

Reforms in Italian School:

What has Changed in Italian Schools from September Onwards?*

By Antonino Petrolino, ANP, Italy

The main changes, with immediate effect, introduced in the Italian school life concern: composition and functions of the Teachers' Evaluation Committee; three-year Plan for Formative offer (School curriculum); *work-related learning program*.

- The first issue concerns the process of choice for the Committee members. The Committee will have to recognize which is the correct way to operate in order not to make mistakes because of haste, taking into consideration that the Committee remains in office for three years and not for one.

- The three-year Plan, which should be approved by the end of October, will affect schools' life for the following three years, starting from Sept. 2016: first issue is the so-called 'functional staff', around which the Reform Law is mainly centered. But the Plan will have to be consistent with the objectives of the Self-Evaluation Report and with the territory requests, also including the *work-related learning program* issue for secondary schools.

- The *work-related learning* issue is only for secondary schools, including Lyceums (High schools) and will start from the eleventh grade during this school year. By Law, all students will be included (about 600.000) in the program starting this September, getting up to 2.000.000 students by 2017. This will create huge organizational problems, redesign the curriculum, to manage either the *work-related learning* hours in the regular school calendar or during holidays or time off school lessons. Most of the promotion and control activities are led by the Headmaster.

The reform law affects many aspects of Italian school life, some of its most controversial and difficult-to-apply parts (such as the part about the teachers' "direct call" for enrollment) have been delayed to next year.

What's immediately new? How the life and work of single schools will be affected at the beginning of September? The changes are essentially three: the constitution of the Teachers' Evaluation Committee; three-year Plan for Formative offer (School curriculum); *work-related learning program*.

The Constitution of the Teachers' Evaluation Committee

From September 2015, the former Evaluation Committee has been substituted by a newly made Committee: beforehand the Teachers' board elected four teachers, every year. Now the members will be 6: 2 teachers appointed by the Teachers' Board and one by the School Council, 2 parents (or one parent and one student in high schools) chosen by the school Council and an external member appointed by the Director of the Regional School Board (a teacher or a Headmaster or a technical director). The school Headmaster will chair the Committee that will be in charge for 3 years.

The Committee composition is different from the past: it is not based upon peer-evaluation as before, but on different points of view. The internal 'technical' assessment (by the three teachers) is sided by an 'external technical' assessment, by a member appointed by the Regional agency, working as an inspector, on the consistency with the system objectives. Moreover, the 'customers' will be represented by the 2 parents, or one parent and one student in secondary school.

This composition will not be applied as far as the teachers' first year evaluation, which used to be the only function of the Committee in the past. In that case, there will only be the 3 teachers plus the tutor of the newly called teacher. Of course, the Headmaster will chair. The new Committee will be called upon a new role, the most important: indicate to the Headmaster the criteria to assign a 'merit' bonus' for teachers. It is one of the most controversial points in the Reform.

The Committee has a difficult job and the Assembly needs to think twice and ponder the decisions about the people to appoint.

The Three-Year School Curriculum

The general guidelines of the school curriculum 2015, conforming to the usual practice, were given by the School Board, whereas for the three-year school curriculum they have been set out by the Headmaster. This could be a good opportunity, even if criticised, because of the overlapping of managerial strong lead and organizational powers.

*Translated and summarized by Francesca Amore, Lucy Pistrutto, Pinella Giuffrida, Headmasters ANP Italy

Italian teachers are not so used to working together in a team. They generally tend to plan individually, according to the subject they teach without having a general perspective of the “common plan” and the vision shared in the school curriculum, which is often the result of many single teachers’ - added projects.

The Headmaster’s approach is different. Although he doesn’t teach, he knows the epistemological foundations of teaching. He is aware of his role as an impartial and independent leader; as a manager he is able to improve his know-how and refresh his studies. He has a much better overview than teachers have and he can understand the problems from a general point of view.

Moreover, the three-year school curriculum has to be taken as the means to plan the forecast of the teachers’ staff required by the school and therefore designed by the Ministry of Education to reinforce the school teachers’ team.

In addition: for the first time the planning of the school curriculum will be the result of a clear and documented analysis of findings rising from school activities. Innovations promoted by the reform are based on a self-examination project developed by each school and transferred into the Self-Evaluation Report completed by schools last July 2015. The starting point for the three- year curriculum is represented by the expected pathway to achieve the improvement targets arisen from the Self-Evaluation Report .

The new three-year-curriculum adds some new aspects to the latter one:

- a) the individuation of the number of teachers in the teachers’ staff, inclusive of teachers for special needs and teachers to enhance students’ competences;
- b) the administrative staff needed;
- c) the need for equipment and facilities;
- d) the improvement plans provided by the Self-Evaluation Report;
- e) work related learning activities,
- f) coherent actions referred to the National Plan aimed at improving digital competences.

Work - related learning

Although it is only just compulsory in secondary schools, *work - related learning* is one of the most important innovations with immediate effect on the Italian secondary school system.

Beginning from this school year 2015/16, in three-years’ time upper secondary classes students (from 16 to 19) will be involved in *work- related learning* activities to be increased until 200 hours for Lyceum courses and 400 hours for Vocational schools.

Considering an equal distribution in three-year’s time, about 12, 5% of total course hours could be spent in *work- related learning* modality.

Actually, activities could be carried out during holidays or time off school lessons but this could mean an educational time increase of 40% per year; it is a radical change for the Italian secondary school system. Such a relevant presence of *work - related learning* needs an afterthought about school “theoretical” studies.

Anyway, since the beginning of the present school year, secondary school Headmaster have been selecting the potential company partners. Moreover, they have to conclude agreements, look for school tutors, share decisions about the presence of tutors in the company, arrange the training activity programme to be done (in the company). Another important preliminary obligation is Work Health and Safety Education at school. As for workers, even students involved in *work related learning* programme have to be properly informed about potential danger situations and trained about the code/rules of conduct adopted to minimize risks.

At the end of the school year, Headmaster will write a sort of evaluation report, one for each company partner, expressing their opinion about the assessment of training attainments and possible findings raised in the working relationship.