONAL POLICY DISCOURSE...

Multicultural Approach

“coexistence” of
differences; with
separate cultural
identities



Intercultural Approach

dynamic view of cultures,
deliberate interaction,
dialogue and mutual
transformation

Italy has officially adopted the intercultural paradigm since the 1990s

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION: POLICY VS PRACTICE

A MODEL STILL IN THE SHADOWS

While interculturalism is the official paradigm for addressing inclusion in Italian schools, its implementation often remains superficial or inconsistent.

Intercultural education described as a '**ghost model**' (Tarozzi, 2012).

Both 'multicultural' and 'intercultural' approaches fall short **without critical reflection on the very notion of 'culture'**.

“Regardless of the label, either multi- or inter-cultural approaches need to be grounded in meaningful theoretical reflections to consistently inform educational practices”.

Biscaldi & Chinazzi, 2025, p. 118

WHY ANTHROPOLOGY BELONGS IN TEACHER TRAINING

- Promotes reflexivity and critical thinking
- Connects cultural awareness with justice
- Supports teachers in navigating complexity

Anthropology invites us to avoid a '*constitutive*' use of culture to embrace a '*regulative*' and heuristic understanding.

**IF TEACHERS THINK ANTHROPOLOGICALLY
WE CAN BUILD SCHOOLS THAT NOT ONLY
ACCOMMODATE DIVERSITY,
BUT TRANSFORM THROUGH IT.**

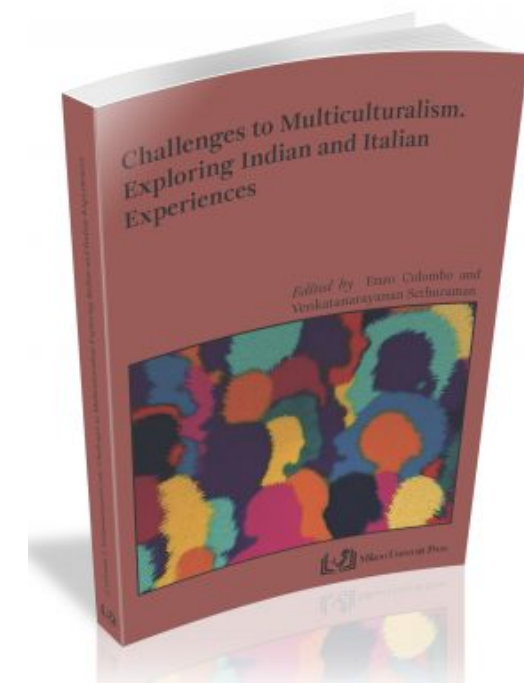
THANK YOU

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MULTICULTURALISM IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES (CHAPTER 7)

The Italian Case - Angela Biscaldi & Anna Chinazzi



Full
book

