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Changes in Teacher Education in Italy: A Survey from Italian Unification to Today

Abstract: This paper focuses on recent trends in teacher education in Italy, taking into account elementary and preschool (3–10 years old) teacher education as well as secondary school (11–18 years old) education and highlighting the changes and continuities in the history of Italian teacher education.

Teacher training in Italy reached a turning point with Law no. 341 (1990), which established a new comprehensive system of university education for schoolteachers of all levels. In 1998 a four-year degree course for future elementary and preschool teachers was implemented. As for the initial training of junior and senior schoolteachers in 1999, they were required to attend the School of Specialisation for a two-year period.

In 2010 a five-year *numerus clausus* degree course was implemented for pre- and primary schoolteachers, using a different curriculum and providing a teaching qualification. Secondary school teaching qualification, on the other hand, became critical after the two years course *Scuola di Specializzazione all'insegnamento* was abolished. The implementation of specialised teacher training courses for disabled students and inclusive teaching is also reviewed.

Keywords: teacher education, teacher training, teacher profession, XIX-XX century, Italy

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Introduction

Teacher education in Italy has historically distinguished between elementary and secondary schoolteachers: for two centuries, the former had a lower level of education but were required to master elements of pedagogy, whilst the latter held a degree but received no training in pedagogy. This discrepancy persisted until the end of the twentieth century, when, in 1998, a requirement was introduced that elementary school teachers should have a degree and not just a high school diploma (from the *Istituto magistrale*) and that secondary school teachers should attend a specific postgraduate teacher education course to learn about pedagogy as well. Twenty years on from that turning point, problems and uncertainties about secondary school teacher education persist, as I will demonstrate.

Teachers' Education in Italy

Before Italian unification (1861) an organised system of teacher education for elementary schools existed only in the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, under Austrian rule (Polenghi 2013), and the Kingdom of Sardinia (Morandini 2003). After unification, the *Scuola Normale* (named after the Austrian Normal school) was introduced throughout the whole peninsula, providing a two- or three-year post-elementary curriculum for future elementary teachers; however, this left a gap between the elementary school and the Scuola Normale, which in some cases was filled by attending other courses. Elementary school lasted four years, and the only secondary school programs available were the *Ginnasio-Liceo* (five + three years) and the *Scuola-Istituto Tecnico* (three + three or four years). The Scuola Normale was in a singular position, as it was not recognised as a secondary school even though its pupils had to be 14 years old, and no specific preparatory school was recognised in the Casati Law.

It was only in 1896 that a proper three years schooling, propaedeutic to the three-year Scuola Normale, was set up. The path to become an elementary school teacher was still much shorter than that to become a teacher in secondary school,

applicants for which were required to have attended a Ginnasio-Liceo, to have attained a university degree and to pass a state examination. Future elementary school teachers acquired some notions of pedagogy, namely theory of education and history of education, and were provided with practical training in an elementary school, whereas most secondary school teachers were not trained in pedagogy (the exceptions were those few who held degrees in Philosophy or Humanities, as the chair of Pedagogy was linked to that of Philosophy) (Pagano and Vigo 2012; Polenghi 2012, pp. 139–142; Polenghi and Triani 2014, pp. 9–12).

The gap in competence (and therefore in salary) between elementary and secondary schoolteachers was substantial. This was worsened by the fact that the role of the elementary school teacher rapidly became a female preserve, whereas secondary school teachers were almost exclusively male; the Italian University officially opened its doors to women in 1875, so it was only after that date that girls started to attend public secondary schools, which had remained a male world for a long time. The feminization of elementary school teachers (encouraged by the Casati Law of 1859, which permitted women to be paid a lesser salary) contributed to keeping this job both economically and socially inferior. In 1877 women outnumbered men as elementary school teachers (19,234 women vs 18,790 men). By 1900, women made up 67% of the elementary teacher workforce (although in Milan, due to the Habsburg tradition, they were already 85%). In the same year, 94% of the pupils attending the Scuola Normale in Italy were girls (Covato and Sorge 1994; Covato 1996; Soldani 2004; Soldani 2010).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Herbartism and Positivism dominated the pedagogical scene. In 1904, Luigi Credaro, professor of pedagogy, follower of Herbart, Member of Parliament and promoter of the Union of elementary school teachers, managed to achieve the opening of the so-called *Scuole Pedagogiche* (Pedagogical Schools) for elementary school teachers who aspired to become school directors. The Scuole Pedagogiche, offered by some universities, consisted of a two-year course of subjects which covered Pedagogy, Italian, History, Hygiene, Philosophy, Law and Psychology. These courses were successful, but many university professors and students resented them and objected to having adult teachers as students in the university lecture hall: they still considered elementary school teachers socially inferior and too ignorant to attend a lecture (Pazzaglia, 2003). The cultural gap between the teachers in elementary and secondary schools was also evidenced linguistically, as the word *maestri* was and still is used for the former, while the word *professori* refers to the latter, although *professori* refers to both high school and university teachers, because it indicates teachers who hold a degree.

Another relevant point was that elementary school teachers were appointed and paid by municipalities (and therefore received a broad range of salaries, which were lower than those of secondary school teachers), not by the state, until the introduction of the Daneo-Credaro Law in 1911 (Sani 2001; 2010).

The neoidealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile, a minister in Mussolini's first government, reformed the Italian school system in 1923. He closed the Scuole Pedagogiche and replaced the Scuola Normale with the *Istituto Magistrale* (Teacher Institute), a new and greatly improved system comprising seven years of schooling,

including Latin and one modern language, as well as Philosophy and Pedagogy. He abolished the practical element of training, however, for he considered being cultured as sufficient preparation for teaching and despised Positivistic and Herbartian didactics, considering teaching to be merely a matter of technique (Sani and Pazzaglia 2001). Pedagogy was still linked to the education of elementary teachers, and was thus only taught in the Scuola Normale. The academic courses on Pedagogy were linked to Philosophy and were not compulsory for future secondary school teachers. Gentile thought that whoever had knowledge could teach; in his view a general understanding of culture (*Bildung*) and a high level of competence in a given subject were all that was needed to be a good secondary school teacher. As access to university was restricted mainly to those who attained high marks at the end of their time at the Ginnasio-Liceo, these conditions were accepted. The idea that no pedagogical training was necessary to teach in secondary school therefore remained dominant (Ostenc 1980; Charnitzky 1994, pp.73-154).

Republican Italy and Teacher Education

The Istituto Magistrale was reformed by the Ministerial Decree 1 December 1952. Psychology was introduced as a subject and the practical training element was reinstated. The final certificate still counted as a teaching qualification.

In 1962 the *Scuola Media Unica* (Unified Junior High School), a three-year compulsory course following the five years of elementary school, was established. Educationists close to Dewey and Hessen prevailed in their opinion, which favoured the presence of subject teachers in the Unified Junior High School (Sani 2006). These teachers had to be professori, not maestri: they had to have a degree and pass a State examination, like the teachers of Senior High Schools, where they were tested only on their subject knowledge, with no reference to pedagogy, psychology or didactics. In dealing with 11- to 13-year-olds, these teachers often lacked the pedagogical foundations elementary school teachers had, which resulted in a too-strict system of evaluation which tended to fail children from disadvantaged families (Barbieri 2010).

In 1969 the doors of university were opened to all students from every secondary school, provided they had completed a five-year course. This increased the length of the Istituto Magistrale from four to five years, creating parity with those who were pursuing a degree, instead of going to teach in elementary schools. In 1991, the fifth year was finally made compulsory. The year before, teacher training in Italy had reached a turning point with the introduction of Law 341 on 19 November 1990, which established a new comprehensive system of university education for school teachers of all levels and finally eliminated the gap between maestri and professori (Luzzato and Pieri 2002). This law affirmed the need for all future teachers to have a university-level education, exceeding the school grade in which they teach; on the other hand, it also confirmed the importance of having two separate and specific training paths for maestri and professori, due to the pupils' needs and the specifics of the different school levels which characterise the Italian system:

it was determined that elementary and pre-school (three- to five-year-old pupils) teachers should have a degree, too, but a specific one (Polenghi and Triani 2014, pp. 14-15).

The law also introduced the *Scuola di Specializzazione all'insegnamento Secondario* (School of Specialization for Secondary Schools), which offered two pathways, one for Scuola media unica (Unified junior high school – ISCED 2) and one for high schools (ISCED 3). The title obtained after completing the Specialisation had a qualifying value and was required for anyone wishing to be eligible for the open competitive exams.

For the first time, elementary school and kindergarten teachers had to have a degree. The law was implemented by the Decree of 26 May 1998. The university degree course was first offered in 1998 by the Faculty of Educational Sciences as a four-year course with a dual path, one for elementary school and the other for kindergarten. English was compulsory, as it had been introduced as an elementary school subject. In 1998 the Scuola di Specializzazione all'insegnamento Secondario was also finally set up, which required the completion of a two-year postgraduate course with options in different subjects alongside compulsory courses in the theory of education, pedagogy, the history of education, experimental education and evaluation, psychology and special education. (Italy abolished special schools and fully integrated disabled pupils in mainstream classes in 1977.) An apprenticeship in a secondary school, under a tutor's supervision, was also introduced. For the first time, pedagogy and classroom training were compulsory for secondary school teachers (Polenghi and Triani 2014, pp.15-16; Barbieri 2010).

Entrance to the Scuola di Specializzazione all'insegnamento Secondario and the university degree for future elementary school teachers was by entrance exam and *numerus clausus*. In both courses, the teaching qualification was awarded on the basis of a final exam. Subsequently, in 1999 the Bologna process with its three + two formula was adopted, but the newly created degree for elementary school teachers remained a four-year course, because 5 years were considered too much, hence once again elementary school teacher education was still regarded slightly inferior to the secondary teacher education.

Legislative Decree no. 227 of 17 October 2005 required that teachers of any type and level had to have a BA plus an MA (three + two), as well as a year's specific teacher training. In consequence, the Scuola di Specializzazione all'insegnamento Secondario was suspended in 2008. However, no specific MA for future teachers was prescribed by the Minister of Education until the Legislative Decree no. 249, 10 September 2010, which again defined initial teacher training. According to this decree, future secondary school teachers should have a BA degree, plus an MA degree focussed on both teaching and their chosen subject, plus a sixth-year of *Tirocinio Formativo Attivo* (active internship) where courses covering the science of education and the didactics of particular subjects, training activities and workshops were provided (Polenghi and Triani 2014, pp. 16–18).

In point of fact, whereas the *Tirocinio Formativo Attivo* had two editions in 2011/12 and 2014/15 (each selected through *numerus clausus* and a ministry-prescribed entrance test), no specific MA courses for teachers were prescribed by the

Minister of Education, so that the system has never been fully operational and the impact of the 2010 Decree remains halved.

Decree no. 81, issued on 25 March 2013, also established another and quicker special pathway (*Percorso Speciale Abilitante*) lasting only a year, which granted a teaching qualification to those who had already been teaching for at least three years. In this case, there was no entrance test and no practical training was offered, on the grounds that these persons already had a good training in teaching. On the other hand, they did have to follow courses on didactics, special education, technologies for teaching, and the didactics of individual subjects. In Italy, special education, didactics and educational technologies all belong to the same scientific academic sector. The academic education for teachers was hence restricted to a part of the pedagogical field. The *Percorso Speciale Abilitante* was a path which offered many teachers the opportunity to attain the qualifications they needed in an easier way. Mainly due to Trade Unions pressure, supply teachers were favoured over younger colleagues who lacked experience.

The previously mentioned 2010 decree no. 249 also changed the four-year course for future kindergarten and elementary school teachers, adapting it eventually to the Bologna process and hence raising it to five years. It remains a numerus clausus degree (limited enrolment after an entrance exam), but with a single curriculum (different to the previous one) and no separation between the elementary and kindergarten courses, and it now automatically qualifies graduates to teach at both school levels.

Following the so-called Buona Scuola Law no. 107 issued on 13 July 2015, on 13 April 2017, Legislative decree no. 59 (*Gazzetta Ufficiale* 05. 16. 2017) issued by the Renzi government instituted a new scheme of three years of initial education and training for secondary schools (*Formazione Iniziale e Tirocinio*), designed for people who have MAs in different subjects. This decree prescribes the admission, through competitive entrance on the basis of qualification and tests, to a three-year path, with university courses on education and how to teach a subject, with an increasing and paid engagement in direct teaching in schools. At the end of the course, employment is guaranteed (Margiotta 2018).

One of the eligibility requirements for the initial competitive entry is to have at least 24 ECTS in anthropological/psychological/pedagogical disciplines and in didactics and teaching technologies. MA graduates who do not have these ECTS in their curriculum must acquire them by attending specific courses provided by the university (particularly the Faculty of Educational sciences), to qualify for the competitive entry exam.

To date, three versions of these 24 ECTS courses have been provided, but the entrance competition has not yet been programmed by the Minister of Education, so the tenured positions remain vacant.

Opinions and polemics have been divided about exactly how to allocate these 24 ECTS. The ministerial decision announced four slots of six ECTS each, allocated as follows: six to anthropology (although following criticism, ethics was added); six to psychology; three to education and three to special education; and six to didactics and educational technologies. As previously mentioned, in Italy, special education,

didactics and educational technologies belong to the same scientific academic sector, so this division gave nine ECTS to one sector and only three to 'education' in general, although there are three other academic sectors: Theory of Education (*Allgemeine Pädagogik*); History of Education; and Experimental Education. The academic societies representing History of Education and Experimental Education and Teaching Research officially protested the plans. Consequently, a general disagreement between the various Faculties of Educational sciences ensued, so that some, such as Turin, are providing three ECTS in Theory of Education, three in Special Education and six in Didactics and Educational Technologies, while others allow candidates to choose the ECTS they want (e.g. six ECTS in Theory of Education, six in History of Education, four in Special Education plus two in Experimental Pedagogy, four in Didactics and Educational Technologies plus two in Experimental Pedagogy (Catholic University of Milan, State University of Bari, etc), or one ECTS in History of Education can be included in the three in Education, etc.). Online universities normally provide just didactics and educational technologies plus a minimum of experimental education.

Inclusion

Law 517 of 4 August 1977 dismantled the previous system of special schools and prescribed the total inclusion of disabled pupils in all types of schools. This marked the final point of a path which begun a few years earlier (Pruneri 2003, Law 118 of 30 March 1971 and Decree 970 of 31 October 1975): the wave of cultural rejection of institutionalisation, led by psychiatrist Franco Basaglia. His battle on behalf of the anti-psychiatric movement, supported by the students of 1968, led to Law 180 (13 May 1978) and the closure of the asylums where the mentally ill had been kept for life (Foot 2015; Babini 2010).

The abolition of special schools caused a period of difficulties, as the disabled children now entered mainstream classrooms with teachers who were inadequately prepared to teach them. The special aides who worked in special schools and special separated classes had received very good training for working with these students, but the sudden total inclusion meant that all teachers had to have at least some knowledge of special education and that a greater number of special educational needs teachers was needed.

The Minister of Education's initial response was to open courses which provided qualifications for special aides. Because so many were needed, many applicants were accepted into these courses which provided theory but no training. Standards did not rise until the 1990s, when these courses were offered by the universities, but many teachers without tenured positions still attended these courses simply in order to get a stable job—not through any deeply-felt motivation (D'Alessio 2011; Canevaro and De Anna 2010; Canevaro 2007).

With the first four-year course to become an elementary school teacher being offered in 1999, a prescribed path was also provided for future special aides. This path included special courses called *Tirocinio Formativo Attivo* for special education

(Decree no. 249, 30 September 2011). This path required 60 ECTS, consisting of courses on Special Education and Psychology, School Training, specific workshops and a final paper. Entrance was by exam. These special education courses are still provided, particularly for secondary school.

As with elementary school, the implementation of a specific two-year path (partly during the five-year course and partly after the degree) has been debated. The *Formazione Iniziale e Tirocinio* scheme also prescribes a two-year path, added to the five-year MA degree, to become a special aide in secondary school. The length of the special aide's initial education and training will therefore be raised to six and seven years. This thorough training has been requested by associations of disabled people and the families of disabled children, who demand a high level of qualification, but it is feared that the degree takes so long to complete that not enough people will choose to complete it.

Trends and Changes in Teacher Education

When considering elementary school, the most striking aspect of teacher training is the rapid increase in the length of the initial education of future teachers between the very end of the last century and the introduction of a specific degree in 1998, which raised the number of years which future teachers spent in education from 12/13 to 17 and then 18 years in total (Table 1).

1861	1900	1923	1962	1998	2011
Four years elementary school	Four years elementary school	Five years elementary school	Five years elementary school	Five years elementary school	Five years elementary school
Various options	Three years prep school	Four years Istituto Magistrale	Three years middle school	Three years middle school	Three years middle school
Two-Three years normal school	Three years normal school	Three years Istituto Magistrale	Four years Istituto Magistrale (five years since 1991)	Five years Istituto Magistrale	Five years Liceo scienze umane
				Four-year degree <i>numerus clausus</i>	Five-year degree <i>numerus clausus</i>
7 years	10 years	12 years	12/13 years	17 years	18 years

Table 1: Elementary school teacher training, 1861–2011

The slow process of gradual change thus accelerated dramatically in 1998 with the introduction of the university MA course, which not only required four or five years of additional study but also provided teachers with a much deeper and wider education. Since 2011, 28 subjects have been included: Theory of Education, History of School and Education, Developmental Psychology, Ancient and Medieval History, Modern and Contemporary History, Geography, Sport Pedagogy, Experimental Pedagogy and Evaluation, Didactics, Sociology, Italian Literature, Italian Language, Mathematics, English, Special Education, Social and Intercultural Education, Children's Literature, History of Art, Geometry, Educational Technologies, Nutrition, Earth Sciences, Psychology of Education, Physics, Chemistry, Music, Clinical Psychology and School Law, as well as classroom training and a final report. The subjects were selected by the Ministry, with candidates having the freedom to choose just one course (8 ECTS) from among them.

The striking difference in comparison with the previous curriculum, which was withdrawn in 2011, is the removal of philosophy and the growth of scientific subjects. Students may choose philosophy as an optional subject, but its disappearance from the curriculum highlights the recent preference for hard sciences and the loss of the traditional anthropological stamp.

When the qualification to teach was granted through the Normal school or Istituto magistrale diploma, philosophy was a subject, linked to pedagogy. When in 2010 the Istituto magistrale was reformed and became the *Liceo di scienze umane*, philosophy was still on the curriculum, even if it was eventually separated from pedagogy, which became history and theory of education. This change had been suggested by academics and was intended to mark the end of the long influence of Gentile's neoidealistic stamp, which viewed pedagogy as an inferior element of philosophy. The history of education also became the history of school and educational processes, rather than just pedagogical ideas (Polenghi 2012, pp.139-155).

Now that the elementary teacher training course is open to students with any kind of diploma, not necessarily one from Liceo di scienze umane, which does not provide a teaching qualification, some students have had no instruction in philosophy or Latin throughout their schooling. This is the result of the cultural change in favour of hard sciences at the expense of 150 years of history, overlooking the fact that philosophy for children is debated and supported by many teachers and academics.

The training of secondary school teachers also changed in 1998 with the advent of university courses which required studying pedagogy (Scuola di Specializzazione all'insegnamento Secondario) to obtain a teaching qualification. In this way future teachers were at last introduced to pedagogical courses and training. As we have seen, however, the most recent measures have reduced students' exposure to the theory and history of education and increased the time devoted to didactics and educational technologies, shifting the core of teachers' pedagogical education and in so doing abandoning a long tradition to keep up with contemporary trends.

The whole system of teacher training, both initial and in-service, faces the challenge of supporting a profession which is being radically transformed in Italy (Bottani 2013). Both maestri and professori—both mostly women—are

now having to deal with a decrease in social prestige related to educational jobs and a different relationship emerging between schools and families which places them on more equal terms but is more confrontational. Paradoxically, families are demanding more of teachers but trusting them less than previous generations did. Teachers' salaries are quite low at all school levels, but teachers' strikes and claims, together with a widespread rejection of any system of evaluation, is not helping to raise teachers' social status. Students, on the other hand, seem to be building more positive relationships with their teachers than their parents—a trend which may also be exacerbate parents' antagonism toward other educators (Trincherò, 2012).

Given these circumstances, with classes which include disabled pupils, non-native speakers from various countries, children from difficult families, etc., the tasks and competencies required of teachers are greater than before. Despite this, pedagogy is frequently attacked in the newspapers: It is blamed for being an empty discourse which distracts teachers from building sound competences in their own subjects (Israel 2016; Cangiano 2017; Fiorucci 2018; Galli della Loggia 2019; Raimo 2019; Berthelot 2019). This argument, although rooted in an academic fight for power, shows a worrying distrust of educational theories and methods which also arises from certain self-referential, non-empirically founded and verbally obscure educational theories. Sometimes very abstruse technical language simply disguises a lack of innovation or scientific foundation. The complexity of our society demands that teachers' education and training not be confined to their subjects.

Disciplinary skills should be more and more integrated (and not replaced) with relational and communicative competences. The teacher is no longer supposed to speak from a "chair", but to teach whilst building a relationship with both students and adults, to define her/his strength not on a supposed social prestige, but on professional competences. (Polenghi and Triani 2014, pp. 21).

The paradox in Italy at the moment is that, whereas teacher education for future elementary school teachers is very broad and encompasses too many subjects (thus entailing the risk of not mastering any), teacher education for future secondary school teachers is showing a tendency to regress to a fundamental disciplinary competence with some focus on technological abilities. Emotional and relational competences, so important in dealing with phenomena such as bullying, depression and anxiety, are by no means less important, but are still perceived as being 'naturally' possessed by teachers.

The past government unfortunately seemed to share this distrust of pedagogy. The past Minister for Education, Marco Bussetti, declared his intention to abolish all forms of preparatory teacher training for secondary school teachers (Zunino 2019), hence reverting to Gentile's view. Cancelling teacher education courses would save Italy some money but seriously damage the national school system (Iori 2018; Mortari 2019).

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SPREMEMBE NA PODROČJU IZOBRAŽEVANJA UČITELJEV V ITALIJI: OD ZDRUŽITVE ITALIJE DO DANAŠNJIH DNI

Povzetek: V prispevku se obravnavamo trende na področju izobraževanja učiteljev v Italiji v zadnjem času, pri čemer nas zanima zlasti izobraževanje učiteljev, ki poučujejo na predšolski, osnovnošolski in srednješolski stopnji izobraževanja. Med drugim predstavimo tudi implementacijo posebnih študijskih programov za poučevanje učencev s posebnimi potrebami ter inkluzivno poučevanje. Osvetlimo spremembe, do katerih je na področju izobraževanja učiteljev prihajalo skozi zgodovino. Izobraževanje učiteljev je v Italiji doživelo preobrat z Zakonom št. 341 leta 1990, s katerim je bila uveljavljena nova sistemska rešitev univerzitetnega izobraževanja učiteljev za vse ravni izobraževanja. Leta 1998 je bil nato uveljavljen štiriletni dodiplomski študij za bodoče predšolske in osnovnošolske učitelje, medtem ko so morali mlajši in starejši učitelji od leta 1999 opraviti posebno specializacijo, ki je trajala dve leti. Leta 2010 je bil uveljavljen petletni študij za učitelje na predšolski in osnovnošolski stopnji, ki je zagotavljal ustrezno kvalifikacijo učiteljev in je temeljil na drugačnem kurikulumu. Težava pa je nastala na področju izobraževanja srednješolskih učiteljev, potem ko je bil ukinjen dveletni program specializacije.

Ključne besede: izobraževanje učiteljev, programi izobraževanja, poklic učitelja, 19. in 20. stoletje, Italija

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