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a cura di Globalizing & Sara Mayol





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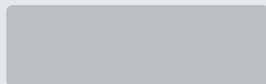
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Manuale per la **preparazione** al concorso  
e per l'**esercizio** della **professione**

- Skills, methods and approaches of modern teaching and learning

a cura di **Globalizing & Sara Mayol**

Il nuovo Concorso a Cattedra – Competenze professionali in Inglese  
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# Preface

*“Better a well-made rather than a well-filled head”*

Michel de Montaigne

How do you measure the effectiveness of a lesson? But before that, what is meant by effectiveness when it comes to teaching? This apparently trivial question is the starting point for this volume.

Traditionally, the idea of school is associated with the idea of learning, initially just notions. The first, obvious answer to our question then is this: teaching effectiveness is measured in terms of the results achieved by the students. The interest shifts to the expected results. We take a step forward and we realise that in order to measure effectiveness, we must first ask ourselves what are the results that we expect to achieve through teaching. It soon becomes clear that the transmission of teaching based on the mere acquisition of knowledge is now wholly inadequate. The real mission of the modern school is to train young people for life, make them able to deal with situations, endow them with the necessary tools to face the future.

Considering a complete study cycle, from the primary school to university, students who graduate today began studying about twenty years ago, in an environment totally different from today. How could school prepare him to face an unknown reality? In a society of the digital revolution, characterised by continuous and fast changing environment, the school must understand the necessity to train students in the use of technologies and for new professions in order to solve the problems yet to be known. Faced with these new requirements, the school and the teachers are required first to have the ability to help young people develop the skills and expertise necessary to address the challenges of society in which they live as protagonists.

Such knowledge, accumulated for some time internationally, has resulted in the investment of substantial resources in finding new and more effective training and learning methods, with the aim of achiev-

ing a profound revision of knowledge and of the models of education and training leading to the development of a complex thought process, the only one able to deal with issues that require multidisciplinary approaches. This is what the French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin explains in the book entitled, precisely and simply, *The head well made* (whose subtitle, *Education reform and thought reform*, is emblematic and more relevant than ever in this respect). The “well-filled head” is one in which “*knowledge is accumulated and does not have a principle of selection and organization to make sense*”, while in the “well-made” head there is “*a general attitude to ask and deal with the problems, organizing principles that allow to connect the pieces of knowledge and give them sense*”. Therefore, the “well-made” head is capable of overcoming the separation between cultures and meet the challenges of the complexity of life in every aspect.

It had become obvious for some time that pupils are not containers to be filled with many notions disconnected between themselves: the *National Indications* of 2007 took a road that, in our country, represents the first attempt to establish a training program based on a final competence profile, featured, i.e., by the goals to be achieved. The school is understood, therefore, as the context in which the foundations for a training course are laid, able to provide the necessary tools for a lifelong learning.

The *National Guidelines* 2012 continue in this direction and consolidate the choice of an education aimed at the acquisition of skills and abilities. With this objective, the continuity and unitary feature of the curriculum are reinforced between nursery school, primary school and lower secondary school, in relation to the unity of the person and the process of learning, recognising that skills and competences are not like notions, whose acquisition can be expressed in terms of defined times, but “qualities” that mature, become finer, and are perfected if properly stimulated over time. The vision of the education commissioned by the new *National Guidelines*, under which teachers must henceforth model their activity, is centred on the skills, or rather on the skill-oriented goals. Compared to this and taking into account the results offered by the research on learning models, the pedagogical and educational action is conceived in a new way, respectful of the knowledge related to the learning environment, understood as a context of activities and situations that respects and promotes the centrality of the pupil, which processes the right learn-



ing for multiple pathways, characterised by features of inflexible and precious uniqueness. In this context, interactive forms and collaborative learning emerge, as well as laboratory methods and situations contributing to enhance the expression of their potential on the part of the pupil and to connote learning as a constructive activity. Thus, the opposite of a transmissive setting - expressly stigmatised by the *Guidelines* - to which we can no longer recognize any plausibility, although it can be challenging, for further awareness and the project work that it requires.

Based on these premises, the volume is subdivided in two parts. The **first part** presents and compares the main learning models and their use in teaching projects: learning the knowledge is, in fact, the basis on which the teacher builds and plans the classroom activities, representing an essential prerequisite for anyone who aspires to lead an effective lesson. This is an interesting and thorough *excursus*, from Piaget to Baron, from Sternberg to Gardner and his theory of “multiple intelligences”, to the useful contributions of the social-cultural constructivism, to the latest contributions offered by neuroscience. Learning, as mentioned, is no longer considered a mere transmission of notions from the teacher to the learner, but it is essentially “social”, taking place in a context-class in permanent contact and mediation with others. A type of learning that wants and needs to be cooperative and collaborative, as we shall see. Then there is the section dedicated to programming and evaluation (who evaluates? what is evaluated? how do you evaluate?), in which the functions of evaluation are assessed and the most effective means to put it into practice are examined.

The **second part** deals with the topic – important now, more than ever – of multidisciplinary, crucial to understand reality in its entirety, abandoning the now dated separation between disciplines: the different ways of “teaching lessons” will be evaluated – from the frontal lesson to the participative one – and the different methods, in particular those that use new technologies. The lecture, with a long tradition, offers certain advantages when it comes, for example, to communicate a large amount of information to a large number of participants. However, when the aim is to establish an exchange, comparison, discussion, learning from each other, the lecture should be rethought, along with its limits. If the teacher can no longer be

considered as a mere transmitter of information but, instead, a “researcher” reflecting continuously on his own way of teaching, and learning to improve his profession, then he becomes the “director” of the learning process. Only in this way, the teaching-learning paradigm, from being individual, will be transformed into collaborative, where even the student will play an active and participatory role. Knowledge is a shared job: a more engaging learning is longer lasting. On this premise, we will examine the conditions of the collaborative and cooperative learning, its theories of reference, the formation of study groups and we will see how to establish that “positive interdependence”, which constitutes an essential element of cooperative learning, whereby each Member of the Group perceives to be indispensable for the group itself, having a common goal to achieve with consequent positive results both in terms of motivation and commitment and in the quality of interpersonal relations.

A final **Appendix** to the text gives a short summary of the Italian institutional and educational system

Questo lavoro, ricco, complesso, denso di rinvii normativi e spunti operativi per l'attività dei futuri insegnanti, tratta materie in continua evoluzione.

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# Chapter Two

## Planning

### 2.1 The regulatory framework

Since the 1960s, when Mr. Milani said that there was no greater injustice than to “*give equal parts between the unequal*”, the problem of diversifying training programmes to achieve real equality of opportunity has become increasingly central to a gradually wider group of leaders and teachers and even today is one of the fundamental objectives of the autonomous school.

In the 1970s, spurred on by a growing part of the population who demanded a school capable to guarantee equivalent possibilities of success, the Delegated Decrees were approved, the Law 517/77, the Middle School Programmes; the shift was made from programme schools to planning schools.

Slowly, the idea emerged in schools that, if you wanted to actually achieve promotion and development of the potential of each student, it was essential to follow a path of building multiple routes adapted to different subjects. These routes involved forms of co-operation and integration between the teachers of the different subject areas and between the school and the extra-curricular education systems operating in the territory, in order to build a network of appropriate proposals and motivation for the plurality of students.

The failure to adopt a comprehensive reform restructuring all of the several orders of studies and the training system of those having access to education, consented the survival for many years in Italian schools, particularly in upper secondary schools, of practices anchored to a formalistic culture based on the transmission of content; the evaluation focused on the learner, not on the analysis of the educational process.

In the 1970s, however, starting with compulsory education, the debate on the “curriculum” was underway.



The word *curriculum*, derived from the verb *curro*, which means run (on the land), *navigate* (on the sea), *fly* (in the air), contains in itself the meaning to move from one place to another in space and time and it implies the idea of a location oriented through the variety of the possibilities.

The term curriculum in pedagogy has had several meanings: in Italy it initially coincided with the curriculum, i.e. a plan for teaching, in which teachers identified objectives and content. Later it became richer and more diversified until it outlined the whole *learning* paths. In those years the scientific and international experience had many curricular models, classified according to different types, all aiming to overcome the rigidity of the programmes in order to outline self-correcting itineraries.

Since the late 1970s every teachers' college had to prepare its own educational plan to contextualise the indications of the programmes to the needs identified in the territory and for individual students, to adapt the organisation of their resources and to create a common background for the pro-educational planning of individual teachers.

## 2.2 Planning of the activities in the model of A. and H. Nicholls

Specialised publications in Italy, though, focused their attention mainly on the teaching programming, an activity closer to the operational needs of the teachers, while educational training remained more of a ritual than reality. During these years the linear curricular model of industrial-technological type prevailed, whose phases were summarised by A. and H. Nicholls in a graphical representation that suggested the idea of a cyclical and recursive planning <sup>1</sup>.

Such model, assuming the objectives as a factor of adjustment of the successive phases of the curriculum, implied:

- Overcoming of the traditional concept of the curriculum, coinciding with the programmes, which identifies the content of different disciplines with the educational purposes;

<sup>1</sup> A. Nicholls, *Guida pratica all'elaborazione di un curricolo*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1978.

- > The choice, made by teachers, after a preliminary analysis of the initial situation, of the routes deemed most appropriate for fulfilling the general instructions of the planning;
- > The identification by teachers of the objectives and their graduation;
- > The selection of content and the organisation of the environment and learning experiences (times, spaces, how to group the pupils, etc.);
- > The evaluation as an integral part of the education action, with a regulatory function of the whole learning process, differentiated into initial, formative and summative evaluation and different from the verification.

The objectives were diversified into general and specific and the definition of the objectives was presented in various ways by different theorists. In this model taxonomic tables were used to achieve the different teaching units, in which the various specific objectives were articulated.

Next to this linear model, in the early 1980s in Italy, especially thanks to the research by Damiano, a new model spread concerning the pro-curricular planning by concept maps, based on the psychological theories of J. Bruner, D. Ausubel and structuralism. The teaching centred on concepts was developed in the United States in the 1950s to reform curricula, especially for scientific subjects. According to Bruner, basing the curricula on the structure of the disciplines, could give the following advantages:

- > Being able to anticipate the learning of the fundamental concepts: for any piece of knowledge there is an appropriate version according to age;
- > Provide the tools to continue to learn, using the subjects as “*special methods of thought applicable to specific categories of phenomena*”;
- > Facilitate general transference in learning.

The research on the structure of the disciplines was further developed by J.J. Schwab.

Damiano<sup>2</sup> while organising the methodology of planning, identified three phases. The teachers, through an initial thorough conversation with the group of students, identify the knowledge already held by

<sup>2</sup> E. Damiano, *La religione cattolica a scuola*, La Scuola, Brescia, 1989.

them on a given topic. From this point teachers start to identify the concepts to be built, those to be rearranged and the relationships between the concepts to be stabilised or changed.

## 2.3 The educational and didactic planning of the institution

In the phase of educational and teaching programming of the institution, teachers, taking into account the needs of the pupils, the expectations of the families and the demands of the social contexts in the territory, prepare the curriculum starting from the essential objectives to be achieved through conceptual networks of educational units, in which the concepts and relationships, chosen as learning tasks, are articulated and promoted. Teaching by concepts, after having identified through the initial conversation the starting knowledge of the pupils — which L.S. Vygotskij calls the “zone of proximal development” — involves jeopardising the common sense beliefs through information able to create cognitive conflict, in order to arrive to a systematic definition of the concepts that are intended to be built or redefined.

The functional use of “teaching mediators”, i.e. of the different methods and languages (mimics, iconic, analogue, symbolic), allows the passage from one physical-perceptive organisation to the logical-symbolic one.

In the conceptual map curriculum, the evaluation accompanies the whole teaching action, from beginning to end, having different functions: diagnostic, regulatory, control of the acquired conceptual mastery. In the late 1980s, the spread of the paradigm of complexity, the large amount of knowledge achieved in every field of research, the need for autonomy and decentralisation, and with reference to the constructionist concepts of learning from Vygotskij to G. Bateson revived the new dissatisfaction with the linear logic, the “rational-optimistic” logic of planning by objectives, which continued to be the most popular model of curricular planning in schools.

## 2.4 “Curriculum” planning

In addition to the concept maps *curriculum*, other project patterns appeared, from the one relating to the integrating background, to the

one related to situation, modular teaching; despite the theoretical differences, these curriculum models emphasise, to be achieved, the need of a common transversal work between teachers of different areas and schools.

This strong need for common work among teachers, underscored by the latest theoretical studies on the processes of learning, is transferred on the ever increasing importance given to the educational planning of the institute from the nineties.

The Law 148/90 on elementary schools, the CM 271/91, the recommendations included in the Guidelines for kindergartens and in the Brocca project for experimental high school, the CM 339/92 on the continuity of education, all re-launched the importance of the educational *curriculum* that every school, collectively, had to develop, after having analyzed the specific needs of the area in which it operates, as an integrating background against which all teachers had to coherently define their activities.

In addition to the *explicit curriculum*, i.e. the methodological-disciplinary choices that schools had to implement in order to contextualise the content of the national programmes, at the beginning of the nineties the following *curricula* became visible and a reason for reflection and conscious planning:

- The *implicit curriculum*, in respect of the growth of the student as a person and the development of his aptitudes, his learning styles and his expressive, learning, decision-making skills which are connected with the climate and the organisation of the educational environment;
- The *cross curriculum*, i.e. the acquisition by the pupil of all those skills that “pass through” the various subjects and the entire education process, from primary school to higher education, such as listening skills, understanding of a text, study skills which, not being exclusive to one area or one type of study, must provide for common planning moments. Such skills are an indispensable resource to continue to learn, understand, study even after one leaves school.

During the programming/rating activities teachers have begun to distinguish between achievements, skills and *masteries* acquired by students, the latter intended as the capacity to know how to rework and reuse the knowledge and experiences in different contexts. This route involves the shift from “knowing” to “know-how” then going



on to reach “self-awareness” and it entails an educational experience that involves not only the intellectual but also the socio-emotional growth of the students.

In the mid-90s, PEI, the Service Charter, and later the POF (*Piano dell’Offerta Formativa* - Plan of Educational Offer) are the answers that the Italian school undertake with regard to the complexity of knowledge, the increasingly higher transparency and quality responses expressed by citizens, the demand of many teachers to become more actively involved as participants in the educational pathways they intend to implement. The PEI, and later the POF, are the means by which the didactic autonomy of the individual schools, on the way to become decision makers themselves and not just executive bodies of decisions taken by central authorities, and find a concrete dimension in the formulation and publication of the academic offer. The teachers’ college assumes a more collective identity and can retrieve a higher capacity of research and experimentation opening itself to the territory, either to understand their needs or to advertise the contents of the school’s educational proposal.

The concept of *curriculum* is expanded; for teachers the shift from empirical teaching to a more rigorous and scientific one implies a responsibility to choose from one of the following theoretical reference models:

- a) The teaching theory;
- b) The learning theory;
- c) The projection technologies;
- d) The internal epistemology of the rules.

The curriculum must select and define (but not require) the reference content, it must indicate the minimum and maximum times for their realisation, define the organisation criteria of the content and the formative experience strategies, define the goals, identify the methods and criteria for the appreciation of the educational and cultural development.

The curriculum acquires a strategic meaning in relation to the education of new generations. The elaboration and fulfilment of the curriculum must favour a mixed pattern of implementation, not only the *bottom up* or the *top down* type; the college is delegated to the preparation of the choices on the content, methods, processing and various forms of evaluation and documentation. The curriculum of a school



is set to become a co-operative plan of formative interventions, the school itself should aim at becoming a “community of laboratories” co-ordinated with one another.

The latest studies on intelligence, memory and metacognition, as well as the latest documents of the OSCE, agree on the fact that individuals, in order to live, must speak many languages; they must be able to live with others in an intercultural dimension. To develop the ability to learn throughout life, the school must help students to grow their desire to know, learn, choose, and develop their attitude to research and to carrying out activities by processing information. To achieve this, it appears essential to create stimulating contexts, open up to the territory and reach a “triangulation” between content, methods of teaching and learning theories.

Through the proactive capacity that a school manages to express, in fact, it may “activate” the surroundings, select its interlocutors, and respond to their needs and expectations becoming a real cultural entity operating in the territory.

In these years the first school networks appeared, linked together to achieve, by combining funds and resources, joint curriculum projects that propose activities other than the traditional teaching, that are able to respond to the needs of the specific local realities and to motivate young people finding thus new forms of continuity, guidance and prevention of dispersion.

Article 21 of Law 59/97 opened the way for the school autonomy; the Regulation of autonomy has deepened and has ratified the most significant experiences occurred in recent years, even with reference to curricular indications.

The Teaching Offer Plan, elaborated by the teachers’ college, on the basis of the general guidelines defined by the Didactic Circle or Institute Board, after hearing the proposals of the various bodies (Article 3 of the Regulation), replaces the PEI and the Service Charter, thus becomes the key document of each educational institution and defines its cultural and planned identity. It also contains the curricular project of the school. Autonomy puts an end to an education system based on rigid planning, decided by central authorities, although the compulsory curriculum, established at national level and covering almost 80% of the activities to be carried out, preserves the unitary nature of the education system. Each school must indicate the compulsory share of integrating activities freely chosen to achieve a specific educational



proposal. This system will allow the unitary character of education to be guaranteed, strictly monitored by the national service for the quality of education, whilst enhancing cultural diversity and meeting the needs of the territory.

The curriculum that emerges from the Regulation can be enriched by disciplines and optional activities, programmed on the basis of an agreement with Regions, local authorities and school networks.

Organisational and educational flexibility may refer to:

- The articulation of the school calendar and the annual total hours of each discipline;
- The change of the traditional hour as a teaching unit and the use, within the curriculum, of residual hour spaces;
- The articulation of various disciplines and individual paths of recovery/strengthening;
- The disciplines/activities chosen by individual schools as an integration to the compulsory share of the curriculum;
- The use of teachers in a functional way to the project, provided:
  - The compliance with the total annual hours allocated to individual curricular disciplines,
  - Lesson articulation in no less than five days weekly,
  - Freedom of teaching
- Optional activities/disciplines to be activated in the extra-school planning.

New ways to group students can be found, going beyond traditional class unity and encouraging co-operative activities for homogenous/heterogeneous groups, through action-research models.

Each school can independently choose and adopt, for students evaluation, a system of “credits” to certify the skills acquired in extracurricular activities, that can allow the integration of young people into the society and the world of work, facilitating the orientation and training, or to discover paths for the recovery of “educational debts”. The ability to create networks between schools, to make arrangements with public and private entities, that are different types of networks, will promote research, updating, teaching, exchange of information and materials, and the acquisition, in a consortium, of goods and services. Individual schools or schools in the Consortium will be allowed to sign agreements or contracts with state or private universities, private organisations or associations, will be

able to contribute to the achievement of the specific objectives to expand the training offer; this will support the methodology/didactics research, encourage the development of new technologies, of methods of evaluation and self-evaluation, of the documentation; this will help each school institution to achieve a more “specific” cultural and social identity.

The main guidelines that should guide the teachers’ colleges in autonomously drawing up their curricular proposals can be summarised as below:

Flexibility	Sharing responsibilities	Integration
Understood as the ability to modulate within a unified design: curriculum, staffing level, adaptation of school time, modular didactics, customised courses.	Choices refer to the Plan of the Teaching Offer, the methodological - didactical research, the internal self-evaluation system.	Ability to place itself within a versatile educational system; have interactive relationships with the territory, being able to form networks between schools, and relationships with the public and private entities to enrich the training offer.

Each school will also work well during the extra-school schedule, linking itself to the territorial centres, such as the cultural agency for *lifelong learning*, for training and requalification of adults, in collaboration with the labour market. This will allow educational institutions to increase the “service” character on the territory and to take part in the fulfilment of equal opportunities for every individual, through proposals for education, training, new technologies, contact with the labour market and social activities.

## 2.5 The Metacognitive curriculum

We have already underlined that the teaching and learning of metacognitive strategies, desirable in a modern and effective school, must be placed inside the methods of teaching, the school planning and the supervision of processes.

Curricular planning must take into account the need to foster the attitude to the metacognitive thinking in the construction, organisation and evaluation of activities. Specifically, the following objectives should be taken into account by a curriculum oriented towards the formation of a metacognitive attitude (Costa 2008).

## A) Learning to think

Human beings have a natural ability to think. To make the most benefit from this innate inclination however, someone must teach us “how to think”. Just like an athlete with a natural predisposition still needs to train to improve his skills, students need practice, concentration, reflection and a steady guide to learn how to think competently. If thinking is innate in humans, competent thinking must be cultivated over time. Cognitive processes and content (inter/transdisciplinary) are inseparable. To achieve deep understanding a continuous use of the abilities to compare, analyse, apply, transfer and assess are needed: every classroom’s activity should be designed to achieve “competent thinking”.

## B) Think to learn

Knowledge is a process facilitated by the exchange of experience. Classroom activities should therefore seize the opportunity arising from the interaction within the class group proposing activities that allow the continuous exchange/production of ideas. The content to be learned is not the goal of the educational process, but the “vehicle” to implement a learning process raising questions and problems capable to develop imagination and stimulates reasoning in a non-judgmental atmosphere.

## C) Thinking together

The individual influences the thinking of the group, and he is, in turn, influenced. The search of means to encourage group thinking helps students build their own knowledge and the shared knowledge. *The teamwork allows more connections between different points of view in order to solve problems, overcoming the limitations of individual perspectives* (Vygotskij, 1978). The development of the ability to work in a group requires skills to reflect seriously on problems and allow to set aside

that part of egocentricity that often restricts the ability to solve problems and to achieve deeper learning.

## **D) Thinking on your own thoughts**

The curriculum should also develop a high awareness of one's own thinking. In fact, despite having the potential to generate these conscious thoughts, most of the time we are not aware of how we are thinking. Learning to think starts by recognising "how" we are thinking, through listening to ourselves and the communication that we have with ourselves. The metacognition involves everything in us: emotions, physical sensations, ideas, beliefs, values, quality of character, and the inferences that we generate from the interactions with others.

## **E) Thinking big**

Through the curriculum it is possible to build collaborative learning communities where people can seek ways to continuously support each other, learn together and grow towards bigger intellects.

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