

TEACHER EDUCATION POLICIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION
AND QUALITY OF LIFELONG LEARNING

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**Reinventing in-service Training and Teacher Professional Development:
the Italian case**

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1. Background

In-service training for teachers has developed mainly in the last decades; however there is a long history of actions undertaken for teacher professional development within the Italian school system. Due to the delay in innovating traditional initial teacher training continuous teacher training has acquired a growing importance to during the past 50 years.

The long, although rather neglected, tradition of in-service teacher training goes back to the Conferenze pedagogiche: they were late 19th century initiatives for improving knowledge and competence of teachers, mainly in primary schools. At the time the effort to spread literacy was high but the quality of teachers was not considered appropriate, therefore the need to develop teachers' skills was highly perceived, under the pressures of national reports complaining about the poor quality of teaching and teaching conditions.

In the '50s the concern for quality in primary schools teaching was diffused and many actions were undertaken. However, it was only during the early '70s that in-service training started to be seen as a crucial policy measure within newly adopted education policies: the principle of in-service training as a right and a duty was openly stated in the legislation, under the auspices of long-life learning for all. Innovative teacher groups working in schools were strongly demanding new opportunities for professional growth.

In the '80 in-service training developed in some areas and the first national plans were devised and implemented. Language teaching and pupils with special needs were priority areas followed by new technologies. Teacher training became an essential means in supporting school reforms: a five-year plan for all primary school teachers, in connection with the 1990 reform, was designed and implemented. Organizational and institutional bases have developed over the years: from the Centri didattici nazionali set up during the '50s, to the Istituti Regionali di Ricerca, Sperimentazione e Aggiornamenti Educativi in the '70s and, more recently, the Piani nazionali e piani provinciali di aggiornamento in the '90s.

In this paper I will highlight the transition that is under way since 1998, by starting with an overview of the *status quo* at the end of the '90s (2.), presenting the main features of the current Government action (3), identifying the main policy issues that need to be dealt with (3) and highlighting the medium term (1998-2001) development plan (4). Teachers are in Italy a strong professional group (more than 700,000) and represent one of the most important area of employment in the public sector.

Teachers in the Italian school system (1999)

	MF	F
Primary schools	263.268	248.025
Low Secondary schools	200.791	146.992
Upper Secondary schools	248.217	144.431

This is a diversified professional group: upper secondary school teachers, for instance, refer to various subject areas: language and culture (52.000), modern languages (23.000), mathematics and natural sciences (48.000), technology (13.000), human and social sciences (29.000), art, music and drama (8.000) and physical education (12.000).

2. In-service Teacher Training in the '90s

The number of in-service training courses for teachers reached its climax in the '90s: a strong involvement of the central and local school administration led to a system of yearly national and local plans with rigid regulations for the organization (time, models, resources) and for teachers participation. All local education authorities had to develop plans for teacher training yearly supporting schools projects (40%), taking direct action (10-20%) and authorizing initiatives taken by external providers (40-50%). In some areas of the country more than 70% of the initiatives came from external suppliers; in others their actions covered less than 35%.

The level of participation has progressively included all teachers: in 1998-99 over 94% of teachers had attended at least one training course. A national agreement (1993-97) with the Teacher Unions made attending a 100 hours training in a six-year cycle compulsory for every teacher in order to progress in his-her career. Short thematic courses, induction programmes, special courses for teachers' mobility were the main type of initiatives: the vast majority of initiatives were based on simple models (a series of conferences). Teachers' satisfaction varied greatly from one sector to another.

Level of attendance to in-service training courses (% of teacher attending a course)

	1970	1980	1990	1999
Pre-primary schools				96,8
Primary schools	58	80	92	96,3
Low Secondary schools			73	95,2
Upper Secondary schools			57	94,2

Source: G.Gasperoni, *Gli insegnanti di fronte al cambiamento*. Seconda indagine IARD sulla condizione del corpo insegnante in Italia. Milano, 1999. P.15

Training forms and their evaluation (% of upper secondary school teachers)

	Teachers with experience of ...	'Very effective'
Lectures	88,9	69,5
Groupwork	81,7	75,3
Workshops	66,	91,8
Open and distance learning	24,9	61,7

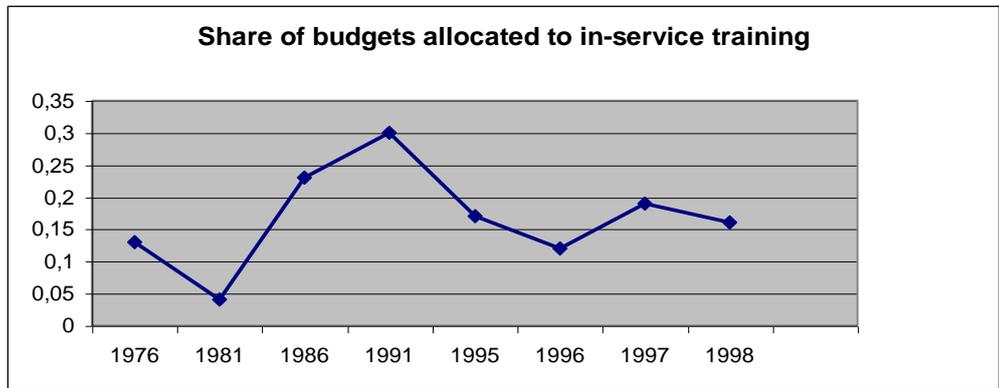
Source: G.Gasperoni, **Gli insegnanti di fronte al cambiamento**. Seconda indagine IARD sulla condizione del corpo insegnante in Italia. Milano, 1999. P.16

Teachers' satisfaction about in-service training (1999)

	Good or very good	Partially or totally inadequate
Pre-primary schools	76,6	23,4
Primary schools	68,2	31,8
Low Secondary schools	61,8	38,2
Secondary schools	54,6	45,4

Source: G.Gasperoni, **Gli insegnanti di fronte al cambiamento**. Seconda indagine IARD sulla condizione del corpo insegnante in Italia. Milano, 1999. P.15

In general terms resources for in-service training were considered by experts to be inadequate, and furthermore they are not deployed productively. Many times scarce resources were supposed to meet very ambitious demands and plans. The scale of resources involved varies from one year to the following one. In comparative perspective, public investment in Italy is similar to country like Germany and France but much lower with respect to country like Portugal or Norway.



During that period several criticisms have been made: short-term action, fragmentation of initiatives, poor planning, low influence, no evidence of impact, missing relations with teacher cognitive process. There are several problems: uneven investment over the years, a widening gap between needs and resources, low cost course planning. Very few attempts to evaluate the results of the system have been developed, anyway.

In the late '90s a series of changes, introduced by legislation, and Government plans of decentralisation, of restructuring the tiers (from a three-tiers system to a two-tiers system), and of local management of schools - altered the scenario, strongly influencing in-service teacher training. At the same time the Government agenda started focusing on the teacher status and performance, under the pressure of the need to implement such ambitious plans. This is the background to the recent Government action for reinventing teacher training and professional development.

3. Reinventing in - service training and teacher professional development (1998-2000)

Last September a Ministerial Directive set up a new perspective and depicted the overall framework for action; the document was the result of the innovative stance taken in 1998 and based on a few important decisions:

- ❑ setting up a **national strategic unit** (1998) within the central administration (Coordinamento della formazione degli insegnanti): having the task to develop a coherent policy for teacher professional development;
- ❑ searching for quality (**standard** for the organization and the financing of the system have been defined; **accreditation** system is under way; **monitoring**; improving skills of project leaders);
- ❑ launching **national actions** for headteachers (1998), administrative staff (1999) and teachers with responsibility in the organisation of the school (1999);
- ❑ adopting a **mixed approach** based on the role of schools (50% of resources), of central (35%) and provincial (15%) school administration.

These decisions supported several processes of changes, that can be summarised as follows.

a. From administrative structures towards a policy arena

Debates and criticism have led to a reduction of the role of school administration as training suppliers and to strengthen its steering, planning, and monitoring functions. An array of suppliers provides training opportunities: university departments, research centres, teachers professional associations, external actors. Outsourcing and accreditation are becoming common practice, while planning and monitoring are gradually being reinforced.

The policy arena includes not only training providers, but also institutions involved in knowledge construction, publishing companies, professional communication leaders, decision takers in the area of teacher selection and recruitment, policy makers in connection with financial resources allocation; and more recently the information industry and broadcasting companies. This is a very complex policy arena: effective decisions have to deal with all issues involved. A training policy implies explicit and active teacher policies. Traditionally, trade unions have been major actors in teacher training development; today it is clear that the policy community includes a variety of new actors.

b. From national and provincial plans towards convergent actions under a common vision

In the past in-service training has played a remedial role and a support role for some innovative areas such as language teaching, technology and teaching to pupils with special needs. In the last

three years a big effort has been done in linking training to the school system restructuring: national plans have been undertaken in order to support the renewal of the final exam of upper secondary schools (esame di stato), the enlargement of compulsory schooling (up to 15 year of age), the development of school autonomy.

National plans are not enough. If there is a need for a permanent support system for teachers, it is necessary to tackle a number of structural problems:

- ❑ filling the qualification gap: the majority of pre-primary and primary (63%) school teachers do not have the qualification - a university degree - that is now required for new teachers;
- ❑ renewing administrative and institutional bases: training is not an administrative duty and requires policy-making skills;
- ❑ establishing new partnership between teachers and academic institutions (universities, research centres);
- ❑ developing new approaches by modelling the advanced projects and by inventing new solutions;
- ❑ revisiting the role of schools: they may become the major focus for teacher professional development.

Only coherent actions taken by involved actors can help to move forward. A common vision may be provided by the new conceptions for professional development and teacher learning. There is no need to carry on with the old fashion concept of compulsory in-service training.

c. From training courses towards learning environments

The high number of courses established (more than 24,000 every year) did not prove to be totally adequate for a diversified supply of professional development opportunities. A U-turn is necessary. From content centred courses, it is now time to focus on the process of professional learning. From occasional use of in-service training as policy means to implement innovation (esame di stato, obbligo scolastico) it is now time to move towards a system of permanent opportunities for professional development. It is time, in other words, to give first order status to the professional development of teachers.

Long term goal is to gradually build integrated learning environments for teacher professional development: i.e. a professional area that may be integrated, including traditional and new models at the same time and creating living space for teachers.

The actions may be:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| • traditional short courses | already spread all over the country |
| • master programs | a pilot scheme is to be launched this year |
| • research grants for teachers | a pilot scheme is currently in action |
| • collaborative research programs | teachers and university |

- stage for teachers in firms:
- industry, new economy, mass communication, information and communication industry a first project is to be implemented this year
- TV satellite courses four initiatives under way
- video on demand already in action,
- on-line learning there are several projects
- local centres for teachers many local projects
- websites with materials for teachers several experiences are being realized
- teacher networks a few programs already in existence
- school development plans many projects
- counseling and technical assistance a major project is under way in Southern Italy
- independent professional learning several experiences

d. From hierarchical delivery systems towards adaptive learning frameworks

The basic decisions taken are modifying the delivery system. Something still remains from the old system, but new routes to innovation are apparent. In a year time the system is expected to be radically renewed.

As far as providers are concerned important changes are under way. We are moving from the unselected range of institutions and agencies providing teacher training to a **list of accredited providers**. The system of accreditation aims at improving the quality and assuring the reliability of suppliers. Special status is recognised to teacher professional associations and to scientific communities open to teachers.

Among the new models that are under consideration, sponsored and supported **teacher networks** seem to be a promising solution. Networks of teachers working on curriculum development in the areas of teaching of Italian and environment education have been established, in cooperation with schools, professional associations and school administration. The same approach is followed in order to improve cooperative work among teachers working in isolated areas. This is a pattern of a lean organisation providing opportunities and developing a community of practices; the support of technology helps contacts and exchanges.

The partnership with Universities is taking several innovative ways. From 80 to 100 hours **thematic courses** for specific issues are provided by universities, contracted by the administration: 15 universities are currently providing one-year courses for the teaching of Italian as a second language. A pilot scheme for **research grants** for teachers has been developed and is currently under implementation: class teachers whose research proposals have been accepted are offered a supervision for planning and carrying out a research project. **Research projects involving teachers** are supported. In the area of early teaching of modern languages a three year national scheme has been designed by university researchers: it involves 120 class teachers of pre-primary schools and is based on specific and innovative research acquisitions. **Co-operative research**

projects are currently developed by research centres and universities in several fields: environmental policies, mathematics education, scientific areas.

Information and communication technologies are more and more connected with the innovation in this area. At the moment there is a range of initiatives in several fields. A special program of action has been implemented in the 1997-1999 (500million Euro) for introducing technologies in schools and for teacher training. After this phase the focus is on the use of technologies in teaching. A national training project for teachers with responsibility in schools (**funzioni obiettivo**) has been based on the setting up of a virtual campus (www.bdp.it/funzioniobiettivo). In cooperation with the national tv broadcasting company, training courses have been offered through **TV satellite channel**: more than 3,500 schools (out of 10,000) have got digital satellite equipments. A pilot scheme for **video on demand** has been pioneered in the last years: via Internet teachers may choose an item (mainly ten minutes programs) among over 2,000 and receive it via satellite a few days later. Most national actions have some technological element built-in: a **web site** as a necessary means for exchanges. A **national observatory** has recently been set up to monitor the production of software for teaching.

Growing emphasis is currently posed upon the setting up of **locally-based professional opportunities**. Teacher centres and services for teachers at the local level are part of the national policy. Instead of creating a planned network of centres, the attempt is to develop a system of opportunities within the local areas. Alliances with local governments, local museums, local art galleries, public libraries are seen as the right way to set up. Educational authorities have been invited to develop this approach by setting up local unit. In some region, Emilia Romagna and Lombardia, this approach is highly developed.

There are a few innovating actions under way among the support measures.

First, there is an advanced project aiming at developing an **adaptive framework** for users and suppliers interaction. Based on an agreement signed with the central administration, a unit of the CNR - National Council for Research - is developing a web site where teachers may find information about professional development opportunities.

Second, actions are planned for **improving managerial skills** of people with responsibility in the development process and within the implementation structure. Steering the system, assuring quality and developing new models are important tasks requiring a professional approach.

Third, a **monitoring unit** has been set up. In 1998-99 a national survey has been carried out in cooperation with school inspectors.

Fourth, **research** is sponsored: about the teacher sociological profile, skilled and advanced teachers, professional cycles.

e. From financing the supply towards supporting the demand

Each teacher is given five days a year for attending training activities. Traditionally public investment was geared towards financing the supply of training. The current policy aims at supporting the demand: the school system as such looks for training services in order to deal with structural changes, and individual schools are given resources for their development plans and teacher professional development. Financial resources for teacher training come from a range of other sectors of public actions (immigrants, health policies, social policies...).

Many activities carried out at a school level have a direct impact on professional development: a more integrated view (peer review, co-operative projects, development plans, project work, self-help groups...) help reduce the cost of training. Moreover new approaches, through ICT, and mixed systems of financing (project financing through public and private investments) are not facilitated by the existing administrative regulations; however they may change the situation in the next future.

4. Policy issues

In connection with future development four issues may be identified; they are at the core of the reinvention project that is under way.

First, individual teachers are to be seriously considered. There has been a strong tradition of collegiality at single school level in the Italian school system. More and more it appears important that **individual measures** need to be taken. We are trying to deal, in a better way, with the professional autonomy of teachers: schools are asked to support professional development plans of individual teachers, research grants are given to individual teachers.

Second, teacher training for all does not necessarily imply a uniform approach. An **holistic approach** to teacher professional development requires a policy of diversification of the opportunities and of personalization of professional growth. Less courses and more quality, focused and specific initiatives instead of a large number of tiny initiatives. Taking into account needs, professional and life cycles, length of careers, constructivistic approaches are considered important today.

Third, a new **implementation structure** is widely needed: various solutions have been proposed, adopted, abandoned over the years. The new structures are based upon cooperative schemes, sharing vision and working together in projects.

Fourth, a high quality system of professional development of teachers requires a strong link with the research community. We have to reconsider the relation between **research and teaching practice**. This means to develop teacher research, co-operative projects, university research; it is probably necessary to work with a new generations of researchers in the area of education. The knowledge basis should be different.

5. Working for a national policy

There is a growing consensus on the idea that what is needed in this context is not just a good reform, but teachers that are prepared to implement the reform and able to make reforms happen. Teacher professional development is at the core of a four year plan that is currently under way. It aims at reinventing in-service teacher training by altering structure, functions and the idea of training itself.

Four year action plan

1998	1999	2000	2001
Monitoring			
Surveys			
Workshops with expert			
	Criteria for resource allocation		
	Standard		
	Priority setting		
		Methodological Research	
		New models	
		Forward mapping	
		Implementation structure	
			Dissemination of new models
			Development
			Evaluation

Teacher professional development is not just one among the policy instruments such as curriculum designing or standard setting; within the very demanding reform plans that the Government is going to implement it is a paramount and decisive set of policy measures. The basic aims are clear, the long term development is apparent - integrated learning environment for teachers -. What is highly needed is a strong and powerful support from the research community and from the professional world of teaching. New organisational arrangements and new models require revisited knowledge bases and sound conceptions of teaching and learning: reinventing teacher professional development is at a very beginning stage and this will not be a minor challenge.