Tell us briefly about the project, starting with the problem tackled.

Based on the results of a historical and sociological research study (history of migrations in Ticino, qualitative research based on interviews with migrants, two-month analysis of articles in Ticino newspapers), we are developing a theatrical pedagogy intervention programme for schools following compulsory education programmes. We are working over one year with two classes from Ascona primary school, and with one class from Locarno lower secondary school, with the aim of developing a "best practices" programme in order to thematise interculturality at school.

49% of Ticino residents have a migratory history (compared with the 37% average for Switzerland). Despite this, in public debate on the topic of migration, "migrants" are mainly perceived as groups of people fleeing their countries because of difficult living conditions and/or as a result of conflict and authoritarian regimes, or else as people who move in order to look for well-paid employment. The wide range of different motives and biographies tends to escape attention, and the media contributes to this sweeping interpretation of the facts.

This research project started because of our interest in the variety of individual stories of immigrants and emigrants in Southern Switzerland, and particularly in people recounting their biographies in person. This focus on people talking about their made it possible to capture not only the diverse range of experiences, but also the various ways in which individuals interpret these experiences, and to understand the strategies by which migrants tackle the experience of feeling like a foreigner in everyday life. Accessing these themes by way of theatre means not simply turning to the rational component, but also opening up the possibility of also achieving an emotional understanding of the situations.

What initial results have been obtained?

Regarding the analysis of newspaper articles, we noted, for example (particularly for one of the newspapers analysed), that when discussing migration, the most frequently highlighted aspect was criminality. There are very few articles analysing the topic of migration in greater depth in a differentiated manner, underlining the complexity of the phenomenon. As regards the initial results of the analysis of the interviews conducted with migrants (all in-depth interviews), we see that those who saw or experienced discrimination or xenophobic reactions to their skin colour, talk about it, but reiterate that they do not think this to be significant. Reacting with indifference to experiences of hostile or unjust treatment due to the sim-
ple fact of being an immigrant appears to be a psychic strategy adopted in order to withstand painful experiences.

What are the strong points of the project? And the problems
The implementation and transformation of the research results into a theatrical pedagogy educational context is the strong point of this project. As a result of the multicultural composition of classes, teachers and pupils in schools are increasingly being faced with the problems of intercultural communication. The theatre serves as a means for testing the level of understanding and empathy for “the other”.

Do you remember anything interesting, amusing or unusual that occurred during the project?
In comparison with primary school pupils, we saw that when lower secondary school pupils express their thoughts, they are influenced by the expectations of the adults. When asked to speak about their relationship with “the foreigner”, they tend to censor themselves, in line with the concept of “political correctness”, while primary school pupils appear to be more “authentic”.

Could other projects develop from this one?
There could be subsequent projects verifying, in other contexts, the processes tested in the Ascona and Locarno schools.

Apart from you, who else was on the project team?
In addition to myself, Veronica Provenzale, Victoria Franco and Paola Solcà (sociologist of migration DEASS - as consultant), also worked on the sociological and historical component; Lianca Pandolfini, Andrea Valdinocci, Kate Weinrieb and Hans-Henning Wulf collaborated for the part focusing on theatre laboratories in the schools.

Laboratory work in the classes

Project type: Applied research project, in course (01.02.2017-31.01.2019)
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Project partners: Primary Schools of Ascona/Ronco/Brissago; Locarno 1 Lower Secondary School; Centre for documentation and research on migration (Centro di documentazione e ricerca sulle migrazioni), DEASS (Paola Solcà)