

EDITORIAL

Teachers' training: the heart of the school

Teachers' quality is the 'heart' of a school capable of promoting the personal and cultural growth of its students.

Of course, many other aspects are necessary for this 'heart' to be able to express itself at its best: we need rules, curricula, facilities, resources, leadership... and the list could be extended further to other fields, focussing on their essential characteristics.

All this is certainly necessary, but not sufficient.

Indeed, every framework condition can either favour or hinder teachers' work, but it is the relationship with the students that shapes the unrepeatable, irreversible and unique experience represented by the teaching action (Damiano, 1993¹). Everything that concerns the school becomes meaningful only if, in a specific space and time and with those specific people, the teacher's action becomes an opportunity for growth for everybody.

Therefore, every moment at school and every single teaching action take up the beauty and prominence of a unique experience, where the teacher is faced with an open problematic situation for which there is no written solution.

Unfortunately, when it comes to teachers, the question is often limited to their recruitment, as if that were enough.

Let's be honest: a good school for students requires 'good' teachers. The issue of teachers' recruitment cannot therefore be divided from that of their initial and in-service training. Certainly, 'filling the teaching positions' is necessary, but not enough; teachers need appropriate initial education and effective support for their professional development. And the second action without the first is, at least, weakened, if not completely stultified.

Walking into a classroom every day means to continuously face open and complex situations. Teachers are therefore asked to have many skills, but also the ability to reflect on their experiences, thus being able to use those experiences to adapt their action to the current situation, making it effective (European Commission, 2013²).

For this reason, there is nothing that can replace a good initial training for teachers, able to promote both disciplinary and didactic skills, and above all the mindset of a 'pragmatic researcher', able to question reality and reflect upon it (Mortari, 2009³). Even years and years of teaching experience cannot replace initial education that, as is the case with practical traineeships, activates reflective processes on teaching practice.

Reflexivity and research skills are also mentioned in many European documents as essential skills for the initial training of teachers. These skills can help promote teachers' professional development in line with the complexity and continuous evolution of the required tasks (Caena, 2014⁴).

1. Damiano, E. (1993), *L'azione didattica*, Armando, Roma

2. European Commission (2013). *Supporting teacher competence development for better learning outcomes*. Brussels: EC.

3. Mortari, L. (2009) *Ricercare e riflettere. La formazione del docente professionista*, Carocci, Roma

4. Caena, F. (2014). *Initial teacher education in Europe: an overview of policy issues*. Brussels: European Commission

The knowledge of one's own discipline and its didactics, as well as the knowledge about the growth dynamics of the subjects involved in the teaching experience are necessary elements, but not sufficient: the teacher also needs to be able to question and reflect upon the overall context, for the teaching action to be appropriate and effective.

What is the situation like in Italy with regard to initial teacher training?

As far as preschool and primary school are concerned, the training system is certainly challenging and able to promote the skills necessary for an informed and mature professionalism.

What about lower and upper secondary school teachers?

The answer is unfortunately embarrassing, not to use other adjectives.

Initial teacher training is such that teachers' disciplinary training is considered sufficient. On top of that, 24 training credits in anthropological, psycho-sociological and pedagogical disciplines add very little to teachers' training, especially in the absence of an internship and its serious reworking.

In recent months, in a conversation with some international colleagues, I received interested questions and sincere appreciation for the training system for future preschool and primary school teachers, while at the same time they showed some doubts about the initial training of high school teachers. Faced with their concern, I could not but agree with them, and justify the current state of affairs as the result of an interrupted reform process, that however will hopefully be revised... I was rather vague about the times and the entities that are working on this change...

There are positive signs and we hope they will turn into a serious and credible project.

For this reason, in the section "Experiences and reflections" we offer extensive excerpts from the document *Proposal on initial and in-service training of secondary school teachers* (November 2019), drawn up by Conferenza Universitaria Nazionale di Scienze della Formazione (CUNSF www.cunsf.it), which brings together the Directors of the Departments of Italian universities offering teacher training courses. It is therefore a reliable proposal that submits to the political debate a model of initial training set within a scientific framework that helps see the problem in its proper dimension.

The role of a scientific journal with respect to this topic is certainly not to propose operational solutions, but to highlight the need for them by underlining their pedagogical and professional motivations, but also showing, by means of the various contributions, the richness of a reflective and research-oriented approach on professional practices.

In addition to the other interesting contributions in the "Experiences and reflections" section and in addition to the stimulating reports in the "Reviews" section, we would like to underline the richness and depth of the scientific articles published in the "Research" section.

Luca Odini highlights some prominent aspects of Arne Næss' thought that help critically reread the proposals of environmental education offered in the framework of educational and didactic activities.

In his contribution in English, Aristides Galatis addresses the topic of teaching critical thinking, a skill that is often poorly understood, usually feared, but widely recognized as one of the main activities of education. The author further highlights the notion of problematization as a primary pedagogical tool of the critical thinking teacher.

Giovanni Bonaiuti argues about the intense debate raised by the supporters of *evidence-based education* on the desirability of basing teaching practices on research results. In his article, Bonaiuti analyses and discusses the basic concepts of this proposal in the light of the main objections and presents the international initiatives and the Italian stance of the SAPIE association (Società per l'Apprendimento e l'Istruzione informati da Evidenze).

In her article, Laura Sara Agrati addresses the issue of the effectiveness of teaching strategies in the area of inclusion, and invites to critically elaborate on the relationship between what is highlighted by today's research and what teachers actually know and are aware of, especially in relation to their professional training.

Giuseppina Messetti explores university students' point of view on teaching at the time when they decide to undertake the training process to become secondary school teachers. Based on the *Student Voice* theoretical framework, the author presents qualitative data referring to 24 autobiographical writings of as many students, focused on the memories of their "favourite" teachers.

In their contribution, Valentina Pagani and Giulia Pastori present the results of a Collaborative Research work that has involved practitioners in the critical evaluation of the CLASS tool (*Classroom Assessment Scoring System*). The authors highlight how it is possible to positively combine the objective and decontextualized character of many of the tools used to assess the quality of educational services with the dominant idea in the Italian 0-6 pedagogical debate, which favours a negotiated, participatory and reflective evaluation.

In her contribution, Federica Valbusa presents a path of affective education, aimed at helping primary school pupils to reflect on their emotions in order to understand them. The author describes the practice of affective self-understanding, promoted through diary writing and accompanied by the metaphor of the "garden of emotions", and designed to facilitate the analysis of emotional experiences.

Elena Nuzzo's contribution focuses on peer feedback as a stimulus to metalinguistic reflection. In the foreign language class, learners can be actively involved in the process of correcting written texts by means of peer review. Corrective feedback given to a schoolmate can have positive effects on the provider as well, stimulating metalinguistic reflection thanks to the need to focus on the nature of the mistakes identified in the other's text and to know how to describe and explain them.

The study presented by Renato Salsone *et al.* describes the university choices of school graduates, both in terms of motivation to continue their studies and in terms of the results achieved one year after high-school graduation. The study highlights the importance of univer-

sity counselling, by focussing on its connection with the students' proactive and autonomous management of their training and professional career.

In their article, Mattia Oliviero and Luciano Covi analyse the results of the INVALSI tests by focussing on two different, though complementary aspects: on the one hand, the absolute results of the tests, where the two authors show that the differences in terms of orientation and emerging at grade 10 are already present at grade 8; on the other hand, the effect of schools on students' learning, net of their individual characteristics. The authors show that the added value of a school (though considering the critical issues highlighted by some researchers, particularly with regard to its use as the only tool for evaluating educational systems) is not linked to the absolute results achieved by the school itself, but is a measure of the effect of the school, net of all the differences that characterize the students who attend it.

Finally, Luisa Pandolfi focuses in her contribution on *Care Leavers*, i.e. students that have just turned 18 and who decide to leave the protected system of care and protection offered by minors' residential centres and thus have to quickly become 'grown-ups' and adults. The author presents a research work that highlights, based on the point of view of those who have personally had this experience, the main protective factors that help achieve positive outcomes at the end of the residential care pathways and in the transition to autonomous life.

Claudio Girelli and Maria Arici