

Communication 8 Alternative schools in Italy : evolution of school innovation in Italy

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Attempts to develop innovative teaching and experimental trials in Italy have been traditionally focused in the area of state schools. This for socio-political reasons as the private sector was dominated in an absolutely predominant way by the presence of Catholic schools and the left culture was dominated by the Italian Communist state tradition, so this has meant that operate in non-institutional contexts was considered as an implicit attack on public and secular education.

The Montessori and Steiner schools have traditionally been frequented by the wealthy classes and never had a numerically relevant presence in the country.

Another anomaly of the Italian situation is the case of the experience of preschools of Reggio Emilia which, despite having hired a great international reputation, have never spread out of the city of Reggio.

The “Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa” that in Italy took over and developed the Freinet principles had a fairly widespread and exercised an influence in State schools especially in the years ' 70. Subsequently its innovative power was almost completely lost: today its presence can still be found only in some schools where groups of teachers who had started the experiments in the past remained active.

The activities of experimentation and innovation within the state school system today are always related to individual aspects of school life while they just never seem to question the educational and organizational practices as a whole, because there is absolutely no autonomy of single schools or groups to change the fundamental practices and rules.

As the only example of an attempt to collectively change school functions can be mentioned the movement of the “ Scuole senza zaino” currently involving about 180 schools in different parts of the country.

Primary cause of leakage of the wealth of experience and theoretical elaboration of that period was the total indifference to the new educational issues that involved also the left movements and parties and the absence in Universities of truly innovative and open minded programs able to feel the real situation of daily life in the schools and look at new experimentations in a global perspective. This has meant that the teachers did not have any chance to get prepared and motivated to a creative approach to the profession, producing a totally passive attitude, nowadays strongly increased by the hyper-bureaucratic and dehumanizing drifts of the educational relationship.

Today, in the face of such increasing closure of spaces for free initiative within the institution and the growing disease of children in the schooling process, families are moving to look for external solutions in an increasingly widespread (exponentially in recent 3/4 years), taking advantage of the opportunity that the Italian legislation gives parents the possibility to keep children out of the state school (nevertheless without any economical facility): these initiatives of homeschooling and especially the little schools founded by groups of parents and self managed (the so-called “scuole

parentali”), are most of the times eclectically inspired by the different currents of thought of the tradition of alternative education; they have in common the need to create a more comfortable environment for children where implement educational practices more respectful of the sensitivities and needs of young people. Many meetings are rising every year as moments for spreading these ideas and proposals.

Nevertheless there is still a quite complete separation between this new stream of needs and efforts and the official policy of the government and of the teachers' unions.

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