

Civic Education in Italy: intended curriculum and students' opportunity to learn

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1. Introduction

In the next few years the Italian education system will probably see some profound changes on the basis of the reform recently approved by the parliament. These changes concern the overall structure of the school system (starting from pre-primary education) and the vocational training system. The basic aims that the school system must pursue have been redesigned in this reform, as well as the relationship between state and non-state schools. Curricular contents are currently under revision for each school level. It should be stressed here that this reform has seen much debate and great criticism by many people involved in the world of education (teachers' unions and associations, parents' associations, student organizations and university experts).

However, the reform does not question some changes introduced in the school system over the last few years. In particular, schools' administrative and teaching autonomy is destined to be consolidated and probably extended. The tendency for increasing decentralization of the school system can by now be considered a sufficiently consolidated phenomenon. An initial consequence of this gradual decentralisation may be found in the possibility for schools to adopt organisational models and educational projects according to their own general educational aims, school culture and relationship with their local areas and communities.

The considerations presented in this article refer to the current situation and take the new reform into account only for those aspects which may affect the school's role in students' civic education, both as regards curricular definition and the quality of student participation in the life and running of the school.

2. The Italian school system: present structure and future developments

The international surveys carried out over the last few years (particularly the OECD studies on the quality indicators of education systems) and the statistical investigations conducted at national level show some aspects of relative backwardness of the Italian school system with respect to those of the main European countries. For example, as regards schooling levels, the percentage of youth aged 14-18 years attending secondary school is around 80%, and fewer than 70% of these students arrive at obtaining a diploma on completing upper secondary education. The student drop-out rate (especially in the first two years of upper secondary school) is still quite high, albeit falling, and the incidence of cultural and social factors on school performance is still very strong. Even differences between the country's regions continue to be considerable. There is also a lack of proper integration between the school system and the vocational training sphere (entrusted to regional authorities).

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Compulsory schooling is at present of nine years and until age fifteen. It includes primary school, lower secondary school and the first year of upper secondary school. The new reform does not speak of 'compulsory' education as such, but of the 'right to education and training for at least twelve years' or, in any case, until an academic qualification is obtained by age eighteen.

The present primary school structure (age 6-11, grades 1-5) was defined by Law 148 of 1990, which followed the approval of new curricula for this education level (1985). The first two years constitute the first cycle, during which the teaching is of a pre-disciplinary form. The subsequent three years (second cycle) have the following subjects: Italian, foreign language (English), mathematics, sciences, history, geography, social studies, education to art, sound and music, physical education. Religious education is not compulsory.

Lower secondary school structure (age 11-14, grades 6-8) is still defined by the reform law of 1962 and the curricula in force for this level were approved in 1979. The subjects taught are: Italian; history and civic education; geography; a foreign language; mathematics and natural sciences; technical education; art; music; physical education. Religious education is not compulsory.

Upper secondary schools (age 14-19, grades 9-13) are differentiated according to school track. There are three main sectors: the liceo, technical education and vocational education (different from the vocational training system entrusted to regional authorities).

The new reform of the school system introduces some important organisational changes (1). The reform envisages the following organisation for the education system:

- Pre-primary education of three years
- A first cycle of schooling, which includes primary education (of five years) and lower secondary education (of three years)
- A second cycle of schooling, which includes the "licei system" (of five years duration and divided into two periods of two and three years, respectively) and the "system of education and of vocational training". The licei system includes the following upper secondary school types: liceo artistico ("art lycées"), liceo classico ("classical lycées"), liceo economico ("economic lycées"), liceo linguistico ("linguistic lycées"), liceo musicale ("music lycées"), liceo scientifico ("scientific lycées"), liceo tecnologico ("technological lycées") and liceo delle scienze umane ("humans sciences lycées") (the art, economic and technological licei are in turn divided into school tracks) (2). Students have the option of moving from the licei system to the system of education and vocational training if they have the necessary requirements.

From the age of 15, students have the chance to obtain qualifications by alternating school and work. The curricula of the different systems and tracks will be arranged into a fundamental core on a national basis and into a quota system reserved to regional authorities (3).

As already mentioned, the last few years have seen greater school autonomy as regards administrative-financial matters as well as in organization and teaching (Law 127 of 1997 and the subsequent implementation regulation of 1999). According to these new dispositions, the Ministry of Education is responsible for defining the general objectives of education processes, deciding on the school subjects characterizing the various school levels and on the relative teaching hours (national curricula), establishing quality standards for the school service as well as the minimum duration of the school year, the distribution of financial resources and the assigning of staff to schools, and also for establishing the criteria for evaluating the overall school system. Schools have the responsibility for deciding on teaching methodologies, teaching times and organization, also by starting up supplementary courses to the ones established at national level (up to a maximum of 15% of the total annual teaching hours). Schools can also implement initiatives for innovation, research and experimentation with a view to school development. At the start of every school year, each school must approve its own Piano dell'offerta formativa (Education Offer Plan), which establishes the projects the school plans to organise and the objectives to be achieved.

The reform law does not envisage limitations to the autonomy of individual schools in determining their own curricula. It is likely that the legislative decrees envisaged for implementing the reform will establish new standards for school autonomy too, in view of the new arrangement of curricula divided into a national quota and a regional one.

3. Civic education in Italian schools

In order to analyse the status and role of civic education in the Italian school system, we must refer to at least three different levels of education and formative experience: that of the general aims of the school system as a whole; that of curricular contents and teaching methods; and that of experiences of participation which students can achieve inside school and, more in general, the 'atmosphere' characterising them (4).

3.1 Civic education as an educational objective of the school system as a whole

In the Italian school system, civic education is seen as one of the fundamental aims of school education as a whole. All the general introductions to curricula in force in the various school levels refer to the Italian Constitution and to the fundamental rights and duties of man and citizens that it specifies and guarantees. From what has been said so far, it is quite clear that the term 'civic education' is used in a very broad manner in the Italian school system, and refers to

"that sphere of values and issues essentially concerning the domain of the citizen, without however neglecting its connections with ethical, civil, social and economic issues relating to the person and worker",

as established in a Ministry of Education directive (*Educazione civica e cultura costituzionale*, no. 58, 8 February 1996).

Civic education is acknowledged as not only pertaining to the cognitive sphere, but also to the affective-experiential domain. To a certain extent, it also concerns the formation of values (Corradini 1989), although it should not be viewed as the transmission of just the dominant values (Laporta 1993; Visalberghi 1993; Pellerey 1995). In this perspective, civic education is essentially characterised as education for democracy, for the exercising of citizen's rights and duties, and for democratic living together, with full respect for social and cultural differences.

The theme of 'democracy' and of 'democratic' values is explicitly recalled in the definition of the general aims and specific objectives established in primary and lower secondary school curricula as well as in some upper secondary school tracks.

As established in primary school Social Studies curriculum:

"education for comparison with others, for a critical spirit and for democratic living together is an objective and method that is common to all teachings"

with the aim of

"acquiring knowledge of the rules and norms of associate life, in particular those which allow democratic decision-making processes".

(from *I nuovi programmi didattici per la scuola primaria*, DPR 12 February 1985 no. 104)

The theme of educating for the acceptance of, and respect for, differences, in order to achieve a better democratic living together, is found in ministry programmes of various school types and levels. In the section concerning democratic cohabitation in primary school curricula, we read:

"Schools must operate so that the child ... be made aware of the various forms of diversity and alienation that exist in order to prevent and oppose the formation of stereotypes and prejudice towards persons and cultures".

In the general introduction to lower secondary school curricula, we read:

"By placing the pupils in contact with issues and cultures of societies other than the Italian one, lower secondary schools will also facilitate the formation of a European and world citizen, by educating for a mental attitude of understanding that goes beyond every unilateral view of issues and towards the intuition of common values shared by all men even in the diversity of their civilizations, cultures and political structures".

3.2 Civic education in curricula

At the same time, the construction of knowledge that is more directly related to civic education involves a great many school subjects of the different levels making up the Italian school system: History, Geography and Social Studies in primary schools (second cycle); History and Civic Education in lower secondary schools; History and Civic Education in upper secondary schools; Law and Economics in the first two years of technical and vocational schools, and in other schools that have decided to include this subject in their curriculum. In some upper secondary school tracks, Geography curricula also deal with civic education related issues.

The contents of these subjects are established by curricula of 1985, for primary schools, curricula of 1979, for lower secondary schools (Nuovi programmi per la scuola media), and by a decree dating as far back as 1958 (DPR 13.6.1958 no. 585), for upper secondary schools. A proposal for reviewing and updating the teaching contents and organization of these subjects was made in the aforementioned Ministry of Education directive on Educazione civica e cultura costituzionale to which was attached a document entitled Nuove dimensioni formative, educazione civica e cultura costituzionale, that established the fundamental guidelines for a new teaching of civic education at all school levels.

Another common feature of all levels of the Italian school system is the strong bond of civic education teaching with the teaching of history. The study of History is given a fundamental role in the formation of the civil conscience of citizens.

3.2.1 The development of cross-curricular and extra-curricular projects

It is worth recalling that over the last few years, on the basis of proposals put forward by the Ministry of Education, and also due to the initiative of teachers' associations, NGO's, voluntary associations, various cross-curricular and extra-curricular projects and programmes have been carried out in theme areas at times not explicitly envisaged by curricula (such as education for peace, inter-multicultural education, environmental education), but nevertheless important for students' civic education.

These initiatives have in part compensated for the excessive indeterminacy of indications present in school curricula, both in terms of contents and of methodological-didactic indications.

The issue of minorities is becoming increasingly the object of study and interest, above all in view of the growing migration flows to Italy. This phenomenon justifies the interest for developing projects of inter-multicultural education in schools, also in the light of the initiatives taken in this regard by international organisations such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe. Over the last few years, school initiatives in this field have seen the contribution of many Ministry of Education circulars, among which we should recall:

- Circular no. 301 of 8 September 1989, entitled Inserimento degli stranieri nella scuola dell'obbligo: formazione e coordinamento delle iniziative per l'esercizio del diritto allo studio ("Integration of foreigners in compulsory education: formation and coordination of initiatives for exercising the right to education"), aiming to encourage contacts between schools that have foreign pupils and the immigrant groups and communities these pupils belong to, in order to facilitate direct communication between pupils and those peer and adult immigrants who have already developed a certain mastery of the Italian language.
- Circular no. 205 of 26 July 1990, entitled La scuola dell'obbligo e gli alunni stranieri. L'educazione interculturale ("Compulsory education and foreign pupils. Intercultural

education"), which stresses the role of intercultural education in order to facilitate the capacity for "constructive living together", the acceptance of and respect for diversity, prevention of the formation of stereotypes and prejudice towards different peoples and cultures.

- Circular no. 73 of 2 March 1994, entitled Dialogo interculturale e convivenza democratica: l'impegno progettuale della scuola ("Intercultural dialogue and democratic cohabitation: a schools' planning commitment"), aimed at encouraging cooperation and participation inside schools.
- Circular no. 56 of 16 February 1995, entitled Campagna europea dei giovani contro il razzismo, la xenofobia, l'antisemitismo e l'intolleranza ("Youth European campaign against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance"), which recalls the most significant actions developed by the Ministry of Education.

The limitation of the proposals contained in all these circulars, however, derives from that fact that their actual implementation largely depends on the interest and willingness of teachers (since it is their responsibility and task) inside each school to set up projects and initiatives in this field.

The same thing can be said for human rights education and the ministry circulars issued in this field (Losito 1998). The circulars tend to bridge a very noticeable gap in school curricula. The civic education curricula of compulsory education do not explicitly refer to the teaching of human rights if not by referring to the Italian Constitution. The primary school curricula, for example, open with this premise:

"Primary education aims at forming men and citizens within the realm of the principles established by the Republic's Constitution; it is also inspired by the international declarations of the rights of man and of children, and works towards the understanding of, and cooperation with, other peoples".

This also explains why textbooks in compulsory education rarely have a specific section concerning human rights or the presentation of fundamental documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the European Convention on Human Rights, and why there are very few textbooks that refer to the International Convention on Rights of the Child.

3.2.2 Student participation in school life

In upper secondary schools, students' democratic participation in the school's running is explicitly envisaged by current legislation, through both direct and indirect forms of participation: students have the right to hold meetings, set up committees and elect their own representatives for class and school committees. A Statute of Students guarantees certain fundamental rights inside school and for relations with teachers.

In compulsory education, these forms of participation are not officially envisaged, but there is the widespread practice of electing pupil class representatives who then mainly act as 'spokespersons' for their classmates, above all as regards school heads.

Recourse to teaching methods that foster the active role and participation of students is also encouraged in some curricula. Lower school curricula, for example, maintain that teaching-learning activities inside the class

"even when using team work, must be used as a time for specific reflection, as a guide for discovering the internal roles and structures of this microcosm that must be organised according to the requirements of the democratic method and of responsible participation".

4. The results of some studies

4.1 The gap between intended and implemented curriculum

Studies in the civic education field have highlighted the existence of a gap between intended curriculum and implemented curriculum (Losito 1999). This gap concerns: teaching contents (Asquini, Salerni 1992a, 1992b; Agazzi, Berti 1995); the actual possibility of achieving the objectives established in curricula (Benesso, Berti 1996); the characteristics of the textbooks adopted and the way they deal with the issues related to students' civic education (D'Antonis Onofri, Salerni 1990; Bacceli 1991; Lastrucci, Salerni 1993a).

In particular, according to the results of these studies, it would appear that:

- The time that teachers actually devote to civic education is less than the one envisaged by official curricula and often depends on teachers' individual 'disposition' towards these issues.
- The combining of civic education teaching with that of history, and the attribution of just one overall grade for both subjects, greatly contributes to 'subordinating' the former to the latter.
- Civic education textbooks are hardly used by teachers: they are often not even purchased by students. This lack is not compensated adequately by the use of other teaching materials or by reading newspapers and journals in class.

Hence, the knowledge acquired by students is a far cry from what is required by official curricula, particularly as regards certain specific features of our country's democratic system. A study carried out on third-year lower secondary pupils (Agazzi, Berti 1995) showed that, although these pupils could distinguish the fundamental characteristics of democracy, monarchy and dictatorship, they nevertheless had a fairly superficial idea of the democratic system as a whole. In particular, they did not know very much about the specific functions of the executive and judicial powers and of the relative bodies involved, the reasons underlying the division of powers and the differences between different organizational models of executive power (parliamentary government and presidential government).

A series of studies, carried out on the skills for defining historical-juridical terms (D'Antonis, Salerni 1990, 1992) on the part of students completing lower secondary education and students in their first two years of upper secondary education (Asquini, Salerni 1992; Lastrucci, Salerni 1993b), showed that lower secondary students - although being able to use historical-juridical terms - find it difficult to define these terms themselves or to recognize the correct definitions. This was also found for words of everyday use, such as 'referendum', 'republic' and 'election'.

4.2 The results of the IEA Civic Education study

The results of the Civic Education study, carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), allow us to reflect more deeply on the knowledge and skills actually acquired by students in this sphere. The study was conducted in two phases in the period 1995-2001 (Torney-Purta, Schwille, Amadeo 1999; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, Schulz 2001). The main study was carried out in 1999 and, in Italy, involved two separate probability samples of students: one of third-year lower secondary pupils and the other of first-year upper secondary students. Three different survey tools were used: a students' questionnaire (of three sections: the first on knowledge and skills, the second on background variables and the third on attitudes), a teachers' questionnaire and a schools' questionnaire.

On the whole, 3,300 lower secondary students (180 schools) and 3,808 upper secondary students (172 schools) answered the questionnaires. Like students of other countries, the Italian third-year lower secondary and first-year upper secondary students show they have an acceptable knowledge of the main principles governing the functioning of democratic societies and their internal relations. Their knowledge level is higher for the general features of a democracy, but lower for economic

issues.

Table 1: - Percentages of Correct Answers per Item (International items)

	3 rd year lower secondary %		1 st year upper secondary %	
1. Identification of the citizen's role in democratic countries	79	(1.01)	80	(1.01)
2. An accurate statement about laws	76	(1.23)	83	(0.96)
3. Identification of a political right	62	(1.45)	74	(1.31)
4. Identification of a violation of freedom of the press	74	(1.09)	78	(0.99)
5. An example of discrimination in employment	54	(1.44)	58	(1.09)
6. Purpose of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights	86	(0.97)	87	(0.88)
7. Importance of associations in democracy	69	(1.40)	71	(1.38)
8. Purpose of labour unions	79	(0.96)	80	(1.12)
9. Potential threat to democracy	75	(1.12)	80	(1.09)
10. Identification of illegal activity on the part of a political organisation	68	(1.24)	74	(0.92)
11. Function of having more than one political party in a democracy	82	(1.03)	86	(0.86)
12. Who ought to govern in democracy	82	(0.86)	83	(0.89)
13. Main task of national legislature	71	(1.05)	73	(1.02)
14. Strengths and weaknesses of a democratic system (interpreting a cartoon)	59	(1.28)	62	(1.22)
15. The violation of civil liberties in democracy	42	(1.43)	47	(1.40)
16. Major purpose of United Nations	83	(1.12)	86	(0.82)
17. Characteristics of a non-democratic government	58	(1.57)	63	(1.49)
18. Concentration of press ownership	40	(1.62)	44	(1.22)
19. Necessary feature of a democratic government	65	(1.43)	74	(1.24)
20. The content of the Convention on Rights of the Child	86	(0.86)	88	(0.87)
21. Ownership and management of multinational companies	56	(1.31)	62	(1.40)
22. Function of periodic elections	41	(1.23)	47	(1.29)
23. Identification of the issuers of a political leaflet	81	(0.99)	85	(1.22)
24. Identification of the leaflet issuers' view about taxes	81	(0.95)	87	(0.96)
25. Identification of which policy issuers of leaflet are likely to favour	58	(1.27)	64	(1.15)
26. An example of discrimination in pay equity	41	(1.32)	48	(1.36)
27. Essential characteristics of market economy	43	(1.59)	50	(1.31)
28. Contents of the Constitution	72	(1.16)	80	(1.11)

29. Transition from a non-democratic to a democratic government (most convincing action to promote democracy)	60	(1.27)	66	(1.24)
30. Identification of an example of corruption in national legislature	77	(1.19)	83	(1.08)
31. Cooperation between countries for solving environmental problems (distinction between opinion and fact)	47	(1.24)	52	(1.29)
32. National flag (distinction between opinion and fact)	73	(1.30)	79	(1.03)
33. Understanding the main message of a cartoon (difficulties of a politician in handling reform processes)	79	(1.00)	84	(0.94)
34. Differences of opinion (interpreting an article about factory being shut)	34	(1.46)	39	(1.18)
35. Differences of opinion (interpreting an article about factory being shut)	60	(1.46)	63	(1.28)
36. History textbooks (interpreting a cartoon)	57	(1.32)	61	(1.25)
37. Women and politics (distinction between fact and opinion)	73	(1.29)	77	(1.30)
38. Taxes (distinction between fact and opinion)	51	(1.55)	55	(1.35)

Percentages based on valid responses. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

Their knowledge level is, however, decidedly less satisfactory as regards the specific features of the Italian political-institutional system, as demonstrated by their performance on the items of the 'national option', which was included in the students' questionnaire and which required a more specific knowledge. Only 34% of the first-year upper secondary students and 32% of the third-year lower secondary students answered correctly to an item concerning the vote of confidence in a government; 48% and 44%, respectively, answered correctly on the possibility of making changes to the Constitution; 59% and 56%, respectively, answered correctly on the necessary requirements for being an Italian citizen; 50% and 56%, respectively, answered correctly on the right to education of nomad children.

These results confirm what was found in other studies: students do not have a sufficient grounding in certain fundamental aspects of the Italian political-institutional system, despite the fact that this knowledge is essential for their responsible participation in democratic life and to actively exercise their citizenship rights (Dei 2002).

In analysing the internal differences of the two samples, another significant fact was found. There are statistically significant differences between students of upper secondary schools of different tracks, and these appear to be not so much due to the different curricula, but to the students' different social and cultural backgrounds. The other variables which correlated positively to student results, both in the lower and upper secondary school samples, were of a socio-cultural nature (parents' academic qualifications, number of books at home, newspaper buying). In general, the differences found had a similar trend to the one seen in other national and international surveys on student performance (Caputo and Vertecchi 2000; Caputo 2001). A pessimistic interpretation would stress the substantial inability of the school system to compensate for the differences between students at the outset, with all the consequences this means for their future role as citizens.

The teachers' answers to certain items in their questionnaire could help to explain the unsatisfactory level of student knowledge as regards some issues. One item in the teachers'

questionnaire concerned students' opportunity to learn (OTL) with regard to specific topics. Table 2 shows the teachers' answers to this item.

Table 2: - Civic Education Content: Students' Opportunity to Learn

(percentages)

		1st upper secondary	3rd lower secondary
National History	1	2 (0.7)	
	2	27 (3.1)	7 (1.8)
	3	59 (3.5)	60 (3.9)
	4	12 (2.3)	33 (3.9)
National Constitution	1	1 (0.6)	
	2	48 (3.3)	14 (2.4)
	3	44 (3.5)	69 (3.5)
	4	7 (1.5)	16 (3.0)
Conceptions of Democracy	1	9 (1.9)	2 (1.2)
	2	48 (3.1)	36 (3.3)
	3	38 (3.6)	53 (3.1)
	4	5 (1.4)	10 (2.3)
Electoral Systems	1	21 (2.6)	3 (1.4)
	2	57 (3.3)	49 (4.2)
	3	19 (2.5)	45 (3.9)
	4	3 (1.1)	3 (1.4)
Political Systems	1	16 (2.2)	1 (0.8)
	2	57 (3.2)	37 (3.5)
	3	25 (2.9)	56 (3.6)
	4	3 (1.1)	6 (1.9)
Judicial System	1	26 (2.5)	11 (2.5)
	2	56 (2.9)	53 (3.9)
	3	16 (2.5)	31 (3.7)
	4	2 (0.7)	6 (1.9)
Citizen's Rights	1	2 (0.9)	
	2	32 (2.7)	14 (2.5)
	3	55 (3.4)	59 (3.6)
	4	11 (2.3)	28 (3.6)

Human Rights	1	1 (0.8)	1 (0.5)
	2	29 (3.2)	10 (2.3)
	3	61 (3.2)	65 (4.0)
	4	8 (1.4)	24 (3.5)
Equal Opportunities	1	8 (1.5)	2 (1.2)
	2	46 (3.7)	24 (2.8)
	3	39 (3.6)	60 (3.4)
	4	7 (1.7)	14 (2.6)
Cultural Differences	1	5 (1.3)	2 (1.0)
	2	43 (3.0)	26 (2.9)
	3	44 (2.8)	60 (3.4)
	4	8 (1.9)	12 (2.5)
International Organisations	1	8 (1.4)	1 (0.5)
	2	54 (3.5)	21 (3.0)
	3	34 (3.3)	65 (3.6)
	4	5 (1.5)	13 (2.7)
International Problems	1	17 (2.4)	1 (0.7)
	2	56 (3.3)	41 (3.3)
	3	22 (2.9)	48 (3.3)
	4	4 (1.5)	10 (2.4)
Migration	1	3 (0.9)	
	2	38 (3.1)	13 (2.4)
	3	50 (3.0)	69 (3.4)
	4	9 (2.1)	18 (3.1)
Economic Issues	1	11 (1.8)	1 (0.7)
	2	53 (3.0)	39 (4.0)
	3	32 (2.8)	53 (4.0)
	4	4 (1.1)	7 (1.9)
Social Welfare	1	15 (2.1)	1 (0.7)
	2	51 (3.1)	37 (3.2)
	3	30 (2.8)	58 (3.4)
	4	5 (1.3)	4 (1.5)
Trade Unions	1	24 (3.0)	5 (1.6)
	2	59 (2.0)	44 (3.8)
	3	15 (2.0)	47 (3.9)
	4	2 (0.7)	4 (1.7)

Dangers of Propaganda	1	12 (1.8)	3 (1.2)
	2	48 (3.3)	30 (3.9)
	3	36 (3.1)	55 (4.4)
	4	4 (1.3)	13 (2.6)
Media	1	4 (1.1)	1 (0.0)
	2	33 (2.9)	12 (2.7)
	3	55 (2.9)	66 (4.0)
	4	9 (2.1)	21 (3.4)
Environmental Issues	1	1 (0.5)	
	2	25 (2.7)	11 (2.4)
	3	60 (3.1)	58 (3.9)
	4	14 (2.5)	31 (3.7)
Civic Virtues	1	13 (2.3)	4 (1.4)
	2	43 (3.7)	28 (3.3)
	3	38 (3.2)	56 (3.5)
	4	6 (2.0)	13 (2.7)

Percentages of teachers' answers given on a four-point scale (from 1 = 'none' to 4 = 'very much').

Standard errors appear in parentheses.

Percentages based on valid responses. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

The teachers' answers seem to confirm that students do not have many opportunities to deal with economic type issues and topics (Losito, Mintrop 2001). If we also consider the data on international issues and organisations, there would appear to be a substantial inability of the Italian school system (at this schooling level) to contribute to creating the knowledge necessary for dealing with the growing drive towards economic integration and - to a lesser extent - political integration at international level.

5. Class and school climate

The gap between intended curriculum and implemented curriculum would seem to extend also to student participation in the life of the school and, more generally, to their everyday experience inside school.

The theme of the atmosphere 'experienced at school' directly calls into question not only the school's organisation as a whole, but also the teaching practices and relational models enacted by teachers, especially for the importance attributed to the students' perception of this 'atmosphere'. A great many factors contribute to school 'climate' and these depend on many aspects ([Anderson 1982](#)). As regards students' civic education, some questions are important to be answered with reference to school atmosphere: to what extent can the school climate actually be called a "democratic climate"? And what are the characteristics to be considered in order to define a school climate a democratic one?

What emerges in the available studies on the Italian school system is a situation of basic dissatisfaction, both on the part of students and teachers. Despite the possibility for student participation in schools, it is universally held that this form of participation is largely unsatisfactory.

Students have the chance to organise public debates and events inside school, even though they do not always use this possibility. Student participation to external events is largely tolerated at the disciplinary level. The Ministry of Education itself has issued specific directives on this in the past, inviting school heads and teachers to encourage the creation of "meeting places and opportunities" and to favor "the school's openness to educational and cultural demands coming from its surrounding area" as an "answer to students' demands for more active participation in school life" (Ministry of Education directive no. 133 of 1996).

And yet all this does not reduce the feeling of dissatisfaction and the impression that, very often, this participation is "not spontaneous or, at least, is induced by a form of institutional rite" (Cavalli, de Lillo 1993, 39).

This kind of interpretation has been expressed repeatedly not just by the Ministry of Education and teachers, but also by parents' associations. Even students' associations have expressed similar opinions.

Even if these critical views are unanimously shared, there appears to be less than unanimous agreement as regards the causes underlying the ineffectiveness of these forms of student representation and participation. A proposal for reforming the representative organisation at the school level is currently under discussion, but there is no agreement as yet at the parliamentary level. One possible interpretation of this situation is the gap between the forms of participation allowed - and in some way encouraged - inside school and the everyday teaching experience inside the class, as regards individual classes. One could say that these are two experiences going on parallel to each other, with little chance of converging. The studies available on teaching-learning activities carried out by teachers show that the teaching activities of most teachers seem to be inspired by not very participative criteria (Asquini, Salerni 1992a; Semeraro 1993). These studies give us an image of schools in which strongly traditional teaching methods are the norm, still mainly focusing (above all, in secondary schools) on the sequence lesson - individual study - test, in which there is no real 'education contract'. What we see in some way is a re-proposal of the distinction between 'espoused theories' and 'enacted theories' (Argyris, Schön 1978) found by research on organizations other than schools. It is likely, then, that there is a gap between the theories the teachers declare they are following in their everyday teaching activities and their actual teaching practice.

6. The teachers' role

As already mentioned, one of the aspects characterising civic education in Italian schools is the gap between intended curriculum and implemented curriculum, between stated objectives and actual teaching practices, between the potential for action offered by legislation and by existing norms and the actual achievements in schools. In a situation of this kind, the teachers' role becomes crucial, both as regards their specific teaching actions and their function of organizers of teaching-learning situations that determine the quality of students' cognitive and socio-affective actual experience. The issue concerns all teachers and not just those teaching the more direct civic education related subjects. As regards the latter teachers, there are some specific problems - also highlighted by research in the field - as regard their academic background. They mainly have backgrounds in fields like history, literature and geography, and have a lot less preparation and experience in the specific civic education field. Nor is any specific grounding required in their initial teacher-training phase (Corda Costa 1974, 1995).

It is worth recalling the answers given by teachers regarding their own in-service training experience, in the IEA study. 59% of upper secondary school teachers and 55% of lower secondary school teachers said they had never taken part in any specific in-service training activities for civic education. 41% of upper secondary school teachers and 38% of lower secondary school teachers considered training on teaching methods as one of the priorities for improving the teaching of civic education in school. In lower secondary schools, 49% of the teachers thought the support of external experts was fundamental (as compared to 38% of upper secondary school teachers). The topics the teachers feel they are less prepared in are the judicial system, international issues and economic issues, for upper secondary school teachers; the judicial system, economic issues and

trade unions, for lower secondary school teachers.

At the same time, teachers are firmly convinced they can play a fundamental role in students' civic education. It is thus probably best to focus on this conviction in future work for improving the teaching of civic education, also in view of the fact that processes of change in the Italian school system have been traditionally favoured and supported by grassroots innovation promoted by the more committed and professionally more aware teachers and their professional associations. It is thus possible and desirable that they will provide the driving force for overcoming the limitations still characterising the Italian school system with reference to students' civic education.

Nevertheless, there is also a need for specific school policy decisions in order to determine the conditions for this to come about in terms of teachers' in-service and initial training opportunities, in order to allow teachers to acquire and develop the necessary competencies to be able to deal with the complexity and difficulty that forming democratic citizens entails.

Notes

(1) The law gives the government the right to issue a series of legislative decrees in order to regulate the following aspects, amongst other things: curricular contents of the study systems and tracks; the tasks and characteristics of the national evaluation system; the criteria for student transition from the *licei* system to the system of education and vocational training; school-work shift; the norms for the state examinations envisaged at the end of the first and second cycles of the education system; teachers' initial and in-service training.

It must be recalled here that the reform envisages the registration of children in preprimary and primary schools at an earlier age. At present, children can register at these schools if they reach the age of three or six years, respectively, within 31 December of the school year concerned. With the new law, the age limit refers to 30 April of the year following the one of registration.

(2) This structure seems to be along the lines of the existing one of the *licei* and technical schools. It is still unclear (there being no legislative decrees as yet for implementing the reform) which of the current tracks of technical education will go to make up the *licei* system and which will go to form the education and vocational training system.

(3) A law on devolution was approved by the Parliament in April 2003, after a long government initiated parliamentary debate. This law explicitly envisages the "exclusive responsibility" of regional authorities for education matters. It is as yet unclear what the possible consequences of this law could be on the overall education system (as well as on curricular contents, school autonomy and both teaching and non-teaching school staff).

(4) The following analysis refers to current curricula. It must be said, however, that the introductory section of the reform's text, which deals with the general aims of the education and school system, does not make any explicit reference to the formation of citizens, but instead establishes, as general aims of the school system, "the growth and valorisation of the human person, in full respect of the pace of the developmental age, of the differences and identity of each person and of the family's education decisions, within an overall picture of cooperation between schools and parents, in line with the principle of school autonomy and according to the principles guaranteed by the Constitution" (art. 1). As regards civic education, the proposals put forward so far for reviewing curricula establish a curricular area called "civil living together" that includes "education for citizenship, road safety education, environmental education, health education, nutrition education and affective education". It is still unclear whether this area will be the object of specific teaching course, whether it will have a curricular space defined in terms of a weekly timetable and what teachers will be responsible for it.

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KeyWords: Civic Education, cross-curricular activities, curriculum, opportunity to learn, students' participation, school climate, school system, teaching-learning, teacher training.



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