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ABSTRACTS



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The Debate on the Normal School's Reform in Italy in the First Two Decades of the Twentieth Century

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The paper aims to analyse the debate on the reform of the Scuola Normale (Normal School), which until 1923 was the only educational training for teachers: this debate will be reconstructed through the analysis of papers published in the magazine *La Cultura Popolare*, which was dedicated to educational issues.

In the first two decades of the 20th century, the Italian pedagogical debate on the teacher's training was lively and there were numerous proposals for reform of the Normal School. The period between the beginning of the 20th century and 1923 is in fact a crucial moment in the history of the Italian school.

On the one hand, significant criticism against teacher's training began to spread: the Normal School was considered inadequate training, which prepared the future teachers in an incomplete and very limited way. On the other hand, teachers gave rise to professional associations at the national level: in 1901 the National Magistral Union was born, with the coordination of Luigi Credaro, who will become Minister of Education: the association aimed to play a role of dialogue on many issues and also on the theme of the basic training of teachers. In that period, moreover, very innovative educational experimentations were carried out in Italy, also thanks to the stimuli coming from abroad: for example, the Salvoni's School, the Pizzigoni's Renovated School, and Montessori Children's Houses. All these significant experiments highlighted the need to radically change teacher's training by redesigning their professional profiles.

A very heated debate on the Normal School's Reform developed: pedagogists, politicians, and thinkers among the best-known participated very actively in this debate, proposing articulate and various positions. This climate led to the activation of the Pedagogical Schools in 1904, courses organized at the Faculties of Letters and Philosophy, with cultural and professional value.

Because of this debate, Luigi Credaro, who had become Minister in 1910, presented a radical Reform proposal, which strengthened the cultural preparation of future teachers, and included the study of pedagogical, psychological, biological, and didactic disciplines, and the increase of the hours of training practice in schools.

The proposal was not approved and was taken up by Credaro's successor, Agostino Berenini, with some small changes; the Italian neo-idealists, however, were very opposed to this proposal and also to the stimuli that came from Europe.

There were many aspects discussed: was there a need for a technical and vocational school or for a school offering a cultural and humanistic education? What subjects were indispensable for teacher's training? Were psychological and didactic pedagogical disciplines necessary? Was there a need for an internship period? Should teacher's training include a 3-year or 4-year course?

These questions found very different answers and animated a very significant debate, until 1923, when the Gentile's Reform abolished the Normal School and replaced it with the Istituto Magistrale.

The reconstruction of this debate also offers very important reflections on current teacher training.



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