

INTERGROUP CONFLICT AND CO-CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL: MULTI-METHOD RESEARCH IN AN INTER-ETHNIC CONTEXT

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Our aim was to identify the main elements of the school experience shaping the affective and cognitive memory trace. We interviewed three groups of subjects: a group of 30 Cimbrian speakers (belonging to the historical minority of Lusérn in Trentino), a group of 30 Trentino dialect speakers (majority language) and a group of 30 young adults (standard Italian native speakers). Data were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods (NVivo8 and SPSS16). According to Grounded Theory, we carried out theoretical coding to identify the core category and to determine the relationships and hierarchies among the various categories. The core category represents the semantic memory of the experience, its affective and representational imprint, the climate that characterized the first stable, lasting relationship with authority outside the context of the primary relationship. The structure of the model, verified in each of the three different groups, is presented.

Key words: Intergroup conflict; Core category; Primary school experience; Inter-ethnic context; Qualitative and quantitative research.

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A foreword is required because our qualitative research included a group of participants belonging to the historical minority of Lusérn in Trentino, probably the oldest of those minorities that are still vital (Hornung, 1981). In the mid-nineteenth century there were 10 German linguistic islands in Trentino, and, as a result of rising national tensions within the Habsburg Empire, the various ethno-linguistic groups founded the so-called “national leagues.” These included several German leagues, which sought to reconnect the Germanic enclaves in Trentino to the established German territory in order to safeguard their existence and ultimately to disrupt the region’s ethno-linguistic unity, so dear to the irredentists.

These initiatives unleashed a counteraction by the Italian contingent, which was also organized into “national leagues.” They founded and subsidized numerous primary and post-primary schools and institutions throughout the whole Trentino, giving particular attention to the places they considered to be at risk from German infiltration: Lusérn on the plateaux of Lavarone.

In 1866 the German school in Lusérn was founded, replacing the previous Italian school. By Spring of that year, the change in the language of instruction had been completed, thanks to the determination of the local Curate (Franz Zuchristian), and with the help of several advocates of German language ethnography working in the region, amongst them Christian Schmeller.

The people in favor of teaching in the Italian language built their own school with the help of the Italian national league, the *Pro Patria*. This decision opened up a rift between the two linguistic groups, until at least the first world war; the practice of teaching children in parallel, linguistically-defined schools is the perfect metaphor for the nationalistic/ideological split that divided the village of Lusérn. The co-existence of the two scholastic institutions, along with the constant disputes that marked the construction of the Italian school (completed in 1893) and the new German school (1894), unleashed a series of interminable local clashes between representatives of the two sides. These disagreements too often resulted in deep personal enmity, threats, conflicts and legal proceedings, all of which took a heavy toll on the climate of civic coexistence in the community, which, as a consequence, was forced to make decisions on the basis of linguistic affiliation; this, in turn, had dramatic repercussions on daily life and the government of the village.

Our aim in this study was to identify the main elements of the school experience shaping the affective and cognitive memory trace. To this end, we interviewed two groups of participants, a group of Cimbrian speakers and a group of Trentino dialect speakers, who had attended the first grade primary school in Trentino and were taught in the majority language (Italian). The two groups had several features in common: a native language differing from the language in which they were taught, a homogeneous linguistic background, were aged between 47 and 95, and attendance at primary school prior to the 1985 reform. However, the two groups were treated differently in primary school with respect to the use of their mother tongue: the Cimbrians often had restrictions and punishments at school imposed on them, while the Trentini (Trentino dialect speakers) were not subjected to any discrimination from teachers. We extended the sample to a third group of young adults aged between 18 and 24 and standard Italian native speakers, who had attended primary school after the 1985 reform.

From the end of the 19th century to at least the end of the 1980s, the minority language (*Cimbrian*) in Lusérn (Trent) was often a reason for discrimination/restrictions inflicted by the institutions (kindergarten, first grade primary school) and individuals (e.g., teachers, priests) working in the community. In 1987, the Institute for the Protection of German-speaking Historical Linguistic Minorities was established by means of a provincial law.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Piaget and Inhelder (1948) argued that the survival of the individual has as much to do with language as it does with the concept of human territory. Survival is social and cultural as well as physical, and is closely linked with learning and cognition. The authors draw attention to the fact that the process of occupying and taking possession of the space to which an individual belongs is repeated constantly in daily life and begins with a discovery made in the first few days of life. Over time this determines the individual's ability not only to represent him/herself in exterior space, but also to construct an interior space which will serve as a map for future acquisitions. Therefore, the ability of an individual to cognitively and affectively perceive and organize the experiences made while orienting her/himself in the cultural space of their environment, especially when it is not homogeneous, is fundamental to the construction of the knowledge that her/he will have of her/himself and of others (Harré & Gillett, 1994).

Our aim was to investigate how school experiences contribute to co-creating “the sense of agentive position, the sense that one is the agent of one’s actions and responsible to others for them,” this being “something that we acquire through ... the cultural conventions for the assignment of responsibility” (Harré & Gillett, 1994, p. 122). We will outline the affective, cognitive and social, hence discursive, structure that becomes a memory representation for the self when it experiences the other in the educational institution. Our aim is also to describe the core category of the material of recovered memories of salient experiences regarding the primary school context. We have attempted to analyze the changes in the remembered experiences of different populations. Participants we interviewed differed with respect to age, mother tongue and whether they attended school before or after the primary school reforms of 1985.

The educational reform of 1985 was a kind of watershed for the minority community that we intend to analyze, because it did away with the old elementary school system which revolved around the teacher merely implementing the State Education system, and the national programs in particular. The reform, which began with the launch of the New Programs in 1985, brought to an end a centuries-old educational system, which, having resisted all the reforms that had been made, had retained its essential character: a monocratic, vertical, essentially authoritarian and, in particular, culturally homogeneous structure. The time-honored figure of the class teacher disappeared with the new law and was replaced by an “organizational model” centered on the principle of collective teaching in primary schools, with three teachers for two classes or four teachers for three classes. This transformation brought a marked change in the balance of power between teachers of different disciplines (foreign languages, science, and literature), who were henceforth able to deal with their pupils’ cultural and linguistic diversity with greater openness and ease in the classroom.

If we look at the minority community from the perspective of ethno-linguistic vitality (group vitality), Lusérn is a vital community (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977) since it meets two of three criteria according to which a minority can be defined as vital, hence differentiated and culturally active: demographic variables, institutional control, social status.

As far as demographic variables are concerned, Lusérn has a total of 297 inhabitants distributed over 156 family units (according to the 2001 census, data for the 2011 census are not yet available); 89.9% of the population declare themselves to be native Cimbrian speakers, while there are only 30 people who do not speak the local language (Pedrazza, 1990, 1991a, 1991b).

Regarding the second criterion (institutional control) — the degree of control the community exercises over its own destiny and its social decision-making power in institutional and cultural matters (Sachdev & Bourhis, 2001) — we see that the community exercises effective control over the diffusion of the language in the educational context, and has done so at least since 1978. There are also specific rankings for teachers who speak the local language, a public examination to assess knowledge of the minority language — an essential prerequisite for employment in the local public administration. Finally, the right to translate all official public administration documents into the local language has also been sanctioned.

The third criterion (social status), however, has not yet been completely fulfilled, as not only is the social prestige of the community not very high (Giles & Johnson, 1987), but there is very little awareness of the community on the part of the inhabitants of Trentino-Alto Adige, the region to which it belongs.

METHODS

Choice of Research Method and Organization of the Research

At Step 1, we explored the centrality of educational institutions and linguistic policies to obtain *extant* texts or letters and documents in order to carry out a diachronic analysis of the schooling system in Lusérn and throw light on almost a century of nationalist struggle for predominance and community control. In many cases, the documented disputes caused a real crisis in civic co-existence in the village. Historical-documentary research on the period covering the First World War and the transfer of Trentino-Alto Adige from the Habsburg Empire to the Kingdom of Italy — important historical turning points — shows the role played by the particular cultural identity of the local population in the outbreak of nationalistic excesses prior to 1915, and the way the population of Lusérn had to reach a compromise with Italian nationalism after the First World War. This all occurred against a background of misery and poverty in which economic considerations and the struggle for survival were often crucial in influencing leaders' decisions and actions.

At Step 2, we carried out a narrative-biographical analysis through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with three groups of native speakers of different languages — Cimbrian, the local Trentino dialect, and standard Italian language — focusing on their primary school experiences. The first two groups of participants, aged between 47 and 95, were alike in having an Italian school background. The members of both groups also had a mother tongue that differed from the language in which they were taught (Cimbrians spoke a German ancient tongue, whose use was typically not admitted at school; the other group spoke a local Italian dialect, which was tolerated in institutional settings, being perceived as a variation of the national majority' language). The third group we analyzed was made up of young people under 24 years of age who all spoke the same language as the educational institution they attended (standard Italian). In analyzing these rather diverse groups we were able to cover all the categories imputable to school experience, thus facilitating the identification of the cognitive-affective structure and the core category around which it is organized. We sought to achieve a theoretical sampling by choosing a process of gradual sampling whereby we could extend the sample and collect further data on the basis of what emerged from the analyses. We decided to carry out a selective or theoretical coding, which consists in an initial phase of open coding, followed by an analysis of the relationships between categories (code map) and consequent description of the properties of each category. This ultimately allowed us to identify the core category and to determine the relationships and hierarchies among the various categories. The interviews took the form of self-reports (with prior consent from the interviewees) and were literally transcribed, then processed together with various pieces of information and memos (Strauss & Corbin, 2008), produced as we went along. We wished to discover whether the traces left in people's memory from their first school experiences differed as a function of their age, their affiliations and the length of time they attended primary school. Processing was carried out using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo8, which was designed for developing and refining the Nudist software (Non-numerical, Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, and Theory-building).

Epistemological Premises

One of the most widely used qualitative methods and one of the most acclaimed in academic circles is grounded theory (GT), a systematic methodology used in the social sciences, which involves the construction of theory through data analysis. Collaborative research on dying patients in hospitals carried out by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), led them to develop the constant comparative method, which later became known as grounded theory. The authors were the first to successfully demonstrate that sociological and psychological theories could be based on qualitative data and that these data have an intrinsic value. This method, which was further developed by, among others, Bryant and Charmaz (2007), Charmaz (1995, 2000, 2006, 2009), Glaser (1992), Morse et al. (2009), Pidgeon and Henwood (1997), Strauss and Corbin (2008), inspired our research, which focused on the uniqueness and the situated dimension of the phenomenon before considering in what way it might differ from or resemble others. The diversity and distinctiveness of the populations analyzed served not so much to compare measurements over the same variables or scales as to identify common categories and invariants; attention was focused on rare and exceptional cases or situations (attaching scientific value even to an individual case) and, furthermore, on the individual personality of each participant.

Following Henwood and Pidgeon's (1995) methodological recommendations, grounded theory consists in carrying out triangulation of sources, careful description of the procedures, continuous analysis of the data gathered, including data obtained from the participants taking part in the investigation and outside observers, to make the study repeatable and reliable.

The starting point in this type of research is the language and the meanings that participants attribute to the world in which they live in order to discover conceptual consistencies in the phenomena analyzed; this method is thus suitable for exploring the processes underlying the various phenomena and the dynamics captured in the context. The participants were selected by progressively extending their number and characteristics throughout the course of analysis. Extension (theoretical sampling) is driven by the demands imposed by the process of theoretical conceptualization based on what emerges from the analysis. Theoretical sampling is only possible by virtue of the fact that data are gathered and analyzed at the same time. In fact, the purpose of gathering data is to obtain a detailed, hence accurate, representation of the phenomenon. The process of coding, selecting the initial categories of interest to the research, reformulating the research question and defining the properties and attributes of the categories also requires that analytical examination go hand in hand with periodic returns to the field and that the collection of data be guided by analytical examination of the emerging categories. This is why interpretation of data is not independent from collection or sampling in the approach we took; in fact, we began to analyze data as soon as they became available and interpretation was the basis for deciding which data or cases to integrate into subsequent analyses and which methods to use to collect them.

According to grounded theory, categories and interpretations already exist while data are being collected, given that data are already an interpretation of reality, a multi-faceted, complex, social construct. In carrying out our research we used the constant comparative method at every stage of analysis, whereby constant comparisons are made between data and the labels generated from the initial coding, the events observed, the categories, and the properties of the categories. Grounded theory is organized in three phases: 1) conceptualization of the descriptive data to yield

progressive abstractions, where the theoretical pathway in all its procedural rigor can always be reconstructed; 2) identifying concepts based on their intrinsic characteristics, and 3) establishing links between concepts to arrive at increasingly complex processes and models, and eventually one or more theories which can explain the phenomena.

Research Questions

The child's first prolonged contact with primary school is also his/her first encounter with a recognized authority outside the family context. What is the nature of memory trace left by this long, important experience? What are its main components? How are these components connected with each other? How do they contribute to defining the core category? What structure emerges from the semantic and experiential sphere of the school? Is it possible to distinguish the semantic memory from the episodic memory of the experience? Is the memory structure resulting from the first contact with school different for Cimbrians and Trentini, for those who speak a language with negative connotations in the institutional environment and for those who speak an idiom, albeit not the standard language, with positive connotations? Is the way in which the first contact with school is recorded in the mind different for people who attended primary school 40 years ago and 15 years ago?

Sampling of Participants

Qualitative methods researchers are not so much interested in the number of cases as in throwing light on as many aspects and as much information as possible drawn from an individual human case or context. Ours is a small focused sample, which we explored in order to discover those essential elements that provide a plausible, coherent and saturated picture of the school experience, and to observe the interactions between the various aspects investigated. We repeat that the results will not be statistically generalizable, although the model and/or the theory arising from this type of study may be. The sample was not defined a priori, but during the course of the research: a method known as theoretical sampling.

Theoretical sampling is a process whereby the researcher concurrently collects, codes and analyzes data and then decides what data to collect next (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The aim is to have the greatest number of opportunities to compare events in order to ascertain how categories vary in terms of their properties and size (Glaser 1978). According to Strauss and Corbin (2008), there are three basic types of theoretical sampling: open sampling, relational and variational sampling, and discriminated sampling, all of which were used in this study.

Participants were selected on the basis of gaps in the emerging theory and the sample was broadened to obtain further information to see whether the categories were equally valid in contexts other than those so far examined. This process ended when the categories or ideas which emerged on the subject *memory of school* were thought to be saturated (Morse, 1995).

Adopting a theoretical sampling method according to criteria of significance and qualitative consistency, we first interviewed a group of 30 native Cimbrian speakers (open sampling),

mostly female (63%), aged from 47 to 95 years ($M = 71.4$, $SD = 13.3$). These participants had attended school for an average of 12.43 years ($SD = 3.21$).¹

During the course of the research, we decided to broaden the sample, not for statistical reasons but to develop ideas. In our case, after the first set of interviews with the inhabitants of Lusérn we wondered whether memories of school were influenced by territorial, cultural and historical minority linguistic affiliation. To clarify this issue, we broadened the sample (relational and variational sampling) to include participants with similar demographic characteristics but different linguistic affiliation (native speakers of Italian, which does not have negative connotations). And so we interviewed a group of 30 people resident in villages in the Autonomous Province of Trento, mostly female (60%), aged from 56 to 92 years ($M = 72.57$, $SD = 11.32$). These participants had attended school for an average of 10.3 years ($SD = 2.23$).

Finally, to study the nature of the data collected and the results of the analyses carried out thus far in greater detail, we sampled a group of 30 young people (discriminate sampling), aged from 18 to 24 years ($M = 21.0$, $SD = 2.10$), mainly female (63%), resident in various villages in the Autonomous Province of Trento, who had recently completed their mandatory education. These participants had attended school for an average of 15.97 years ($SD = 0.81$).

This is a non-probabilistic — yet rigorous — sample, from which inferences may be drawn in so far as participants are selected in accordance with the emerging theory.

Data Collection

The data for this study, were collected from face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews tape-recorded in 2010. The interview guidelines were designed by the researchers to enable them to explore memories and experiences associated with participants' attendance at primary school. We chose the interview technique as it provides insights into the interviewees' points of view and their perspective on school, that is, the set of values and meanings they attribute to their experiences. The interview may be defined as a form of professional conversation according to specific rules and techniques, and is also a sincere exchange of views between two people discussing a topic of mutual interest out of which emerges knowledge (Kvale, 1996).

Our research involved devising ad hoc several open-ended questions, which allowed the interviewer and interviewee the possibility to diverge from the topic to elaborate on a concept in greater detail. This strategy enabled the interviewer to discover how the interviewee's interpretations of a particular topic were structured, without, as far as possible, imposing her/his own structure and opinions. The researcher needs to be as neutral as possible and be aware that the research will inevitably be biased by his/her presence. We feel that this type of interview is the best in light of the trace and the most important aspects to be explored, because it gives the researcher the freedom to choose the order of questions, to elaborate on or rein in topics, and to check any irrelevant digressions by bringing the interviewee back to the subject of the interview and focusing responses, without having to deal with rigid constraints on how, when and in what order to address the topics. The semi-structured interview also allows increasingly focused questions to be asked as the theory emerges and to narrow the field of research around the core category. The interview explores the underlying socio-psychological process and the ways in which the partici-

pant's experiences are consciously placed within that process. The aim is to stimulate people to reflect on their personal experiences.

The following key nodes emerged during analysis of the interviews: 1) memories linked to emotions characterizing peer relationships (friendships) and relationships with teachers and priests in the school environment (institutional affectivity); 2) memories linked to the type of authority in the school: supportive or helpful, reward-based or punitive; 3) memories linked to the rules in force in the school, to religion and classroom behavior; 4) memories linked to the use or otherwise of the Trentino dialect or Cimbrian at school, and to positive or negative contact with the Italian language; 5) memories linked to school prior to the 1985 reform with respect to the climate in society at the time, the skills, discipline and organization prevailing in the school, as well as relational aspects and teachers; regarding the present situation (post-1985 reform), issues may relate to the attention given to relational aspects and skills, or teachers' reduced power of discretion, or lack of discipline.

The oldest interviewees spoke of a school teaching different children, with strict rules, great respect for authority and an iron discipline; the younger respondents spoke of a different school, with greater emphasis on relational aspects and the development of social skills. Regardless of the age of participants, the school experience figures large in memories and is a frequent topic of conversation with peers and with parents, children or grandchildren.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, the researchers gave due consideration to participants' rights. Cover letters were sent to participants with clear information on the aims and procedures of the study and on issues of confidentiality and anonymity. All participants returned their letters giving their consent.

Data Analysis

According to Dey (1993) qualitative analysis involves breaking up the data into smaller units then reassembling them in new ways. Initial description of the data is followed by a process of decomposition into smaller units; the interrelationships between these units are then examined to arrive at a new description based on reconceptualization of the data. The central phase in this process is classification, that is, assigning the data to categories on the basis of relevant characteristics and meanings. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), generating the categories is the most difficult, complex, ambiguous, creative and enjoyable phase, as it requires extensive familiarity with the data and a great capacity to capture the nuances of social phenomena. Creating categories involves detecting regularities and trying to identify the categories of meaning that best express the content of the data. The skill is to identify salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and the belief patterns that connect people with the context.

Conceptualizations (codings) are firmly rooted in the empirical data, with some original responses being used or generalizations made in the form of easily interpretable labels while remaining constantly faithful to the phenomenon. The categories gather together similar responses

based on the principle of content equivalence/similarity. Each minimum unit of meaning is classified by attributing one or more categories to it.

The relationship between data collection and analysis takes the form of a spiral: we start by making an initial provisional interpretation, then go on to collect more data and look at how we can modify the first formulation in light of these data; and so on in a spiral process that ends when the formulation obtained is deemed sufficient to explain the available data. The objective of the data analysis is to reach an understanding of the meanings that participants attribute to their social world.

Analysis is a circular process whereby the transcript has to be read several times with each reading providing new ideas and insights. We decided to make a case analysis, that is, by grouping together the responses from different people to the same question, since our interest was focused on a specific theme and we wanted to record the opinions of different interviewees on this topic.

We then followed Smith's (1995) procedural and methodological recommendations for analyzing qualitative data drawn from interviews. We read the transcripts numerous times, during which we noted everything that seemed interesting or significant, listed the themes that emerged and examined the relationships between them, in an attempt to understand exactly what the interviewees had said in order to interpret their interviews appropriately. This allowed us to generate categories ad hoc for each theme via an inductive process (key words or abbreviations). Having analyzed the first interviews in this way, we used the codes that emerged to analyze the subsequent interviews, inserting new codes only where necessary. We then reassembled the material in line with the codes and put together all the cases exemplifying each theme.

We then fine-tuned the categorization, a process which involved examining each theme in turn and using the raw material to define the nature of each more clearly; the themes that emerged as superordinate from an interactive, creative process were also included, which allowed initially disparate material to be connected. Categorization enabled us to reduce and structure the text. We aimed to be as systematic and methodical as possible in our analysis.

Analysis was structured around three conceptually progressive coding operations. Coding is the set of procedures and techniques followed in order to conceptualize the data. The interpretation process begins with the initial open or substantive coding, that is, conceptualization on the first level of abstraction (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 2008), whereby the data are explored analytically, fractured and expanded in all possible directions. Then each piece of text is examined in detail and the first conceptual labels, discovered in the data and relevant to the research question, are assigned. Given that the categories need to be internally consistent but distinct from one another, we sought those with internal convergence and external divergence. We attempted to identify the most important meaning categories to explain the content of the data, and assembled them into superordinate categories.

The result was a list of codes and categories attached to the text together with the notes written to explain and define the content of these codes and categories, and memos containing observations and comments on the material, elements of the context in which the action takes place, intentions and underlying meanings.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) also proposed axial coding and defined it as "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories." They proposed a "coding paradigm" (also discussed by Kelle, 2005) that involved "conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences" (p. 96). In this phase, common conceptual elements subtending larger portions of text are analyzed, the data are

organized and summarized and categories are drawn up and grouped into macro-categories. Finally, selective coding takes over from axial coding at a higher level of abstraction in an attempt to identify the core category, around which the others can be grouped and integrated, given that it is the main organizing concept of the research area, has the most ramifications and is the most recurrent. At this point, all the categories have been determined, the links between them have been established, and, above all, they have been integrated into a coherent, unifying theory.

Description and coding are not an end in themselves, rather they serve to produce a report of the analysis by creating connections. To do so, it is essential to examine the regularities, variations and idiosyncrasies in the data (exceptions to the rule). We therefore investigated the interactions between the concepts that emerged in producing the overall structure, and also measured frequencies in the data to confirm the observed regularities. We then went back to the data to see if the regularities could be explained, using a process whereby the plausibility of the hypotheses formulated was assessed and verified against the data.

We tried to attain theoretical saturation, that is, the condition in which the theory and its concepts are able to explain all the collected data and where additional data would not add anything. We did not, however, manage to formulate a true theory, but were reassured by the fact that there may be variations in the level of complexity of the final theory (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). Instead we produced an analysis of the relationships between the concepts that emerged as being the most important for the respondents.

An essential element in the analysis is the need to monitor and document the analytical procedures and the processes of analysis as comprehensively as possible. Documentation consists of: 1) field notes; 2) memos, these being the “theorizing write-up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerge during coding, collecting, and analyzing data” (Glaser, 1998, p. 177); personal logs (Plummer, 1995), in which the operations of analysis and the various impressions, associations, questions and ideas are recorded.

Reliability, Validity and Limitations of the Research Methodology

The term validity is to be construed as the degree of accuracy with which an account represents the social phenomena it is dealing with (Hammersley, 1990). We adopted the principle of refutation to obtain the most valid results, that is, the case was scrutinized from every possible angle. We also used the technique of continuous comparison, which involved looking for another case, on which to test the provisional hypothesis, and analyzing and comparing all the fragments of data occurring in a single case (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Having created a set of categories, we then tested the hypotheses that emerged and continued to expand the corpus of data. Given that our analysis encompassed all cases — and we are willing to provide the criteria and basis on which cases were included — we carried out an overall processing of data to ensure our results had maximum validity (Mehan, 1979). Furthermore, our research can be replicated given that the material is available in its original form.

It should be pointed out that research of this type does not require external validation; the principle of modifiability means that grounded theory is self-evaluating (Tarozzi, 2008) and, above all, inherently self-correcting. When new elements emerge that refute the categories that have been created, the theory is not falsified but is merely temporarily inaccurate and incomplete:

it means that the categories are not, after all, adequately saturated and the researcher simply has to examine the data in greater depth, perhaps adding new data to reformulate and correct a part of the theory.

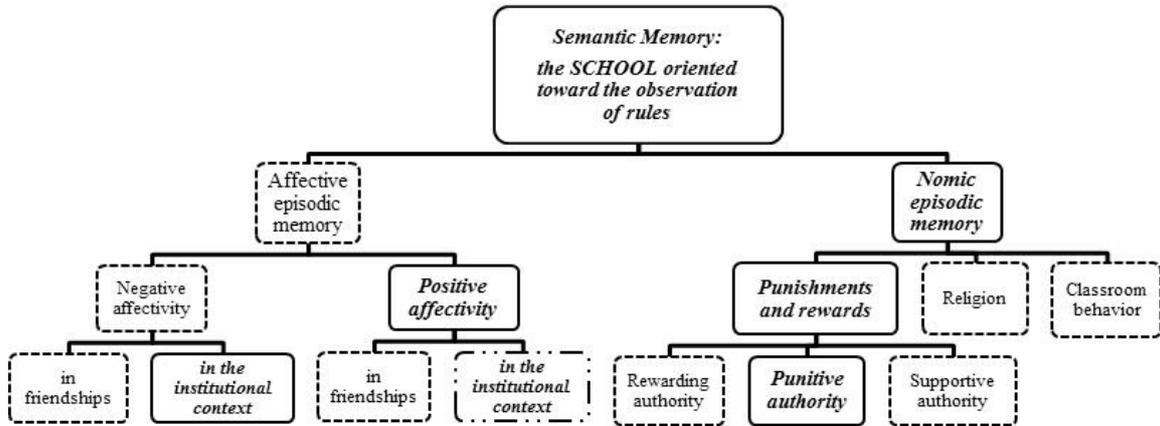
Reliability in this type of research is construed as the degree of consistency with which cases are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Hammersley, 1992). Categories were used consistently. Units of meaning were included in the categories on the basis of decisions made by four different judges, who worked independently and compared their results only when they had finished their work, in order to exclude the possibility of their influencing each other.

Given all this, the first limitation of this research methodology lies in the fact that great attention is given to uniqueness and the idiosyncrasies of the object of the investigation, which is linked to the degree of generalizability aspired to in explaining the phenomena. In our research, the explanation of results is, of course, closely linked to the people interviewed, and to the periods and places investigated. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that the procedures used to analyze the data, the most problematic aspect of qualitative research, relied on the researchers' interpretive skills and their capacity for subjective conceptualization.

FINDINGS

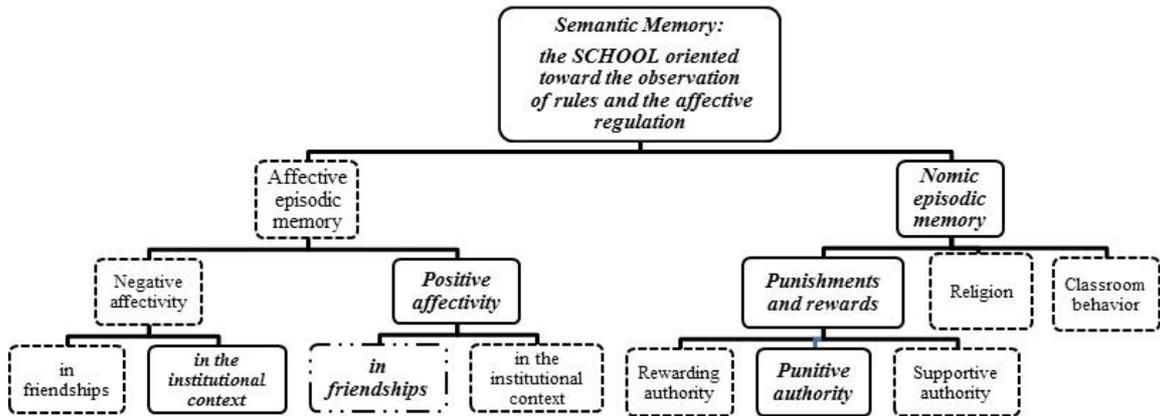
The theory that explains the school experiences we analyzed as the sample was gradually expanded, is structured in such a way that it applies to the experiences of all three groups of participants we interviewed, and can, therefore, be taken as valid (Figures 1, 2, and 3). The core category represents the semantic memory of the experience, its affective and representational imprint, the climate that characterized the first stable, lasting relationship with authority outside the context of the primary relationship. The structure was verified in each of the three different experiences in terms of the number and substance of the categories, with only the degree of saturation differing between the three groups. The fact that each of the three experiences saturated the categories differently led us to characterize their school experiences differently. The minority group's school experience (Figure 1), is recorded as being predominantly characterized by rewards and punishments. The normative dimension, prevailing over the remembered emotional experience, however, forms the background to most of the remembered episodes. Furthermore, affectivity has little to do with the sphere of interactions between peers but instead has to do with contexts (for example, the informal) in which the interlocutor is an adult, teacher or priest. The interaction with an adult is, therefore, prevalent in the informal, affective sphere where a greater number of interactions between peers would be expected.

There were a greater number of memories relating to positive, informal interactions with peers in the group of Trentini, Figure 2, whose use of their mother tongue was not subject to restrictions, compared with the group of Cimbrians (Pedrazza, 1992, 1999). The school is a normative context in which rules and the breaking of rules are recurring themes, but there is also room for affective interactions between peers. The restrictions on the use of their mother tongue imposed on the group of Cimbrian speakers likely preempted peer interactions, given that it would have to have been conducted in Italian, a language which the children had not yet mastered.



Note. Positive affectivity in the institutional context is significantly greater in the sample of Cimbrian speakers than in the sample of young adults ($p < .017$).

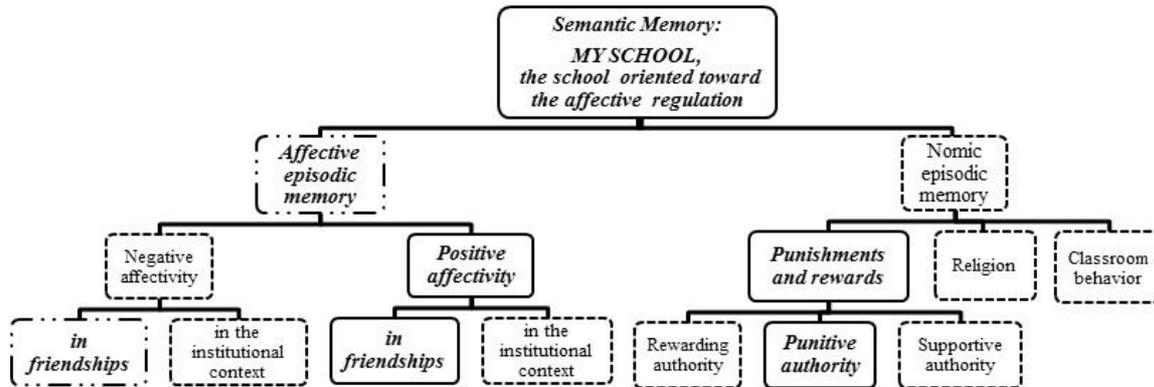
FIGURE 1
 Sample of Cimbrian speakers.



Note. Positive affectivity in friendships is significantly higher in the sample of local Trentino dialect speakers than in the samples of Cimbrian speakers ($p < .01$).

FIGURE 2
 Sample of local Trentino dialect speakers.

Finally, in the group of young adults, Figure 3, a core category emerges where socialization at all levels is encouraged. Socialization and the practices related to it are recurring themes to the point that affectivity, informal interaction between peers are more conspicuous and more numerous than memories relating to rewards and punishments. In addition, there are also significant numbers of negative memories relating to episodes of informal interactions with peers. This illustrates the different climate prevailing in the school after the 1985 reform, one that is less authoritarian and more tolerant, to the point that negative informal episodes between peers may occur and remain an important aspect of classroom life.



Note. Negative affectivity in friendships is significantly higher in the sample of young adults than in the samples of Cimbrian speakers ($p < .001$) and local Trentino dialect speakers ($p < .005$). Affective episodic memory differs significantly from the samples of Cimbrian speakers ($p < .005$) and local Trentino dialect speakers ($p < .005$).

FIGURE 3
 Sample of standard Italian speakers.

Nonparametric Analysis

We performed a nonparametric analysis (software SPSS16) in order to understand the differences between our three groups of interviewees with respect to category saturation.

Statistical analysis of the degrees of category saturation carried out using the Kruskal-Wallis test, led us to conclude that the three samples differ significantly regarding affective episodic memory, whether negative affectivity or positive affectivity. Significant differences emerged in negative affectivity both in friendships, $\chi^2(2) = 15.860, p < .001$, and in the institutional context, $\chi^2(2) = 18.342, p < .001$.

To explore paired differences between the samples in greater depth, we conducted three Mann-Whitney tests using the Bonferroni correction. The results showed that negative affectivity in friendships is significantly higher in the sample of young adults than in the samples of Cimbrian speakers ($p < .001$) and local Trentino dialect speakers ($p < .005$); negative affectivity in the institutional context is significantly higher in the sample of Cimbrians speakers than in the samples of local Trentino dialect speakers ($p < .005$) and young adults ($p < .001$).

Statistical analysis of the levels of category saturation carried out using the Kruskal-Wallis test, led us to conclude that the three samples also differ significantly with respect to positive affectivity in friendships, $\chi^2(2) = 13.278, p < .002$, and positive affectivity in the institutional context, $\chi^2(2) = 9.100, p < .015$.

The Mann-Whitney test also showed significantly greater positive affectivity in friendships in the sample of young adults than in the sample of Cimbrian speakers ($p < .001$), but the young adults did not differ significantly from the local dialect speakers. Positive affectivity in the institutional context was significantly greater in the sample of Cimbrian speakers than in the sample of young adults ($p < .017$), but did not differ significantly from the sample of local Trentino dialect speakers. The sample of Cimbrian speakers had significantly lower positive affectivity in friendships ($p < .010$) and significantly higher positive affectivity in the institutional context ($p < .010$) than the sample of local Trentino dialect speakers.

Statistical analysis of the level of category saturation, carried out using the Kruskal-Wallis test, led us to conclude that the three samples also differed significantly with respect to punitive authority, $\chi^2(2) = 25.552, p < .001$. Here, too, in order to explore paired differences between the samples in greater depth three Mann-Whitney tests were carried out using the Bonferroni correction. The results showed that punitive authority was significantly lower in the sample of young adults than in the samples of Cimbrian speakers ($p < .001$) and local Trentino dialect speakers ($p < .001$).

Finally, we used the Kruskal-Wallis test to see whether there were any differences in saturation levels in categories related to nomic episodic memory. It can be concluded that the three samples differed significantly with respect to the rules regarding punishments and rewards, $\chi^2(2) = 11.587, p < .005$, the rules regarding religion, $\chi^2(2) = 20.536, p < .001$, and the rules regarding behavior in the classroom, $\chi^2(2) = 18.176; p < .001$.

To explore paired differences between the samples in greater depth we conducted three Mann-Whitney tests using the Bonferroni correction. The results showed that rules regarding punishments and rewards figured to a significantly lesser extent in the sample of young adults than in the samples of Cimbrian speakers ($p < .003$) and local Trentino dialect speakers ($p < .005$); rules related to religion also figured to a significantly lesser extent in the sample of young adults than in the samples of Cimbrian speakers ($p < .001$) and local Trentino dialect speakers ($p < .001$), while the rules regarding behavior in the classroom figured significantly higher in the sample of local Trentino dialect speakers than in the samples of Cimbrian speakers ($p < .001$) and young adults ($p < .015$).

DISCUSSION

The results of our research show that similar categories emerged from the analysis of interviews, and these were saturated by the data on school experience from the three groups. More importantly, it was possible to identify a model (theory) and a core category common to the three groups. This shows that the differences in the school experience are due to the degree of category saturation and not to different categories.

The results also show that, in a context where a distinctive feature of one's identity is the identification with the ingroup and the ingroup's distinction from the outgroup (the majority, often associated with negative experiences), the school experience assumes strong normative meaning.

Finally, we note that evidence of the nature of the "new" school, subsequent to the 1985 reform, is also manifested in the group of young people by the emergence of school experiences where the affective dimension is saturated to a greater extent than the normative, judgmental dimension.

NOTE

1. In counting the years of education, we also considered nursery school.

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