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## IMAGINED GLOBALISATION IN ITALIAN EDUCATION

### Discourse and Action in Initial Teacher Training

*A reform delayed more than one hundred years. Luzzatto, 2000, p. 15*

In this chapter, we explore the specificity of the Italian Initial Teaching Training (ITT) reform discourses as related to decentralisation politics in recent years. References to internationality explored in selected policy documents, influential books and some educational journals are assessed against institutional and historical developments. Therefore, this analysis attempts to explore forms of imagined (discursive) globalisation to seek out model states, examples abroad and more generally international knowledge which influence teacher training discourses. An analysis of the characteristics of Italian political culture and of its modernisation project as related to the English model will form part of our historical background. We will deal with an allegedly global trend in teacher education, which is perceived to be the neoliberal English model of controlled professionalism. After a more balanced phase between internationality and domestic tradition during the 1980s, the current Italian ITT discourse assumes a clear inferiority perspective as compared with other national settings. At the same time, however, it is clearly guided by what is perceived to be the most advanced and global model, i.e. the English model. In this paper we will argue that internationality is currently prominent over tradition in Italian debates on teachers and ITT.

#### CONTEXT

Following the 1997 introduction of decentralisation, significant legislative measures have been implemented in search of radical reform of the Italian education system. Despite high expectations, a broad consensus on the necessity of introducing decentralisation policies and some piecemeal implementations of the projected reform, the Italian school system continues to be afflicted by an endemic non-reformability (Bottani, 2002, p. 214). The lack of political stability engendered by a proportional representation parliamentary system was traditionally considered to be the main obstacle to far-reaching reform. However, the last fifteen years have been characterised by greater political stability, and yet uncertainty over projected reforms continues to persist.

During the last ten years, a traditional pattern of “stop and go” in legislative changes and, more generally, tentative innovations in education has, in the field of teacher training, finally reached the stage of implementation provisions and of practical action. However, the process of institutionalising Initial Teacher Training [ITT] cannot be considered complete, particularly as regards the training of secondary school teachers. Until the 1990s and from an education point of view, secondary school teachers were required to have a university degree (laurea), while pre-primary and primary school teachers were not required to have graduated from higher education programmes. Since 1998/1999 the latter have also been

required to attend a four-year course in primary education sciences. Most revealing is that there was no provision for the training of secondary school teachers until the 1998/1999 watershed, when a ministerial decree enacting law 341 of 1990 was issued. In addition, the preparation of secondary would-be teachers was deficient in terms of both academic orientation toward teaching and practical training in the induction phase.

Most internal analysts emphasise the exceptionality of the “Italian case” in terms of cultural, political and educational history. More generally, it is assumed that the peculiar configuration of the Italian democratic system heavily influenced educational matters. Analysts assume not only the non-reformability of the system, but also its opacity to external (and internal!) observers (Todeschini, 2003, p. 220). The internal ideological struggles on educational matters are seen as a clear symptom of the immutability of the system itself, if not one of its main ingredients. Other scholars and policy makers connect internal developments with global tendencies, albeit some of them from within an evolutionary perspective which relegates the Italian pattern of development to a lower stage of the modernisation process.

We will first sketch a socio-historical background of contemporary Italy and focus particularly on political culture discourses on national identity and modernity. Then, we will explore forms of imagined globalisation in teacher training in more depth, to seek out model states, examples abroad and more generally international knowledge which influences teacher training discourses.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Founded in 1861, Italy is normally considered to be a younger state relative to other European nations such as Spain, England and France. The process of Italian state building consisted in the annexation of the small states of the peninsula to the realm of Sardinia under the Savoy dynasty. The peculiarity of the Italian nation formation is commonly viewed as a major constraint to the introduction of changes over time, since it resulted in the persistence of legislative elements of the pre-unitary period. The Casati law of 1859 is significantly seen as the original and most powerful historical precedent for its highly centralistic educational structure, the subsequent legislative cacophony and overregulation.

The republican history of the Italian peninsula starts with the referendum of 1946 and forms two main phases<sup>1</sup>: the First Republic (1946–1994) and the Second Republic (1994 onwards). The watershed is the 1992–1993 “legal revolution” (Parker, 2007, p.7), a dramatic transformation of the Italian political landscape, when the dominant Christian Democratic Party imploded. The First Republic was characterised by extraordinary progress in all spheres, known as the “Italian Miracle”. Italy became one of the six richest economies, a member of the G8 and by 1987 shared 5% of the world market (Parker, 2007, p. 2). Even the 1970s, usually depicted as years of terrorist fear and ideological conflict, could be described as “a diffused attempt to democratise the whole area of civil society – in the schools, in the psychiatric hospitals, among the judiciary” (Ginsborg, 2000, p. 185).

The last fifteen years of the Second Republic have been considered a time of decline in several arenas: economic, Italy’s position in the world, social and cultural realms (Ginsborg quoted by Parker, 2007, p. 2). However, these are also years of ambitious state restructuring striving for federalism which led to important improvements in national, regional and local government and introduced principles of efficiency and accountability into public

administration (Parker, 2007, pp. 9, 11). This new governance trend is also evident in the educational area, as a shift from the direct management of the State to federal supervision and control.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From a socio-historical perspective, education is a phenomenon of both transnational globalisation and culture-specific diversification. Many theories (Schriewer, 2004; Popkewitz, 2000; 2003; Anderson-Levitt, 2003) uphold the idiosyncratic nature of education and the divergence of meaning in specific nations, regions or even local contexts. At the same time, they acknowledge the relevance of the processes of global dissemination and standardisation.

Many comparative studies are more or less explicitly founded on an evolutionary idea or on a convergence hypothesis of an allegedly single “global model of ITT”. This comes to be identified with the post-modern English case, which comparatively represents the most striking example of global trends and neoliberal politics (Menter et al., 2006b; Ozga, 2005, p. 41). This unique global model seems to draw upon a standard/competence approach based on technical skills of teaching and a new professionalism, which means privileging managerialism and effectiveness and leading to the disempowerment the teaching profession (“quasi professional, a technician”) (Patrick, Forde & McPhee, 2003, p. 241). The global model would coincide with a controlled professionalism seen as performance- and assessment- oriented and chiefly a matter of training.

This position, in which the English ITT comes to represent a global pattern and thus implying the perspective of a cultural lag as compared with other nations, is one of the most widespread. However, there are other accounts. From a critical perspective, this issue is deemed to be irrelevant: there is no cultural specificity in teacher training in capitalist settings and thus no global model to be imported (Sander, 2000, pp. 161– 203).

Other scholars acknowledge that “there is apparently a general but not a global move towards closer supervision and regulation of teachers’ careers and teaching practice” (Tatto & Plank 2007, p. 274). Though based on dichotomous concepts such as professional versus technical preparation, teacher as professional versus teacher as bureaucrat, the institutional perspective dismisses the hypothesis of a global model or of a convergence theory and proposes a more complex account (Tatto & Plank 2007, p. 273).

Also, from an anthropological perspective, there is no such thing as a unique pathway in the current reform trends around the world. In fact, for Anderson-Levitt (2003, pp. 9–13) a single global trend might include seemingly contradictory themes such as a controlled and an autonomous professionalism. In her words, “[o]ur broadened concept of world culture of schooling experiences regular waves of changes and incorporates cultural debates in which the pendulum swings back and forth. It offers no promise, then, of convergence toward a more coherent model” (Anderson-Levitt, 2003, p. 13).

Italian policy makers constantly invoke the English model, traditionally seen to be one of the most worthy of comparison (Cerasi, 2002). Therefore, we will mainly investigate its presence and meaning as controlled professionalism versus auto- nomous professionalism, on some

Italian scholarly journals, policy documents and books. In addition, we will project our findings onto a longer socio-historical perspective.

The analysis of educational reform, and particularly the issue of teacher training, must acknowledge global and institutional influences (Tatto, 2007, p. 7); as well as what is conceptualised as “imagined” or discursive globalisation (<internationality>”) (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, p. 7). Because of the particular Italian situation, in this chapter we will focus on the notion of imagined globalisation to analyze the Italian reform’s (1) historical precedents; (2) intended reforms spanning roughly the last ten years, linked with school autonomy and current reform of ITT; and (3) the internationality issue in the field of ITT.

## METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

This study is based on a document analysis of some significant sources of production and dissemination of pedagogical knowledge as related to teacher and reform matters. We selected sources of documentation representative of official educational policy discourse, widely disseminated within their national contexts and representing diverse cultural and political orientations. We analyzed published articles over the last ten years in the following three journals: (1) the official journal of the Ministry of Public Education (Annali dell’Istruzione), (2) a widely disseminated secondary school journal (Nuova Secondaria), and (3) a journal dedicated to issues of teaching (Insegnare). All these sources reveal pedagogical discourses closely related to the process of policy formation, as they published the views of national experts charged with the reforming process which began in 1999. Moreover they are representative of the political, cultural and pedagogical orientations which lead to contrasting views on Italian reform: Nuova Secondaria is linked to Catholic circles and personalist pedagogy, while Insegnare is oriented to the Left and to a secular pedagogy. Another important source is represented by the thematic monographs issued by a private foundation (TREELLLE, 2004), plainly oriented to the international pedagogical landscape. In addition, we also consulted publications of scholars and individuals<sup>3</sup> directly involved or influential in the reform process such Campione, Ferratini and Ribolzi (2005), Luzzatto (2000), Cenerini and Drago (2000), and Chiosso (2006).

### Political culture, discourses of modernity and the question of models

We will now turn our attention to the Italian political culture as the natural background for our discursive analysis on educational matters. The Italian political culture is principally composed of traditional political subcultures which are deemed to have a *longue durée*. These were, in the 1980s, the “white” Catholic constellation, the “red” Socialist and Communist world and the smaller secular milieu moving in the 1990s in a charismatic populist direction. In addition, many analysts distinguish old and new political and cultural myths<sup>4</sup> as rather un-conventional phenomena of the political culture. The main myth dating back to the 1860s is the leitmotif of the “two Italies”: the North vs. the South, the city vs. the country, the republic vs. the monarchy, the Church vs. the State, modernists vs. traditionalists, engagement vs. “qualunquismo” (anti-politics), the “legal” country vs. the “real” country, the “furbi” (the canny) vs. the “fessi” (the gullible) and right vs. left. If there is an “Italian exceptionalism”, and this is a recurrent and transver- sal cultural thesis, this might lie not in the existence of these oppositions, but in their intensity (Parker, 2007, p. 7).

As already stated in the introduction, a closely linked issue with the cultural thesis of the Italian exceptionalism is the assumption of non-reformability, including that of the educational system. Both are discursively intermingled with the national identity question and the Italian modernity issue, and mostly perceived as weak (Patriarca, 2001, p. 24) or incomplete. The political myth of the incompleteness is visible from nation's identity formation in Roman times (Patriarca, 2001, p. 28) to its political transition to the Second Republic (Mete, 2008, p. 481). At the end of the Post Cold War and in its new position as a multi-ethnic country, Italy (re) discovered the value of patriotism, mostly in the form of a neo-ideology (Patriarca, 2001, p. 26). The renewal of patriotic and nationalist values in Italy is not, however, a novelty in the post-'89 European space<sup>5</sup>. As in other cases, the revival of old discourses on identity and national character helps the alchemy of new ideologies and identities.

References to the incomplete character of the Italian modernisation process are paralleled by discourses of "normalisation" ("Italy must become a normal country") as a synthesis of significant elements of the discourse of the Italian road to modernity. For Ginsborg et al. (p. 188), the normalisation political myth supposes references to a superior, unreachable and thus rhetorical Anglo-American model, which constantly informs public discourses.

Discourses on the Italian road to modernity have always implied comparison to other European nations and a negative and stereotyped account of Italian identity (Patriarca, 2001). Moreover, the search for models is a constant in this debate, as we shall see in the pedagogical realm of reform. The English model or Anglophilia is a very important point of reference for Italian liberals since Risorgimento and the post-unification period in the building of Italian democracy (Cerasi, 2002).

Actually, Cerasi offers a historical account of the getting closer and moving away dynamic from the "paradigmatic English model" which is an important point of reference for our analysis of contemporary discourses in education. While the references to France and Germany were more pragmatically oriented given their proximity and appropriateness, the English case was widely recognised as being unapproachable. At first glance, it played the role of a "mirror of ideology, or a screen on which ideal plans for society and its institutions could be projected" (Cerasi, 2002, p. 7). However, a closer analysis leads Cerasi to assert that in their appreciation of English self-government, Italian liberals unveiled conservative desires to preserve social hierarchies. While discourses on the English model were formally intended as a project of modernity, on practical grounds and mainly after the 1880s they served the antidemocratic purposes of the local and liberal elites.

The historical precedents of Anglophilia and other model states in the political realm shed light on contemporary pedagogical discourses on forms of imagined globalisation and modernisation.

"A reform delayed more than one hundred years"

Over the last thirty years, the issues of professional and university-based training of school teachers have dominated the Italian debate on initial teacher training, whereas expected changes in this area were rather inconsistent. The title of this paragraph, coined by one of the most prominent individuals involved in the restructuring process itself (Luzzatto, 2000, p. 15) is extremely revealing as to the specificity of the Italian domestic discourse on education.

Italian education is regularly depicted as lagging behind other European countries. Indeed, the documentation consulted abounds in references to Europe, mostly revealing an inferiority perspective and occasionally a convergence perception.

However, the situation of primary school teachers and that of secondary school teachers differs substantially. While the former would traditionally receive professional training in specialist further education colleges, the latter were appointed through national evaluation competitions and lacked any form of preliminary training.

From a cultural point of view, Italian scholars explain this particular situation as the effect of the long lasting influence of Gentile's educational reform of the 1920s and of its philosophical legacy on pedagogical culture (Luzzatto 2000; Monstuschi, 2003). Indeed, this humanistic-spiritualistic culture assumed that a good teacher simply overlapped with the image of a cultivated and humanly rich person. Most scholars point out that this idealistic conception was the early pattern of ITT. In fact, from an institutional perspective, the representative school structure continues to be in the Italian case, as in the French model, the classical *lycée* (Cummings, 2003, p. 35) founded by Gentile.

It was only during the 1960s that this anti-methodological ethos was radically challenged by an incipient image of the teacher as a professional with appropriate pedagogical, psychological and didactic tools. This trend was rooted in a more general cultural and educational reformist mentality, meant to transform an old and highly classified educational system into a more democratic one. Hence, the original image of the professional teacher in the modern sense emerged in a period of profound social and educational changes. It is symptomatic that this incipient image of the professional teacher was marked from the outset by the wish for their training to be at university level. In 1962–1963, a Parliamentary Commission report recommended two years of university courses for primary school teachers and two years for secondary school teachers, the first year included in their degree course, and the second consisting of a remunerated apprenticeship.

These initial and valuable efforts to conceptualise in pedagogical terms what it means to be a professional teacher, largely supported by central authorities, were paralleled by an anti-institutional protest culture of the working class, of left-oriented groups and professional associations, which produced an alternative version of teacher professionalism. Moreover, the shortage of teachers in the 1960s did not encourage the shift of emphasis from quantitative to qualitative approaches in teacher recruitment and training.

During the 1970s and the 1980s, the image of a militant teacher defending the social and political rights of the oppressed was superseded by the desire to build the teaching profession on solid pedagogical grounds. This coincided with the tendency to “fabricate” a new and modern teacher, connected to international pedagogical developments, and supported by the reform of the school curriculum (a new curriculum for the lower secondary school, *scuola media*, in 1979, and for the primary school, *scuola elementare*, in 1985). During the 1980s, the modern idea of teacher professionalism was largely inspired by prominent scholars, such as Bruner, Mialaret and De Landsheere. These “indigenous foreigners” (Popkewitz, 2003, p. 277) opened Italian pedagogy to internationality, which led to a more successful reformist phase.

Symbolism, tradition and internationality in the teaching profession

One of the most recurrent images of externalisation to tradition is Don Milani's "Lettera ad una professoressa" (1967), which marked a crucial moment in the growing awareness of a dysfunctional school in the service of a stratified and unjust society. This symbolic image is still present in contemporary pedagogical discourses (Jori, 2007).

It is widely accepted that the overthrow of the traditional image of the teaching professional as a merely cultivated person was accelerated by the new openness to internationality, at least as a legitimising factor for domestic policies. From a historical perspective, we can distinguish three patterns of such a fusion between tradition and internationality.

The first was a cultural analysis of traditional/local knowledge in order to integrate it into new knowledge structures. The second came from the field of the curriculum, which challenged teaching/learning patterns and subsequently the teaching profession. The ideas of Frey, Stenhouse and Nicholls have been interpreted and endorsed by Pontecorvo, Pellerey, Frabboni, Scurati and other Italian scholars. Finally, the third inspiration in defining the new teacher was an analysis of more specific teaching competences and skills. In this case, the theoretical contributions, e.g. Zavalloni, Laporta, Corda-Costa and Damiano, and the experiments conducted at the Universities of Bologna and Bari proved an original contribution to an internally conceptualised 'Italian approach' to teacher training. This experimental stage of teacher training reform played a major role in defining a professional and university-educated identity for teaching staff (Chiosso, 2002).

At the policy level, the prolonged debates and experimental innovations of the 1980s finally led to legislation, Act 341 of 19.11.1990. This law introduced ITT at the university level. A four-year degree (laurea) for primary and nursery school teachers, as a simultaneous model, was established, as well as a two-year specialisation degree for secondary school teachers, a consecutive model, to follow a laurea in a given discipline. This legislative innovation, the product of more than twenty years of debates, postponements and experiments, became fully institutionalised only in 1997/1998. During this period, another major influence of widely legitimated knowledge was the OECD volume on quality teaching (CERI, 1994). However, the Italian debates did not succeed in reaching a stable consensus on this issue. We can say that, "at least nobody was thinking that the teaching profession was merely a question of a cultivated person and not of specific competences" (Chiosso, 2002, p. 89).

The debate of the 1990s concentrated mainly on structural-organisational issues, notably the choice between a simultaneous versus a consecutive model. As far as the simultaneous model is concerned, as in the case of the primary school teachers, the two elements of professional training, i.e. a general training for the teaching role and a more specific training for the primary school context, were hardly ever interrelated. Indeed, the laboratories and the school-based teaching practice represent the weakest element of ITT, as they do not ensure the requested interrelation between a disciplinary training and the mastery of professional competencies. As has been observed, the simultaneous model is only so on paper, whereas in reality it becomes an alternate model.

The "mother of all reforms"

Over the last ten years, Italian educational reform was said to be inspired by the same autonomist principle as other European reforms of education, and legitimised in a neo-

Weberian vein by the desire to make traditionally highly centralistic systems more flexible and thus to correct their dysfunctions. A cross-party consensus to reform the Italian education system was supported by both the Right and Left. The autonomy of schools was first defined by legislation in 1997, regulated in 1999, and finally became a constitutional principle in 2001, following a revision of Title V of the Italian Constitution. This political attempt at transforming Italian education into a more autonomous and flexible system seems unquestioned by most politicians, administrators and academics. They call it “the mother of all reforms” and, as in many other European centralised countries, it was undeniably inspired by the same self-government principle influential at the turn of the XX century.

However, this apparent borrowing of the decentralising principle from the international arena and its local adaptation is not without controversy and tension. Indeed, the last reforms (Berlinguer’s Law n. 30/2000 and Moratti’s Law n. 53/2003) engendered passionate public debates. Many scholars believe that these were mostly politically driven and weakly informed by the actual situation of Italian schooling. More than on accomplished changes, Italian education accounts normally focus on the reform aspirations. These are the aforementioned school autonomy, the equal footing of public and non public schools, the cultural permeability of the schools to the economic pressures and the working world, the introduction of practices of evaluation at all levels of the educational system, the overcoming of a school-centred model of education.

The issue of teacher professionalism appears to be intensively invoked at a rhetorical level. The position of the teacher as principally a civil servant, functioning in a highly centralistic system, or as a “mass-teacher” (*insegnante-massa*, Drago, 2000a), is generally no longer considered acceptable. Thus, teacher professionalism is seen as completely lacking or limited to the good will of the best teachers, personally investing time and money in their own training. Thus, professionalism must be radically (re)built (Cavalli, 2003). Not only does the general educational reform striving for autonomy not take flight. The same can be said for ITT reform. The main difficulty lies, once again, in overcoming a traditionally executive position in favour of an autonomous profession (Riboldi, 2003).

#### The meaning of structural uncertainties

The most controversial issue is linked with the initial training of secondary school teachers. The two-year route in a transversal institution for secondary teacher students “*Scuola di Specializzazione per l’Insegnamento Secondario*” [SSIS]<sup>6</sup>, which can be attended after completion of the “three plus two” system of general and specialist laurea, was originally designed as a three-year course (general) plus two additional years of specialist and pedagogical culture leading to the teaching profession – which had to be activated internally by each faculty – plus 1 year of practice supervised by the transversal structures (SSIS). At present, the future of the SSIS is still uncertain and the proposed choices are mainly between (1) a shorter technical preparation route, based on disciplinary knowledge; and (2) a longer professional preparation route, centred on pedagogical skills.

The alternating dominance of these models in educational politics has various theoretical and practical consequences. For some policy makers the SSIS structures should function on the original model of the French IUFMs, as a comprehensive professional preparation of



secondary school teachers. These institutions should maintain close links with the Faculties of primary school teachers, to gain the maximum advantage from the school-based experience of would-be teachers (Luzzatto, 2006). For others, the main function of SSIS should be the supervision of the practicum, while single faculties should be charged with the disciplinary and pedagogical preparation, which will nevertheless result in a more technically oriented preparation. This second route apparently overlooks the positive experience of the SSIS in linking the university to the world of the schools. As we can see, an important site of struggle is thus represented by the integration of scientific knowledge, didactic, and relational competences (Galliani & Felisatti, 2002) – in other words of the partnership between the university and the schools in delivering ITT.

Internationality with reference to European and international comparisons

References to internationality may display “aspects of justification (of values or value-based ideologies), self-legitimation (of educational studies as an academic field), and ascription (of reform failures)” (Luhmann & Schorr quoted by Schriewer, 2004a, p. 485). At this point of our analysis we will try to see how this applies to the Italian debate.

The common practice of denouncing the poor quality of education in Italy, as showed by international statistics, often performs functions of justification and ascription. The often-quoted PISA-OCSE study from 2003 indicates that out of 41 countries, Italian teenagers (15 years) placed 26th to 31st in terms of their performances in mathematics, natural sciences, language and problem solving.<sup>7</sup> To most observers, the inefficiency of Italian education appears self-evident from the perspective of teacher statistics too. In fact, Italy has one of the lowest ratios of teachers per student (1 teacher per 10.8 students, OCSE 1:17, EU 1:15.2). (OECD, 1995; Chiosso, 2006). Thus, many scholars, practitioners and even teachers advocate a drastic cut of 25% of the total number of teachers. This aim is difficult to implement since school teaching was a traditional panacea to intellectual unemployment.

The justificatory role of the references to international comparisons is self-evident even while scholars highlight good performance depicted by international surveys. In fact, a prominent scholar rhetorically asks, “Why don’t we mention IEA-PIRLS? A recent comparative research portrays a non-negative situation of our school, requiring completely different measures than those currently undertaken by the government” (Vertecchi, 2003, p. 11).

Another indicative platform for internationality horizons is the publications of the TREELLLE Association, whose advisory board is composed of international scholars and policy makers. The issue 4/2004, “Which teachers for an autonomous school?” is divided, just as the country monographs published by OECD, into problematic issues, “anomalies”<sup>8</sup>, and proposals<sup>9</sup>, replicating the classical form of OECD experts’ recommendations. This list explicitly draws on an internationality perspective. The “anomalies” rise directly from the comparison with “European trends”. The most frequently invoked international organisations are OCSE and the European Commission.

Internationality as model states and examples abroad

Model states and examples abroad are key concepts of an “international reform on education” as “forms of evaluative interpretation of international data, structures or issues [...] that are <relevant> in terms of educational policy and practice” (Schriewer, 2004a, p. 485). In this sense, the aforementioned journal issue of TRELLE (4/2004, “Which teachers for an autonomous school?”) is extremely revealing. UK and Sweden are regarded as specific sources of innovative practices and as two international models. The reference to the UK made in this document is inaccurate, as the proposals hint at the English model, or what is widely perceived to be the neoliberal global model. Without doubt, this model is one of the most frequently invoked by the documentation consulted for the present research. The most significant and transversal themes, symptoms of internationality are:

- the standards of learning;

- independent agencies of evaluation (on the model of the often-cited OFSTED,

INVALSI has been created, which is not independent), related to the wish to introduce “for the first time a culture of evaluation” of the system, the schools, the teachers and the learning outcomes. “Uniquely in Europe, Italian teachers are accountable for their actions neither to their <peers>, nor to the organisation (head-teacher) nor to external officers (inspectors)” (TRELLE, 2004, p. 25).

- school-based recruitment of teachers, as a prerequisite for creating a truly autonomous school and as a professional community and cultural enterprise, linked with the financial autonomy of schools.

The neoliberal global model, as the “most extreme case of <modernisation>”

(Ozga, 2005, p. 41), e.g., the English case, is one of the most recurrent. For instance, the newly-established ADI (Italian Teacher Association, 1998) endorses the concept of professionalism and has elaborated a Professional Code modelled on the English Code of Conduct and Practice (p. 31). The published work of its president Cenerini overtly deals with the reform of English professionalism, looking for “what can be learned from the English experience” (i.e. professional standards and the creation of an equivalent General Teaching Council) (Cenerini, 2000, p. 262). The same is true for the documents of the TRELLE Association and for the book “That’s another kind of school altogether!” (Campione, Ferratini & Ribolzi, 2005), both supporting a radical reform of the teaching profession and of Italian schools informed by English and American developments (also quoted by Cenerini, National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, 2000, p. 30). It is however doubtful whether the current Anglophilia is driven by discourses of borrowing as justified by the quality of English education. In fact, fewer references are made to the current improvement of English education as showed by achievement scores in international tests, e.g., TIMSS 2007 Report, (Martin, Mullis & Foy, 2008, p. 52). Most probably, references to the English model as a model of governance play, once again, a symbolic function serving to legitimise the internal implementation of these models by broadcasting its alleged merits to the world.

Also, *Insegnare* constantly includes sections dedicated to “lessons from abroad”, as original articles or in translation: “How does the evaluation system in England work: in other words, when experiences from abroad help in overcoming certain failures (if sought) V. Di Pietra”. In

this journal the models are the French educational reform and Finnish performances in international tests.

Other pertinent sources are revealing about the European-oriented internationality horizons held by policy makers (Luzzatto, 2000, pp. 95–97). Practical solutions to the ITT reform are envisaged:

– flexible arrangements for teaching in the upper years of primary school (specialised

teachers but also generalist primary school teachers), quoting the “Swedish solution” which “shows a close similarity” with Italian provision (Luzzatto, 2000, p. 95).

– linking the appointment of teachers with the teacher training routes (following the IUFM French model), specifying that “actually this is not a matter of political debate” and that it is in overt contradiction with the strand promoting “real autonomy” as school-based appointments (Luzzatto, 2000, p. 97).

As in the study of Cerasi (2002), these models reflect both pragmatically driven discourses sustained by assertions of similarity and compatibility and idealistically informed discourses justified by assertions of desirability. References to the English model support simultaneously autonomous and controlled models of professionalism, paralleling the practical wisdom for which autonomy and control are both needed in practice. But paradoxically both ingredients are said to be completely lacking from the current practices.

## CONCLUSIONS

The discourse on the Italian road to modernity has historically been intertwined with the dilemma that represents the search for an ideal which falls between the English model and Italian tradition tempered by the myth of political culture, e.g., incompleteness and the need for normalcy. The current neo-patriotism, and the prevalence in pedagogy of the paradigmatic English model as one of the main ingredients of the internationality dimension is core component of contemporary political and educational culture. Questioning the “world-views or references horizons that are repeatedly constructed from the vantage point of particular socio-cultural or national settings and according to these settings’ internal needs” (Schriewer, 2004, p. 488), is not, however, an easy task.

While the neoliberal global model is a constant of the discursive dimension of restructuring, there are voices which question its legitimacy and appropriateness in the Italian context. Some scholars (e.g. Chiosso, 2006) express doubts about the managerial switch. At the same time, they recognise the need to link education with the required competences of the economic market. Other scholars (e.g. Drago, 2000a) express a more circumstantial criticism regarding the issue of “real autonomy”, intended as financial autonomy and as the possibility of direct appointment of teachers. Similarly, they have reservations about the professionalism issue. From this perspective, these intensively popularised issues do not appear “necessary ways for challenging the mass-teacher, neither are they easy to realise” (Drago, 2000a, pp. 174–175). The proposed solution is, more realistically, the experimental approach to the teaching profession.

While internationality is clearly emphasised<sup>10</sup> throughout the recent policy documentation, the references to tradition are mostly negative. What emerges is, on one hand, the prevalence of references to English and American solutions as most innovative, desirable and powerful models; references to the French solutions as more traditional and realistic models to be imported; few references to Swedish or other Scandinavian solutions as desirable models. On the other hand, there is the lack of good traditions to be preserved or the need to overcome a negative model (idealistic culture, centralistic administration, the “mass-teacher” etc). However, some authors sustain their reform proposals with a discourse which is more compliant to past tradition. For instance, Gentile is clearly recalled by Drago (2000b) and Bertagna (2003).

The longer historical perspective offers, important insights and a less negative account of the “Italian way” of reforming the system. From the greater picture of Italian innovations in educational policy and planning we gain a confirmation of our findings based on recent policy documentation in the specific field of ITT: the longstanding desire to emulate the English model, seen as rather distant but the most worthy of imitation, paralleled by a more pragmatic orientation to the French tradition. As maintained by Guasti (2003), “[t]he Italian school, engaged in a reforming process, looking for or reinterpreting the Anglo-Saxon model, but at the same time it is called to deal with its own history and with the European culture, particularly with the French one” (p. 26).

The current Italian ITT discourse assumes a clear inferiority perspective as compared with other national settings. It is clearly devoted to pick up from the international market the “most advanced” model in its latest global version, e.g., the English model, or what is inappropriately labelled the “Anglo-Saxon” model. This internationality oriented stage follows the more balanced phase of the 1980s, as documented by historians of education.

Despite the explorative nature of this study, which does not allow for definitive generalisations, it seems reasonable to claim that contemporary reform discourses contain mostly references to the world, sometimes in a rather pessimistic vein, as far as internal developments and traditions are concerned. There is a clear dis- cursive pattern of discontinuity between the past and the future. At a rhetorical level, there is a huge aspiration to produce real changes, real autonomy and professionalism, while the concrete reformist steps follow a rather tentative, developmental and recursive – if not conflictive – model of transformation. The temptation to perceive domestic experiences and traditions in broadly negative terms – with the notable exception of the experimental phase of the 1980s, linked with the promotion of models which, culturally speaking continues to be perceived as rather distant, may be considered as another source of discontent and disillusionment.

This analysis supports the thesis that knowledge transfer is resolutely driven by a global dimension which is based on what is perceived to be the very latest trends in ITT. The ongoing re-styling introduced by means of frequent legislative actions correcting previous political decisions, may only have one sense for the sociologist Ribolzi (2006): preserving the old bureaucratic configuration for political reasons with the secret desire to leave things unchanged.

In Anderson-Levitt’s (2003) words, the pendulum of Italian educational discourses resolutely “swings forth”, but it must be remembered that this is not a promise of real, quick or informed

changes. In this sense, it seems reasonable to wonder what influence, if any, such an unbalanced internationality orientation will have on real practices.

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## NOTES

1 These phrases are rather academic conventions and contested notions (Parker, 2007, p. 13).

2 Nuova Secondaria (New Secondary School) is directed by Giuseppe Bertagna, the national adviser to Moratti's educational reform in Berlusconi's right-wing government and *Insegnare* (Teaching) published various articles by Giugno Luzzatti, national adviser to two left-wing governments. *Insegnare* is published by CIDI – Centre for Democratic Initiative of Teachers.

3 V. Campione, P. Ferratini, L. Ribolzi; the president of a very active teacher association ADI,

A. Cenerini; also Norberto Bottani and Giugno Luzzatto.

4 Political myths are seen as substitutes for a more formal political culture, that is, as rituals that "guide processes in which policies are made and public opinion is formed" (Bennett, 1980 in Mincu, 2009).

5 In the case of the post-communist Europe, Kozma (1992) adopts the concepts of neo-conservatism which includes a nationalist component.

6 After ten years of functioning, in July 2008 SSIS structures have been closed down. The reason was said to be the impossibility to recruit these trainees, as imposed by the 2007 financial law, and thus at risk of remaining contract teachers. In addition, the last minister, Mariastella Gelmini announced a reform of secondary teacher training pathway in line with school autonomy. The prospected changes imply a shorter and more experiential pathway to the teaching profession: three-year course (general) plus two additional years of specialist and pedagogical culture leading to the teaching profession plus 1 year of practice (induction). A law regulating the profile and task of the university structure in charge with secondary teacher training as yet has not been enacted.

7 However, this low performance of Italian students in international tests is not the whole story. Scholars also report that educational performances portray a highly differentiated schooling, with huge disparities between regions and between types of school. In the North-Western areas, the performances are close to those of Finland's and Coreea's teenagers are at the top of the list, while in other areas students' performances are close to Mexico and Brazil's bottom 4th and 6th positions. Moreover, while high schools and technical colleges are doing quite well (15th – 16th positions), the more vocational routes lead to performances close to the lowest positions in the list.

8 Centralistic and uniform administration (Is this the way to deal with complexity?), Schools without a governing body (Everybody is involved, but who is responsible?), Number of teachers and channeling of the budget (Does quantity make quality?), Inadequate professional teacher training (Are teachers born or made?), Selection by “ranks” – graduatorie (Temporary employees for life?), Professionalism without accountability (Are all teachers equal?), From law to negotiation and back again (An incompatibility?)

9 State, regions, schools: subsidiarity and distinctive roles, Future student and teachers for a responsible autonomy, Human and financial resources for a European distribution, Training for the profession and more educational research, School-based teacher appointment, Evaluating and rewarding different levels of professionalism, A law on the juridical state and a national deal for

teachers.

10 References to OECD studies and other European institutions abound in *Insegnare*, more than is the case with *Nuova Secondaria*, and also the Ministry Official Journal *Annali dell'istruzione*.

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