**Young people and work: new ways of education**

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*“Istruzione e formazione professionale”*: that is a new course of formation, introduced in 2001 by a reform of *Article 5* of the Constitution, which refers to the administration of the Regions. In Italy the state is in charge of the Institutes of Profession, lasting five years, while the regions are in charge of the Courses of Vocational Training lasting three years.

That’s the first time that one tries to unify them, but for the moment it is still in the status of a project, because the law is not in force yet and the new government has proposed a new modification. Since a unifying contents is missing, the two institutions formation (Institutes of Profession of the state) and vocational training (Centres acknowledged by the regions) live together in the same house, but remain separate, that is to say each one follows its regulations, even within the frame of agreements between the state and the regions.

The collaboration sought between the Institutes of the state and regional Centres often stays only on the project level and thus cannot guarantee an organisation, which by the way only few users need.

The sources of annoyance and the difficulties for pupils who turn to professional formation and vocational training rise in the course of the years and without a decisive move forward on the level of governance and didactic renewal it is difficult to give answers about the final forms of the two courses.

If we move towards a greater autonomy of territorial services of formation, it will be necessary to pay attention so that this sector is not marginalized and handed over completely to the enterprise. But it will also be necessary to pay attention that the programming happens in such a way that there are bridges between the various lines of orientation; so one will intervene in a more efficient way in professional orientation and will more concretely increase the value of departing from the classical dualism of culture and work in the perspective of a permanent apprenticeship.

The continuance of youth unemployment pushes the curricula of formation to anticipating as much as possible the competences which guarantee professional qualification as well as early forms of permanent employment in an enterprise, even by means of contracts of apprenticeship. On the other hand that causes losing sight of the general competences (whose lack already shows up during the phases of practical training) and of the process of overall maturation in which the socialisation in the world of work will be rooted later on.

These young people who suffer great difficulties because of the socioeconomic conditions of their families and whose results at school are to be doubted must finally submit themselves to bureaucratically regulated bridges between the two systems, that of the state and that of the regions. But on the contrary they ought to have at their disposal, regarding the institutional aspect, a more *comprehensive* and more *flexible* course which revaluates their different sectors of apprenticeship and their capacity of acquiring knowledge by means of a renewed *pedagogy of work*.

The recent "Instructions" by the Ministry on the Institutes of profession speak about revaluing the person in his/her role of worker, emphasizing the *quality* of work as a factor which doesn’t only have consequences for the process of production, but also for the formation of the persons, economic growth and social cohesion. Acquiring competences which one can use in the contexts of life urges the pupils to collaborate in the solution of problems and their self-determination, even in innovative situations.

Finally, the certification of these competences and the *school booklet* are instrumentswhich register the investment, the lifelong formation, the recognition of what one is able to do; while *“a sufficient”* in all subjects makes suspect the end and often failure.

*“Istruzione e formazione professionale”* must enlarge the basis of the curriculum thanks to teachers adapted to the proposal of formation: if you want to realize *personalised* courses, it’s the system which must get nearer to the pupil *who is there,* and not recur to obsolete models of ideal pupils.

Our recent legislation tends to increasing the number of courses at the disposal of pupils by setting the times of choosing earlier, which makes on the one hand catch a glimpse of the possibility that the pupils elaborate choices of orientation towards studies or work, which, however, on the other hand denotes the difficulty of supporting those choices in an appropriate way concerning motivation and contents.

“*Istruzione e formazione professionale*” is still in a bottleneck between a system that wants to put everybody into school, but does not succeed in it, and another one that tries to increase the possibilities without asking too much if they are really efficient of the level of formation. The political conflict between these two aspects only diminishes justice; the bureaucratic clumsiness of the evaluation increases the selection even more.

Numerous papers of research make evident that especially in this sector of the educational system there exists a contradiction between the realization of European objectives – concerning schooling and the aim of formation – and the levels of the apprenticeship: the average results fall down to the bottom of the classification, which aggravates social inequality and diminishes competitiveness, even for the pursuit of excellence.

Where collaboration works, the Institutes of Profession are included in the regional programming of qualifications with standards at the end of studies; it makes suspect a reinforcement of the effectivity of formational activities, not only with respect to the degrees to be awarded, but also to the quality of the offer and to its procedures of catching up and developing. Those experiences can guide a comprehensive organisation of the framework defined by a state law.

To tell the truth, the challenge could be to diminish the rigidity of the courses and to be more demanding at the control and the achievement of results.

**The professional formation by the state**

The number of enrolments substantially stays the same in the course of the years, it constitutes about 20% of upper secondary education; these are mainly boys, to a high degree immigrants, but regular participation is constantly diminishing. The number of pupils who are one or more years behind is increasing equally with Italians and immigrants. There is a tendency to an increase of regular participation in the final years, similarly for the admission to the regional exams of qualification in the third year and the diploma exams of the state in the fifth year; in the intermediate years one notices school-leaving or changing from the courses of the state to the regional ones.

**The regional vocational training**

The enrolments correspond to about 2 % of upper secondary education, mainly boys. They go up especially in the regions which have installed an autonomous course, even with regard to finances. In some regions state and regional courses are interlaced. It’s pupils who have accumulated considerable delays in their school career who come to these courses. The regular participation is higher with the immigrants of the second generation, higher than with Italians.

**REPETITIONS**

The phenomenon of repetition weighs considerably on the amount of regular participation and constantly entails the change from the professional formation to the vocational training or school-leaving. Those enrolled for the first time in the second or third year of the regional courses are such ones to a great majority, even of the immigrant pupils; but if you judge starting from the years of being behind, you can say that for them it is a “second” choice. By the way repetition also exists in vocational training and as a consequence staying behind is aggravated.

In the regions where courses are realized parallel to state courses, one can say that obtaining a diploma is easier than in the latter ones. The regional course succeeds in helping to catch up for the diploma, but the start of each cycle remains the weak point; and the change from the first year of the professional formation to the second one of the vocational training doesn’t improve the situation.

The pupils repeating the last year of the middle school generally choose the Institutes of profession, especially the boys and the immigrants of the first generation; those having repeated years in those schools have a very stressful course, especially in the first three years. Among those who have failed at grammar school only few take the way to professional formation; in a majority there are more changes by those repeating the first year of the Technical Institute. In the vocational training one finds pupils who haven’t passed the middle school in a regular way, and not only immigrants.

**ORIENTATION**

An element which can provide interesting information on the success of formation comes from the choice of careers after middle school und from the development of the pupil during the following years. Research has established relations between the type of upper secondary school and the marks at the end of the previous cycle and starting from that one has tried to observe the results in the two following years. Those ways of research do not only deal with the quantitative aspect, but they also try to construe a profile of orientation, based on the quality of the competences and the ways of obtaining them, on criteria of evaluation, on the sociocultural conditions which nowadays weigh heavily on the decisions of families again.

**DIDACTIC PROPOSALS**

Starting from regular participation, repetitions and rates of changes, one can deduce that the most critical years are the years of the middle school and the first two years of the grammar school. The percentage of those staying behind, of school-leavers and all the other data concerning the school career are extremely diverse with respect to the successive years. According to what has been examined, it doesn’t seem that the solution is the change from the Formation to the Vocational Training, which constitutes the “second chance”, which, however, is not free of school-leaving in its turn.

Those repeating the first year of the grammar schools only aggravate the situation, for the newcomers, too, often show absenteeism and problematic situations.

If it is from satisfaction with work that the adolescents draw their motivation to enrich their professional requirements by general competences (which some search for), it would perhaps be worthwhile diversifying the environments of formation radically. It’s a fact that the present situation is confused and that it is not in the position to examine if the orientation centred on the person helps to grow and choose, or if the orientation centred on early work activity succeeds (and in what amount of time) in making persons acquire general competences which are, however, necessary for work.

Even keeping one’s eyes fixed on a combination of didactic activities for general and professional competences one could develop a less intense and more efficient programme by taking the whole first two years as a point of reference. There close attention is needed to didactic innovations with a view to a first certification of professional competences useful for an enterprise or a profession.

The financial resources employed to make one of 5 pupils (20 % of the pupils and the teachers are a datum not to be neglected) repeat a class could be better used to develop the aspirations and the aptitudes of an adolescent, including extra tuition for gifted pupils, and also to construe a different pattern of school on that basis. On principle nobody can indeed be left behind, even after two or three failures.

Thus the right to education for all doesn’t seem to be a reality and the results in quality, according to the OECD-PISA studies, do not appear excellent: rigidity doesn’t entail quality and one cannot exclude that failure constitutes more an element of discouragement and frustration than an impulse to improvement. One consequence of that course of prolonging and leaving the system is a loss for society, which is confirmed when the potentials of the pupils are not recognized and encouraged, but negated and not utilised.

By the way, regular participation of immigrants in the courses leading to professional qualification is higher than that of Italians and better balanced between boys and girls. They will give back quality to professional formation by thus taking a dominant role in the world of work.

It is necessary to start form the principle of equivalence of knowledge (one can reach analogous results on different ways). That principle takes into consideration the standards defined by European competences; one must add the dimension of professions whose standards are indicated in the agreements with the world of work on national and regional qualifications.

**EVALUATION**

The overall evaluation, apart from exceptional cases, is postponed to the second year in order to favour the realization of personalized plans of formation and didactic organisation on different levels (in the first year groups of different levels will be more numerous, while they will be reduced in the second year), favouring groups formed across the classes as well. It will be necessary to arrive at an adequate choice at the end of the second year.

The didactics will strictly realize work for competences, so that one arrives at their certification at the end of two years and at the awarding of credits, be it for continuing in the formation system of schools, be it for entering the world of work. The *booklet of the pupil* will thus begin the capitalisation and the survey of the courses and the experiences in work, as well as introduce the principle of continued formation.

**METHODOLOGY**

During the first year didactics of experimentation will be adopted thanks to the simultaneous presence of teachers of general subjects and professional subjects, possibly supplemented by experts on enterprises and/or professional formation. This experimentation will also be able to lead to abstract acquisitions (scientific, economic laws etc.) or to the production of concrete objects and procedures (joinery, fitting etc.) so that it can control the various “types” of apprenticeship and the various motivations.

During the second year it will be possible to begin the phases of practical training in the enterprise from the beginning of the year, thus building the curriculum on the experience of work by means of a modular programme.

Diverse experiences, first of all those of the phases of practical training, confirm that in the situation where an active involvement is possible motivation and self-esteem are improved. The didactic work must establish a relationship between these two contexts following the times and the ways of acquiring general and transversal competences. The result must be a unique and efficient experience which doesn’t cause the perception of a separation between theoretical, formal learning and practice, whether inside or outside school. It is also known that it is difficult to pass from gesture to word, from action to reflection.

Evaluation shared between the persons working with the pupils in different environments, more descriptive in the analysis of the processes of the apprenticeship, and the awarding of credits for continuing at school or at work, all that could push the pupils themselves to taking greater responsibility and self-evaluation.

For the acquisition of basic competences activities happen essentially through innovative ways, impassioning the pupils directly in the formational activity and making continual references to concrete situations, even by means of employing instruments of experimentation corresponding to a profession.

Teaching starts from the concrete aspect to search for the commonly shared rule, turning upside down the classical logic which starts from theory to get to practice.

Moreover there will be a possibility to propose to pupils with difficulties activities of socialisation at the beginning of the courses, of readjustment of basic competences, of special tuition individually or in small groups, of reinforcement through personalisation often construed in a formative teacher-group relationship by means of concrete activity which often focuses on the construction of finished products. The participation in guided tours where you personally observe experiments, enterprises, applications of competences, makes it possible to construe a project of individualised and personalised formation through recognition of the diversity and the positive features of everyone.

An apprenticeship is a social product; when the pupils create something meaningful, they realize encounters between diverse persons who share a project in the different formative environments.

**CONCLUSION**

It would be a mistake to limit this statement to situations which we know to be the most difficult ones, there would result a “school for the last ones”. It is therefore justified to appeal to those who constitute the world of school for a common effort: failure at exams, lack of success, and marginalisation exist in any line of orientation. Where there are “stronger” pupils, more is demanded for everybody and so more must be given without making that an instrument of selection, if not, the school becomes truly unjust: a school of two speeds, that of the “normal ones” and that of the “others”.

“Can you give everything to everybody?” That’s the topic of an old discussion, especially animated when it is the question of putting “equality” between the pupils on one scale and the “comprehensive” school on the other scale.

Nowadays the differentiation and the polarisation of “weak users” in particular orientations, mainly of the professional type, show that you cannot give everything to everybody in the same way, especially if you think of an “encyclopaedic” curriculum of humanist inspiration.

“*Istruzione e formazione professionale”* is the draft of an experimental model which must maintain the principle of the unity of formation between general competences and professional competences, by increasing the value of the “plurality of intelligences”. Therefore it’s the quality and the organisation of the didactics of added value which avoid discrimination because of social conditions and the conditions of apprenticeship, supported by a strong activity of orientation.

Since the last national inquiry (2001) the demands for three-year courses are rising in the two systems, that of the state and that of the regions. According to the research quoted it seems that the course in the Institutes of Profession is too theoretical and too much charged; while the regional courses are more demanded, even as a first choice by pupils leaving lower secondary schools, and even though there exist less resources for them to meet the demand.

The new line *“Istruzione e formazione professionale”*, called thus by the constitution, is composed of courses offered separately either by the Institutes of Profession of the state in 5 years (which try hard to adapt themselves to the qualification in 3 years required more and more) or by the Centres of vocational training mainly in 3 years (few of them have indeed reached the fourth year).

It’s very complicated to cope with that, and that has very different effects on the success of the formation of young people who are already at a great risk of differentiation.

In *“Istruzione e formazione professionale”* a new container cannot harbour old contents; more modern didactics will crash with an antiquated exam connected to an addition of knowledge.

The constitutional reform confirms the principle of a union between professional formation and vocational training: It means getting near the possibility of an intervention overcoming the dualism between the state and the regions, paying particular attention to the acknowledgement of some structures that are private, run by associations or connected to production plants.

The Italian constitution has a directive in order to solve the question: confiding the sole administration of this sector to the regions and granting to the state the coordination and the control of the results.

We know that an excessive regionalisation leads to fragmentation and a difficulty in communication between the regional systems; moreover it doesn’t take into account the European directives. We need a global organisation of the national system without returning to ministerial centralism.

If on the one hand the professional formation and the vocational training can mutually enrich one another, on the other hand the diverse “administrative bodies” of the two systems impede one another, which has effects on the success of formation.

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