

Ideas for a different school system in Italy

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Methodological issues (after an experience at the MIUR)

- Existing laws (Constitution included) must be part of the instruments' set:
 - ↳ otherwise: "Nice idea, but ... impossible under current laws".
- Lawyers and bureaucrats must be excluded from design and implementation:
 - ↳ otherwise any good idea will be neutralised.
- We should be clear on what we think is the "first best":
 - ↳ it is necessary to keep the right bearing under the pressure of emergencies.
- Be cautious and realistic in designing the transition to the "first best":
 - ↳ aim for "islands of autonomy" in which a new system could start;
 - ↳ avoid a major confrontation to impose general reforms.

The three major problems of the Italian school system

1. Access to schools designed for “élites” (and ... 100 years ago) was liberalized:
 - programs centrally defined as “fixed menus” not as “menú à la carte”;
 - negative impact on social mobility.
2. No real autonomy of schools in:
 - the design of educational programs;
 - the management of resources (particularly teachers).
3. Only the worst graduates want to become teachers (particularly in sciences):
 - expansion of work opportunities for women;
 - wrong incentives generated by selection methods and career structures;
 - this is probably the most serious problem:
 - ↪ good teachers are more important than the institutional design.

Sketch of an ideal system

Schools as “coops” of teachers that are free to decide on their governance:

↪ e.g. select principals.

Schools should be free to:

- design their educational programs (within limits set by a central authority),
- manage their resources,
- select teachers,
- decide on compensation and career structures.

In this context schools are really a “team”:

- centralized evaluation co-exists with evaluation by users;
- resources are brought to schools by students, via a voucher system;
- vouchers implement the socially desired degree of redistribution.

In the short term

Good teachers must earn more and be rewarded by attractive careers:

↪ a selection, more than an incentive device, to attract the best graduates.

But how can good teachers be identified?

- Dangerous to rely on quantitative indicators: partial and manipulable;
- External evaluations (inspectors) are too costly.
- Self evaluations are dangerous; they are reasonable only if strictly guided.
- The “Valorizza” method uses reputation to identify good(bad) teachers:
 - convergence of judgements by colleagues, students and families;
 - one group only is not enough: convergence is needed
 - preliminary evidence: convergence on 20% of good teachers in a school.