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# **A Useless Subject? Teaching Civic Education in Italy from the School Programs of 1958 to the Present Day**

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**Abstract** • Civic education has always been an ancillary subject in the Italian school system. Introduced at the end of the 1950s as a sort of appendage to the history programs, it has recently been subject to multiple reforms, though little or nothing has changed in reality. The analysis of a sample of civic education textbooks in use in schools explains some reasons for this breakdown. Even though they apply the new legislation, these textbooks retain the most blatant defect of civic education in the Western world, which is the lack of a clear and convincing model of the citizen.

**Keywords** • citizenship, civic education, the history of subjects, postmodernity, textbooks

## **Civic Education in Italian Schools during the Economic Boom**

Although the formation of citizens has always been one of the fundamental concerns of the educational system (or at least, of education as we understand it from Humanism) civic education has not always enjoyed the attention it deserves from politicians, teachers and educationalists. This, at least, is the case in Italy, where civic education, which should have had a greater role in shaping the model of the democratic and republican Italian citizen, has only recently become compulsory, , and has, in addition, remained a vague and poorly defined subject. . This is, without doubt the main reason it still occupies a subordinate position within the Italian educational curriculum, for teachers, students and their families alike.<sup>1</sup>

And yet, the historical premises underlying the argument for making civic education the core of the political and educational project of the Republic of Italy are significant and relevant. First, in the nineteenth century, the Savoia monarchy dedicated significant attention to creating a model for the Italian citizen. Following the political unification of the State in 1861, it implemented the slogan

– which, commonly attributed to Massimo d’Azeglio, well expressed the concern of the governing classes of Italy emerging from the *Risorgimento*, who claimed that “We have made Italy, now we must make Italians.”<sup>2</sup> To attain this goal, the nineteenth-century political liberal class undertook a circuitous course which, though perhaps never completed, was pursued with tenacity.<sup>3</sup>

Second, in 1945, Italy surfaced from more than twenty years of fascist dictatorship, which had promoted a very precise ideal of the citizen and had tried to put this into practice both within and outside of the school system, using various tools – which, though in some cases innovative, were often questionable. These ranged from the ‘State Textbook’ (*Libro di Stato*), and military parades and service, to actions regarding family policy and gymnastics at school, to propaganda pervading all instances of public life.

The model of citizen propagated by the regime was inspired by a set of ideals summarized in the formula “God, Country and Family” and in the call to “believe, obey and fight.” Moreover, the entire fascist ideology (the call to fidelity and blind submission to political and religious authority, the desire to maintain a hierarchical social order based on a rigid distinction between classes and a respect for tradition, and the celebration of the love of the fatherland even at the cost of sacrificing one’s life) aimed to affirm a strong nation both within and outside of the country’s borders.

Not surprisingly, the textbooks for all school levels contained the slogan “Book and musket, perfect fascist” (*Libro e moschetto, fascista perfetto*). This disquieting phrase was complemented by the stronger warning that, “The child who does not obey is like the musket that does not shoot: useless!”

After the Second World War, the transition from monarchy to republic, sealed by the drafting and ratification of the constitution in 1947, was marked by a climate of ideological conflict born of the internal struggles that had taken place during the war. Between 1943, the year of the Allied landing in Italy and the country’s liberation in 1945, a civil war was fought between supporters of the fascist regime and the partisans. After the war, the need to promote education in order to nourish a democratic consciousness conflicted with a reluctance to confront “hot” themes in what was still a torn and divided country.

This is why, for more than a decade after the Second World War, the formation of the citizen received only cursory consideration in Italian schools, despite efforts made by the Constituent Assembly to provide Italy, which had emerged from the war physically and morally devastated, with solid democratic foundations, and contrary to declarations made by the various successive Italian governments during this period. , .

The teaching of civic education was introduced into the Italian secondary school curriculum on 13 June 1958. The regulation, supported by the minister of state education at the time, Aldo Moro<sup>4</sup>, was the outcome of a debate on the question of education, focusing on the notion of democratic citizenship, which had been encouraged both among the general public and the political class by prominent intellectuals. Particularly influential was the contribution made to the debate by the Catholic Union of Secondary Middle School Teachers (*Unione cattolica italiana insegnanti medi-UCIIM*) and the Association of Catholic Primary School Teachers (*Associazione Italiana Maestri Cattolici-AIMC*)<sup>5</sup>, which had identified a lack of democratic consciousness among the young generation of educators in the daily exercise of the profession.

Moro's decision was to gain wide consensus not only in the Catholic world; favourable positions were expressed by a number of Florence-based periodicals with secular leanings, such as *Scuola e città* and *Il ponte*, and even the Italian Communist Party supported the initiative from the pages of the magazine *Riforma della scuola*.<sup>6</sup> The decision to introduce civic education was particularly significant given the restrictive stance on the issue taken by the successive governments in the early 1950s. Roberto Sani attributes this change in left-wing circles to "a more acute perception of the repercussions generated by the social, economic and cultural changes taking place in the country and affecting the mentality and attitudes of the youth."<sup>6</sup>

The reforms of 1958 recognized the twofold nature of civic education, which was seen both as an overarching, interdisciplinary subject (it being the task of each teacher to promote "moral and social self-examination" in students) and as an separate academic subject, given that the analytical and organic presentation of its subject matter required the designation of a specific time frame within school hours. It was therefore proposed that the study of civic education should be incorporated into that of history, by virtue of the close link between the two subjects. As we read in the *Introduction*:

History has the most natural, and, as a result, the most direct dialogue with civic education, with which it shares a common core .... Given that its most human aspect is the striving of masses of people to obtain the living conditions and statutes worthy of a human being, history offers the most direct and effective starting point for civic education.<sup>7</sup>

Although the introduction of civic education into the curriculum was a significant step, the decision to allocate just two hours a month to the new subject indicated that it was still considered to be of marginal importance, secondary to its historical context. Equally unconvincing was the decision to limit the program to a concise overview of constitutional principles and the state apparatus, with no mention the need to promote, via education, a culture of democracy in the country's citizens. It is no coincidence that words like "democracy," "democratic citizenship" and "education promoting democracy" are missing from the introduction quoted above. The original, ambitious project to foster democratic consciousness in the younger generation gave way to a "far more modest scheme for providing information" on the political system and organisation of Italian society, with the clear intent "of avoiding contrasts and controversies amongst the various political groups."<sup>8</sup>

In this context, it is not surprising that the new program was greeted with bitter disappointment in the same circles which just a few months earlier had welcomed the minister's decision to introduce civic education into secondary schools. Criticism was leveled by secular and Catholics alike. The periodical *Riforma della scuola* condemned the by notion approach and the "narrow and certainly superseded vision" underlying the programs. In an article which appeared in February of the same year, the author argued for encouraging the acquisition of extensive knowledge not as an end in itself, but in order to promote in students an "increasingly clearer and deeper knowledge of the historical and social context in which they live and in which they are called to work for the advancement of society."<sup>9</sup>

The Florentine periodical *Scuola e città* also criticized, albeit less sharply, the subject matter prescribed by the regulation. . Indeed, Tina Tomasi, who highlighted, on the one hand, the risk of reducing civic education to a group of formulas to be rote memorized and, on the other, the "spirit of initiative," the "courage" and the "willingness" of teachers, recognized the potential of Moro's document, which she saw as offering a golden opportunity "for renewing and vivifying school studies, bringing them closer to real life" – an opportunity that could not be allowed to slip by. In any case, the task of making civic education a tool capable of promoting civil and democratic growth in students relied on the "spirit of initiative," the "courage" and "willingness" of teachers.<sup>10</sup> These words clearly show Tomasi's confidence in the possibility of counterbalancing the limits on effective education imposed by the ministerial program..

Last but not least, strong concerns were expressed within the Catholic world; specifically, by the Association of Secondary School Teachers which, as mentioned above, had played an important role in the decision to introduce civic education into schools. An article published in the

association's year book in 1959, identified several problematic aspects of the new program. First, the author noted that two hours a month were insufficient to cover all the relevant topics, and criticized the decision to assign the new subject to a single history teacher, without involving teachers of other humanistic disciplines. . Second, he expressed reservations regarding the setting up of the programs, which he believed offered merely "superficial knowledge" and did not satisfy the need for "a live presentation of the issues," and which, in addition, he saw as excessively restrictive in determining the scope of the subject matter and teaching methods - - an indication of the lack of respect for the "personal skills" and "initiative" of the individual teacher.<sup>11</sup>

This widespread criticism forced Moro to defend his actions in parliament. In the session of 14 October 1958, he claimed the merit of having filled an important gap in the Italian school system, while at the same time admitting the limitations of the adopted regulation:

I hold - he declared to the senate - that it is an honour for me to have set the wheels in motion by introducing the teaching of civic education into Italian schools ... Although it may be inadequate, it will certainly be equally fruitful.<sup>12</sup>

This assessment appears optimistic when considered in light of the difficulties encountered by the program when promoting the effective teaching of civic education over the following years. . The discouraging results of the reform can be attributed to two factors: on the one hand, the unclear definition of the subject within the secondary school curriculum , and on the other, the attitude of the teachers entrusted with imparting civic knowledge, the majority of whom largely ignored the relevant topics and were therefore less inclined to become involved in initiatives and projects regarding them.

### **Civic Education and Education for Everyone**

It was only after 1979 that new civic education programs, defining the subject matter, methods of instruction and the number of hours allocated to the various subjects in the secondary school curriculum, were added to the ministerial decree. The adoption of these programs can be seen, in the political and social context of the time, as the affirmation of a more mature democracy in terms of the participation of all citizens in public life and the well-being of the community. The so called "economic boom" of the 1960s and 1970s brought a significant improvement in living conditions, as well as changes in customs and habits. In the same years were enacted some laws aimed to

overcome any physical, socioeconomic and cultural barrier for giving effect to the right of citizenship, included in the schools.

On 31 December 1962, a special middle school was set up to aid in completing compulsory education.. The new institution, which was established under Article 34 of the Italian constitution of 1947 and set fourteen as the minimum age for graduation, was destined to replace the different courses existing at the time for the three last years of middle school (from the age of eleven to fourteen).. In keeping with the government's democratic leanings, the school provided equal education for everyone (with the exception of a number of facultative subjects, including Latin) and issued, at the end of the three years, a middle school diploma which granted students access to any of Italy's various study-specific high schools. The school, as stated in Article 1 of the decree, would have an indicative function, helping students in choosing the path of the further studies, contributing to the "formation of individuals and citizens according to the principles ratified by the Constitution."<sup>13</sup> Over the next decade, additional measures were introduced which, in recognizing equal opportunities for all citizens – in education among other areas – established the right to educational integration for "individuals with handicaps" (the term used at the time). Law 517/1977, in fact, called for the elimination of "segregated" classes and the integration of persons with disabilities into the ordinary school system, which was to be facilitated by the presence of specially trained "assistant teachers."<sup>14</sup> These decisions can be seen as attempts to to modify the "top-down," "hierarchical" school structure, with the additional aim of encouraging –teacher, parent and student participation – a notion partly inspired by the 1968 protest movement. The reform, commonly known as the "Delegated Decrees" (a name which refers specifically to the legislative provisions of 31 May 1974), established a number of academic bodies (a teachers' committee, class council and school or institute council), entrusted with the task of endowing the school with "the character of a community interacting with the wider social and civic community."<sup>15</sup> Specifically, the reform increased the involvement of teachers in the "planning of educational action," and provided for the involvement of parent and student representatives in didactic and organizational issues.

This changed horizon was the backdrop for the above mentioned middle school programs of 1979. If the increase in time allocated to civic education in the new program appeared limited and difficult to quantify – as the total number of hours indicated in the curriculum (four in the first two years of middle school and five in the third year) also included history and geography classes – it is also true that the determination to teach civics on a weekly basis increased, at least in theory, the monthly teaching hours from two to at least four).<sup>16</sup> The class council was expected to engage in

coordinated actions and participate in planning, by inspiring in the constitutional principles, while, at the same time, identifying possible issues which could be the subject of interdisciplinary study. The aim was to promote “civically and socially responsible conduct” in students by strengthening their awareness of the complex relationship between the freedom of the individual and the needs of the community, understood as its various “levels of aggregation.”<sup>17</sup> The program also included the first reference to a European and global dimension –a broader concept of education that encouraged an open mental approach which could surpass a unilateral vision of problems and further an intuitive understanding of the existence of shared human values within a variety of civilisations, cultures, and political structures.

Another new element was the proposal to implement experience-based teaching, as opposed to the old model that had involved a mere transmission of subject matter. This shift was reflected in various points of the new program, including the reference to the need for contact with civil society, the accent placed on acquiring methods for the critical evaluation of facts and of emerging situations in school life, and the importance accorded to the “tangible exercise of democratic life” in the classroom via various forms of responsible participation aimed at increasing the students’ engagement in school life. Specifically, the program recommended the introduction of activities involving cooperation, highlighting the benefits of teamwork, which was seen to offer a valuable opportunity and stimulus for developing democratic modes of behavior.. It was hoped that, by instilling a culture of discussion and debate based on dialogue, tolerance and mutual respect, “distorted and exasperated forms of competitiveness” would be avoided.<sup>18</sup> Teachers were encouraged to take into account the contribution of each student, while also allocating time for individual reflection and study.

The program also sought to impart knowledge of the civil and political organisation of society, which was considered on various levels: local, national and international. The material, reduced in quantity was no longer taught in an abstract manner, but rather presented as the outcome of a historical process and as a “premise for further development”.. The text of the Italian constitution served as the main source for the study of this subject ; in the first two years, emphasis was placed on the human and social values laid down in the constitution, which characterized the community experience of the student (family, peer group and school community), while the third year focused on the indepth study of the constitution itself (its composition, underlying principles and methods of implementation), via a comparison with the constitutional texts of other European states.



The reforms of 1985, which extended the teaching of civic education to primary schools, formed a natural continuation, with regard to method and subject matter, of those of 1979, and developed several of their distinctive features. The introduction to the text of the program underscores, alongside the importance of forming individuals and citizens within the framework of the principles ratified by the Italian constitution, the various international declarations of human rights and children's rights – documents which, it states, should inspire an open approach to study, in order to further “understanding and cooperation with other peoples.”<sup>19</sup>

One of the aims of this new school order was to promote the concept of democratic co-existence, understood as the recognition of the principle of equality and the equal dignity of all citizens, and as representing a model of conscious and responsible behaviour – in the words of the decree, a “clear and consistent conduct implementing recognized values.”<sup>20</sup> It is no coincidence that the text clarifying this goal, which was distributed to all teachers, spoke of promoting a mind-set of “active solidarity” as opposed to “passive indifference” in students. The tendency to take Europe as the definitive point of reference was confirmed on a dual (cultural and social) level, as reflected in the decision to focus on the integration process within the European Community.

These goals went hand in hand with the subject matter itself, and the two often overlapped. A history and geography teacher would, for example, also teach part of the program dedicated to “social studies and knowledge of social life.” Teachers were encouraged to implement, via topics and activities “suited to the abilities of students,” the general aims referred to above in a more specific and detailed manner. These included the acquisition of “meditated knowledge” of the rules of social life, which would in turn allow for “democratic decision-making processes,” and the adoption of approaches promoting openness towards verification, in sharp contrast to the “ideological transmission” model. An additional point contained in these teaching guidelines is worthy of attention; namely, the instruction to introduce students to a model of organizing social life via the study of contexts relevant to their everyday lives, such as family, school, community, town, and country. It was assumed that these contexts, being close to the student and thus more easily accessible, would serve as important stimuli for the student's progressive transition from the realm of experienced culture to culture understood via intellectual reconstruction.<sup>21</sup>

At the beginning of the 1990s, a series of highly publicized judiciary inquiries revealed the high level of corruption in Italian politics and the unhealthy relationship that existed between the government and the business world. These inquiries, which marked the end of the so-called "First Republic," emphasized the clear need to promote a moral renewal of the political class and the fostering of a civic consciousness based on the values of the constitution. In so doing, they reignited the debate about the teaching of civics, which had come to be seen as ineffective due to the generality of the material, which had caused the subject to be neglected by teachers and pupils alike.

The first attempt in this direction was represented by Ministerial Directive 58 of 1996. In the part entitled "New Educational Dimensions, Civic Education and Constitutional Culture" (*Nuove dimensioni formative, educazione civica e cultura costituzionale*), the novel recommendation was made to focus the various aspects of civic education (emotional, civil and environmental) on the study of the constitution. Yet despite the recommendation to draw the subject matter from the constitution itself, this attempt to render the subject matter more specific was still too generic. It is no accident that the "continuous curriculum for civic education and constitutional culture" announced in the ministerial directive never came into force.<sup>22</sup>

A few years later, in 2000, Law 30, on the restructuring of primary education, which, though ratified by Minister Luigi Berlinguer, was likewise not fully implemented, introduced the novel concept of "education for civil coexistence" as an alternative to civic education. Law 30 declared that education for civil coexistence was one of the overarching subjects of compulsory education. The change of name and the transition from "civic education" to "civil coexistence" is, in our opinion, more than a mere semantic detail and reflects a determined attempt on the part of the Ministry for Education to present the subject in a more tangible manner. Civil coexistence was seen as a more material concept and, as such, more easily transmittable than civic education. This may be true for a part of the concept – the part perhaps most conducive to the transmission of ethical foundations and shared rules of conduct (the prerequisites of coexistence), to society. But civic education cannot be condensed into civil coexistence, not unless its more profound and abstract content, including democracy and the unwritten meanings of that term – the notions, so essential to the life of a state, of homeland, social justice, and collective identity – is ignored.

In fact, after Law 30, "civic education" as an academic subject gradually disappeared from the Italian school curriculum, never to reappear, while the formation of citizens, up to that time unrecognized by the Ministry for Education, became the primary subject of attention. Each successive head of the ministry in the Piazza Minerva in Rome, made an effort to regulate the

subject, attempting to update the concept of civic education, by then considered superseded, and render it teachable.

Law 53 of 2003, which has gone down in history as the “Moratti Law,” after the minister for education of the second and third Berlusconi governments, Letizia Moratti, picked up exactly where Berlinguer had left off. As clarified in the “National Guidance Regarding the First [Educational] Level” (*Indicazioni nazionali relative al primo ciclo*), Decree Law 59 of 19 February 2004, civic education was replaced by “education for civil co-existence,” which in turn was subdivided into six subcategories to be taught independently, parallel to the other school subjects. These subcategories included “citizenship,” “environment,” “road safety,” “health,” “nutrition,” and “affectivity.”

In an attempt to make civic education more hands-on, the Moratti Law ended up combining a hotchpotch of subject matter seemingly devoid of a common denominator, which ranged from topics like “preparing a balanced meal” to “preadolescence in art,” from “problems linked to smoking” to “techniques for controlling emotions, relaxation and critical observation of the mind-body relationship.” Above all, the program dropped all references to higher values of global import, such as peace and non-violence (which had been purposefully included in the Constitution in the aftermath of the demise of fascism), replacing them, in the guidelines known as the *National Guidance*, with certain cardinal principles of the neo-liberal economy such as attention to health as one of the duties of the citizen.. The official introduction of sex education, presented as an innovation for the Italian school system, also went awry, leading to interpretations strongly ideological in nature and, paradoxically, contrary to the notions of freedom of conscience and thought contained in the constitution; not by chance does the law refer to “education of personal relationships,” rather than “sex education.” To add fuel to the fire, the Ministry for Education produced a series of documents in which the question is treated in a religious context rather than from an emotive or hygienic standpoint, thereby alienating a significant portion of the public.

Although Minister Moratti’s successor at the Ministry for Education, Giuseppe Fioroni, made the revision of Law 53, one of his program objectives, in practice, he succeeded only in delaying the process, without really modifying the framework of the law (a task which would fall to Minister Gelmini, Fioroni’s successor). It should thus come as no surprise that, on the issue the formation of citizens as well, Minister Fioroni generally followed in the footsteps of his predecessor, despite belonging to a political party inspired by opposing beliefs.

Having definitively abandoned the term and concept of “civic education,” the government now began to promote, in its “National Curriculum Guidelines for the Preschool and the First

Educational Level” (*Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo per la scuola dell’infanzia e del primo ciclo d’istruzione*), of July 2007, the “education of citizenship ... via significant experiences which permit the tangible learning of how to care for oneself, others and the environment, and which provide forms of cooperation and solidarity.” These “shared values” and “cooperative and collaborative approaches” were expected to contribute to “the condition for practising civil coexistence” and the launching of what the document defined, significantly, as a “new humanism.”<sup>23</sup>

The main difference between the new guidelines and the Moratti law was the elimination from the curriculum of the six subcategories of education for civil co-existence; the guidelines referred, instead, to unspecified “fundamental principles” of civil coexistence, seen as overlapping with all other school subjects.

The most profound and substantial legislative reform on the teaching of civic education was implemented by Minister Mariastella Gelmini, who headed the ministry in Piazza Minerva during the last Berlusconi government (from May 2008 to November 2011). In Law 133 of 2008, the subject was renamed “Citizenship and Constitution,” definitively replacing both “Civic Education” and “Education for Civil Coexistence.”

The guidelines for the new subject, endorsed by Gelmini, stated that the objective of the law was to teach two of the competencies prescribed in the “Recommendations of the European Parliament Regarding Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning: Social and Civic Competencies.”<sup>24</sup> In order to achieve this, it was necessary to abandon, once and for all, the traditional method for teaching civic education, which “although referencing shared standards and principles and institutions at the highest level...was by nature susceptible to deteriorating into sterile debates, disagreements and disputes or, on the contrary, abstract discussions of little interest to young people.”<sup>26</sup> The goal of the new program was to provide, by contrast, a tangible and easily understandable base for a subject vital to the life of the State – a goal far from easy to achieve, given that the subject had long been commonly considered nonessential to the study curriculum. In order to change the situation, the reform, for the first time in the history of the Italian school system, made “citizenship and constitution” an independent subject distinct from history, and assigned it a weekly, hour-long lesson (which, Gelsomini warned, was still “certainly not sufficient for producing tangible results”).

In an attempt to be more operational and effective, Law 133 recommended that teachers use part of the lesson time to hold class council meetings during which “understandings are reached for

arriving at an academic evaluation of the conduct of children, adolescents and young people,” thereby enhancing the traditional concept of conduct. In practice, however, combining the grade for the study of citizenship and constitution with the grade for conduct, as suggested by the Gelmini law, was not only difficult to implement but also risked becoming an impediment to an understanding of the subject matter and the principles it was meant to convey. Although these principles were inspired by a respect for rules and society, they could only be partly replicated in the school context, which often functioned by nature as a microcosm with a strict hierarchical structure that heavily influenced interpersonal relationships between students and teachers, and between teachers and the school authorities. In addition, the respect for the constitution can not be attested by the vote in civics or in conduct; if the minister's recommendations were implemented, teachers would in effect have been assigned the absurd task of having to judge youngsters not only as students, but as citizens, without knowing anything about the extracurricular life of students.

The reference to the constitution contained in the name of the new subject according to the Gelmini law reflects the minister's wish to base civic education on what, in public opinion, was commonly considered the foundation of democratic and republican life. Yet the law currently in force proves that the study of the constitution, however valid it may be, is in itself not enough to form good citizens. Such a model of study contained two very evident limits: the first, general in nature, was that instilling respect for the laws of the country in an individual does not directly imply that the individual will also respect the rights and responsibilities of his or her fellow citizens. In certain contexts, encouraging respect for the country can lead, on the contrary, to a strengthening of nationalistic, provincial barriers that segregate “compatriots” from “foreigners,” “Europeans” from “non-Europeans,” and “us” from “them.” The constitution could thus become, paradoxically, a platform for relaunching new forms of national identity, intolerance and the rejection of diversity, rather than nurturing the idea of a “new humanism” envisaged by the recent legislation. The second limit, particular to the situation in Italy, is that the new model of civic education prescribed by the Gelmini law amounts to a reinstatement of an eminently moral and abstract teaching style that is destined to weaken the subject, rendering it even more useless and unpopular especially given the Italian political context, in which it is often those who should be an example in applying the constitution that criticise or ignore it. After all, even the authors of the constitution would have balked at linking the study of the constitution to the grade for conduct.

### **Which Model of Citizen for which Model of Society? A Survey of School Textbooks**

Textbooks represent an interesting indicator of the “state of health” of civic education, and reveal much about the degree to which civic education laws and programs are successfully implemented. In order to examine in more detail the contents and teaching methods employed in Italy’s current civic education program, we analyzed ten of the most popular<sup>1</sup> “citizenship and constitution” textbooks<sup>27</sup> currently in use in public schools. The main purpose of this analysis was to highlight their bibliographical and didactic characteristics and their degree of compliance with ministry guidelines. In order to develop a system of indicators that made it possible to analyze and compare the textbooks, we used the classification system created by the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) for its research project, “International Civic and Citizenship Education Study Assessment Framework” (ICCS), which was published in 2009.<sup>28</sup>

The aim of this project was to collect updated data about member countries, toward improving their policies and methods in fostering citizenship, and investigating the effectiveness of schools in preparing young people to play their role in society. To this end, ICCS developed an evaluation model that emphasizes the importance of the daily experience of young people both inside and outside school (an experience which promotes knowledge and access to democratic participation), alongside the teaching of rights and duties, which it also acknowledges as an essential component of civic education. .

The ICCS method has three basic dimensions: a dimension of content, which focuses on issues relating to civic education and citizenship as reflected in the teaching manuals; an emotional-behavioral dimension that describes the students’ perceptions and activities; and a cognitive dimension that traces the process of the transmission of the concepts under investigation.

For our study we took into consideration only the first of these dimensions, which addressed content. The content of the civic education curriculum is divided into four topics (civic society and civic systems, civic principles, civic participation and civic identity), which in turn are divided into further subtopics. For each of the ten manuals examined, we ascertained the number of ICCS indicators present. . The results were unexpected. Although, admittedly, only one manual contains all eleven indicators of the ICCS model, another one has ten, and five of them nine. Only two books achieved lower results (six and four indicators respectively). This means that the majority of the

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<sup>1</sup> According to the website of Italian Publishers Association (AIE).

manuals analyzed comply with the required parameters at the international level, and thus can be said to provide a good basis for the teaching of civic education. Although in theory, these results encourage optimism, in reality, civic education in Italy remains unsatisfactory from many points of view.

This reality is reflected in the fact that all the manuals simply treat the themes provided by the programs, without offering students and teachers the necessary tools to appropriate the concepts explained, and leaving to the professors the task of making them more concrete and understandable. For example, some textbooks apply a descriptive approach to the material, using a colorful, “journalistic” style but without explaining the deeper meaning of the laws and institutions protecting the fundamental values of democracy, such as tolerance, equity and social justice. Other manuals employ a purely abstract setting, without any concrete examples and, above all, without emphasizing that what is being explained is not merely abstract information, but is present in everyday life. In addition, many teachers admit that they do not actually go over the text of the manual in class, partly because of time constraints, but also because they themselves have not received adequate training in the subject.<sup>29</sup> In a recent survey conducted on 800 young graduates, 61.9 percent claimed that in their “citizenship and the constitution” class, the Italian constitution, was presented very superficially if at all, while only 6.7 percent attested to have studied it in depth.<sup>30</sup> The survey also confirms the low importance accorded to civic education in Italian schools: 66 percent of those interviewed claimed to have studied the subject only once or twice a year at most, while only 10 percent had civic education classes at school at least once a week. The result: 75 percent of those interviewed had never read the Italian Constitution.

In practice, the true weakness of Italian civic education lies not in its programs or textbooks, which may be seen as a work in progress, but in the lack of a model of the individual and citizen to convey to the young generation. Indeed, it is not the method of instruction that is in crisis, but rather the subject matter itself; that is, the ideal of citizenship, which is not as clear-cut and as widely shared as it was a few decades ago. It is our very civilisation, based on the notion of human rights, that is being continually questioned today – an ambivalence that goes hand in hand with the quandary in which education finds itself. The school system is still standing, as is democracy, even if neither of them are in the best of health. Yet it is undeniable that in today’s western world, it is the education system above all that is under attack for failing to build a better world, and to protect the humanistic legacy bequeathed to us by previous generations.

In order to give new life to civic education, a new founding event is required, a new subject that transcends issues of terminology and curriculum, dealing, instead, with the role schools may play in forming the individuals and citizens of the post-modern era. If education and teaching are to play their part, a new cultural and educational project will be required. Most importantly, young people must be put in the position to be able to actively explore the positive values of our civilisation –equality, democracy and rights – in everyday life. Moreover, if democracy is, above all, a lifestyle, or *habitus*, as the ancients would have defined it (or, to quote John Dewey, “a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience”<sup>32</sup>), the only way to learn it is to put it into practice, to experience it firsthand.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>On the teaching of civics in other countries see Michel Jeury and Jean-Daniel Baltassat, eds., *Petite histoire de l'enseignement de la morale à l'école* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000); Tilman Grammes, Henning Schluß and Hans-Joachim Vogler, eds., *Staatsbürgerkunde in der DDR. Ein Dokumentenband* (Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften: Wiesbaden 2006); Meira Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Elizabeth Kaufer Busch and Jonathan White, eds., *Civic Education and the Future of American Citizenship* (Lexington: Lanham, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Simonetta Soldani and Gabriele Turi, *Fare gli italiani: Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea*, vol. I (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Ascenzi and Roberto Sani, *Tra disciplinamento sociale ed educazione alla cittadinanza: L'insegnamento dei Diritti e Doveri nelle scuole dell'Italia unita (1861-1900)* (Macerata: EUM, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Aldo Moro (1916-1978) was a jurist, university professor and major exponent of the Christian Democracy party. He headed the Ministry of State Education from 19 May 1957 to 19 June 1958 and from 1 July 1958 to 26 January 1959. On the decisions made in those years, see Giorgio Canestri, “Aldo Moro ministro della Pubblica Istruzione” in *Aldo Moro: cattolicesimo e democrazia nell'Italia repubblicana* (Alessandria: Alessandria Institute for History of the Resistance, 1983), 115-128.

<sup>5</sup> On the history of the two associations, see the text by Roberto Sani, *Le associazioni degli insegnanti cattolici nel secondo dopoguerra 1944-1958* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1990).



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<sup>6</sup> Roberto Sani, “La scuola e l’educazione alla democrazia negli anni del secondo dopoguerra” in Michele Corsi and Roberto Sani, eds, *L’educazione alla democrazia tra passato e presente*, (Milano: Vita & Pensiero, 2004), 60.

<sup>7</sup> Presidential Decree no. 585, 13 June 1958(*Programmi per l’insegnamento dell’educazione civica negli istituti e scuole d’istruzione secondaria e artistica*) in *Gazzetta Ufficiale* 143 (17 June 1958), 2530.

<sup>8</sup> Sani, “La scuola e l’educazione alla democrazia negli anni del secondo dopoguerra”, 61.

<sup>9</sup> Francesco Zappa, “Articolo 34 della Costituzione”, *Riforma della Scuola*, no. 2 (1958): 1.

<sup>10</sup> Tina Tomasi, “L’educazione civica”, *Scuola e città*, no. 12 (1958): 405-406. Tina Tomasi was one of the most representative secular pedagogue in Italy after World War II

<sup>11</sup> Arturo Granella, “Spirito e contenuto dell’educazione civica”, *Cattedra 1959. Prontuario del professore italiano* (Roma: Edizioni Uciim, 1959), 278-282.

<sup>12</sup> Atti Parlamentari, Senato della Repubblica, III Legislatura, *Assemblea*, 1749-1750.

<sup>13</sup> Law 1859 of 31 december 1962 – “*Istituzione e ordinamento della scuola media statale*,” in *Gazzetta Ufficiale* 27 (30 january 1963), 490.

<sup>14</sup> Specifically, **Article 2** of Law 517 of 4 August 1977 – *Norme sulla valutazione degli alunni e sull’abolizione degli esami di riparazione*, in *Gazzetta Ufficiale* 224 (18 August 1977), 6031. Law 104 of 5 February 1992 represented a further significant stage in this transition over the following decades.

<sup>15</sup> President of the Republic Decree 416 of 31 May 1974 – *Istituzione e riordinamento di organi collegiali della scuola materna, elementare, secondaria e artistica*, in *Supplemento Gazzetta Ufficiale* 239 (13 September 1974), 3. The same issue of the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* also contained the texts of two additional decrees; the first concerning “Regulations for the legal status of the academic, directional and inspectional faculty in state nursery, elementary, secondary and artistic schools” (*Norme sullo stato giuridico del personale docente, direttivo ed ispettivo della scuola materna, elementare, secondaria e artistica dello Stato*) (no. 417); the second regarding the issue of “Educational experimentation and research, cultural and professional upgrading and the establishment of relative institutions” (*Sperimentazione e ricerca educativa, aggiornamento culturale e professionale ed istituzione dei relativi istituti*) (no. 419).

<sup>16</sup> For an overview of the weekly teaching hours, see table 1 of the Ministerial Decree of 9 February 1979 – *Programmi, orari di insegnamento e prove d’esame per la scuola media statale*, in

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*Supplemento Gazzetta Ufficiale* 50 (20 February 1979). References to civic education can be found in two Articles of the fourth group of programs: in Article 2 (“The structuring of unified education”) and Article 5 (“Socialization”), which offers a detailed, year by year presentation of the programs’ scope and subject matter..

<sup>17</sup> *Programmi, orari di insegnamento e prove d’esame per la scuola media statale*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Presidential Decree no. 104, 12 February 1985: *I programmi della scuola elementare* in *Supplemento Gazzetta Ufficiale* 76 (29 March 1985), 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Luciano Corradini, Walter Fornasa and Sergio Poli, eds. *Educazione alla convivenza civile: Educare Istruire Formare nella scuola italiana* (Roma: Armando, 2003), 77-78.

<sup>23</sup> MIUR (Ministry for Education, Universities and Research), *Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo per la scuola dell’infanzia e del primo ciclo d’istruzione*, [http://www.indicazioninazionali.it/documenti\\_Indicazioni\\_nazionali/indicazioni\\_nazionali\\_infanzia\\_primo\\_ciclo.pdf](http://www.indicazioninazionali.it/documenti_Indicazioni_nazionali/indicazioni_nazionali_infanzia_primo_ciclo.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> MIUR, *Documento d’indirizzo per la sperimentazione dell’insegnamento di Cittadinanza e Costituzione*, [http://www.icferno.it/l'apprendistacittadino/documento\\_indirizzo.pdf](http://www.icferno.it/l'apprendistacittadino/documento_indirizzo.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> The manuals examined are: Antonella Albonetti, Anna Maria Dal Lauro, *Vivere la Cittadinanza. Lezioni di cittadinanza e costituzione, Corso di Costituzione e Cittadinanza* (Milan: Mondadori Education – Le Monnier scuola, 2010); Andrea Bencini, Vittorio Giudici, *Cittadinanza e Costituzione. Storie di Cittadini*, allegato a *Il nuovo con gli occhi della storia* (Milano: Mursia scuola, 2011); Gianfranco Bresich, Cinzia Fiorio, *Cittadinanza e costituzione*, Allegato a *Scoprire la storia*, vol. 1 (Novara, De Agostini scuola, 2010); A. Di Gregorio, P. Leodi, S. Reale, *Cittadinanza e Costituzione*, allegato a *L’avventura della storia. Corso di storia per la scuola secondaria di primo grado* (Firenze: Il Capitello, 2011); Oscar Farinetti (a cura di), *Lezioni di cittadinanza. Per diventare più umani* (Torino: EGA-Edizioni Gruppo Abele, 2012); Raffaele Mantegazza, *Cittadini e cittadine del cosmo* (Firenze, Giunti scuola, 2010); Giuseppina Signorini, Silvio Paolucci, *Cittadinanza attiva*, allegato a *L’ora di storia* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 2009); Anna Tancredi, Roberta Chitarrini, *Cittadinanza e Costituzione*, allegato a *L’archivio del tempo*, vol. 1

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(Turin: Lattes, 2010); Chiara Ventura, ed., *Quaderno del cittadino*, allegato a Gianni Gentile, Luigi Ronga, *Speciale Storia*, vol. 1 (Torino: La scuola, 2009); Sergio Zavoli, *Cittadinanza e Costituzione*, allegato a *I passi della storia*, vol. 1 (Milano: Bompiani per la scuola, 2009); Sergio Zaninelli, Claudio Cristiani, Giovanna Bonelli, *Cittadinanza e costituzione* (Bergamo: Atlas, 2010). For a more detailed description of the textbooks see Anna Licia Monni, “Una materia difficile. L’educazione alla cittadinanza nella scuola italiana”, (dissertation, University of Turin, 2011-2012).

<sup>28</sup> ICCS-IEA 09, *La terza indagine IEA sull'Educazione Civica e alla Cittadinanza. Rapporto nazionale* (Napoli: Tecnodid Editrice, 2010)

[http://www.invalsi.it/download/rapporti/iccs2009/Rapporto\\_ICCS\\_2009.pdf](http://www.invalsi.it/download/rapporti/iccs2009/Rapporto_ICCS_2009.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> *L’educazione alla cittadinanza nella scuola superiore italiana. Sintesi di una indagine sui giovani diplomati (19-23 anni), allegato al Quaderno n° 11 “Educare a vivere con gli altri nel XXI secolo: cosa può fare la scuola?”* ([http://www.treelille.org/files/III/Quaderno%20Q11\\_interno.pdf](http://www.treelille.org/files/III/Quaderno%20Q11_interno.pdf)).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 101.