



## Physical and Sport Education in Italy

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### Abstract

*Physical Education in Italy, as a school subject, was introduced in 1859, formerly named "Gymnastics", then "Physical Education" and now "Motor and Sport Sciences".*

*In the primary school no physical education teacher is required so PE is taught by the general teacher. In some schools a PE teacher works with the generalist teacher. Recently the Ministry of Education introduced a PE graduate specialist role in the primary school in order to improve action and give to physical education equal dignity compared to the other disciplines.*

*The national curriculum specifies the essential level that must be granted by all school, the number of compulsory hours and the quota reserved to the autonomy of each school. On the secondary level PE is taught by Physical Education specialist teachers.*

*Extracurricular sports activities are supported through the special funding from the Ministry of Education. The sports activities combine in the definition of the student's curriculum and acquired competences as well as in the final mark attributed to the state exams. In the 1970s, the cooperation between the Ministry of Education and C.O.N.I. allowed the beginning of introducing into sports practice elementary and first-level secondary school children.*

*To qualify as a Physical Education teacher a university master degree is needed, plus one year of teaching training (3+2+1). This is provided by faculties of physical education.*

*Keywords: Italy, teacher, physical education, board.*

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### Public Health and Lifestyle

Italy is an European Parliamentary Republic of about 60 million people, it is a over 1000 km boot shaped peninsula that in the second half of the 20th century improved from an economical point of view: mainly in the northern area of the country.

In particular, Italy is a member of the group of the most industrialized nations (G8 and G20 organizations) with a Gross National Product which comes for a 33% from industry, for a 63% from services and for a 4% from the agricultural sector. Italy is still experiencing a significant development and richness gap between the northern industrial regions, where the unemployment rate is around 10% and the southern agricultural ones where in some areas it is even over the 20%.

Despite a well developed and almost cost-free social welfare, which has reduced the rate of child mortality, the country has a limited birth rate. Nowadays, only the 20% of the population is aged below 20 years, and a 23% is aged more than 60.

Today [6], 75% of all deaths involve age classes of 70+ and just 1.8% classes of less than 30. As elsewhere, the main causes of death are represented by cardiovascular diseases (42.8%) and cancer (28.5%). In particular during last decade, 36.2% reported suffering from at least one chronic disease, 12.5% from hypertension, 8.4% from allergic diseases, 6.6% from osteoporosis and 3.8% from diabetes [6]. Like in other UE countries, the prevalence of obesity is increasing rapidly and it is now estimated around 14% in adults. Over half of the adult population appears to be overweight. Obese and overweight subjects are those with the highest prevalence of

other chronic disorders, such as arthrosis and related disorders, hypertension and diabetes. The consumption of alcohol appears to be increasing. Rates are much higher in males than females. The number of smokers is also still relevant. An estimated 11 million people practise sport on a regular basis, corresponding to 19% of the population. In contrast, 41% report they never practise any sports. Sedentary habits are increasing [6].

## Educational Framework

State schools are free, but State-authorized private schools also exist, where tuition fees are required. Education is compulsory for children aged 6 to 16, involving five years of primary school, three years of lower secondary school, higher secondary education of five or more years being provided traditionally by classical or scientific high schools, to which technical and vocational schools were gradually added [4]. The university, according to Bologna Process (1999), is generally based on two levels: a 3 years bachelor's degree and a 2 years master's degree with the options of further special courses. A reform has been introduced recently (2002–2003) to achieve the EU standards. The organisation of study programmes (12 years education divided into two cycles) and timetables is the responsibility of the individual school institution in the context of the national regulations and guidelines.

Physical and sport education is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and is a compulsory study subject in the various level, even for the disabled people, with appropriate adaptations. PE was introduced in 1859, formerly named "Gymnastics", then "Physical Education" and now "Motor and Sport Sciences".

## Physical education at different levels of school

### Physical Education in Primary School

Even though national programmes refer to the need to foster movement and sport competences in the child, no physical education teacher is required in the primary school, which sees 2,6 million students with an average of 20 children per class. The Physical Education (PE)

programmes are defined and implemented by the local school institutions in collaboration with a number of stakeholders, such as local administrations, C.O.N.I. (Italian National Olympic Committee), national sport federations and local clubs, both in the context of school activities and out-of-school programmes. This causes a wide diversity of variously co-financed initiatives that frequently lack of systematic approach and continuity, mainly because year over year budgets are not always maintained. Only recently, with the 2003 school reform, the Ministry of Education introduced a PE graduate specialist role in the primary school in order to improve action and give to sport sciences equal dignity compared to the other disciplines.

Guidelines: 'The body as a value'. So, it is not a dress but a whole way of being and acting in the world and the society.

Targets: construction of his own identity in relation to his self-knowledge and to the others and the orientation of his own life project.

Contents: parts of the body, senses and perceptions, motor and postural schemes (learned through games), nutrition guidance, personal care, environmental problems and unhealthy habits (pollution, smoking, sedentariness).

Evaluation: an evaluation document including a portfolio of individual skills and assembling all the documentation collected during the entire school period.

Teacher: PE is taught by the general teacher. In some schools a PE specialist teacher works with the generalist teacher.

### Physical Education in the Lower Secondary School

Physical Education has a minimum of 54 and up to 66 hours per year, which generally means 2 hours per week. The course is compulsory and individualised educational plans are defined for the disabled, whereby they can also be partly or totally exempted from practice. Teachers must have a degree in PE or a degree in Motor and Sport Sciences. In order to become a permanent state teacher a qualifying examination is required and a 2-yr Master degree (in the 3+2 university system) is now needed. Although PE teachers and school

structures/ administrations are the basic actors of the Student's sport activity in the Secondary school, their effort is lacking of the necessary effectiveness because of the limited lesson time per week. They are only able to help and encourage those students that are already self-practising sports in external Sports Clubs (in the sports federations or non-profit sports associations), with only limited success in their mission to improve the 'sports mentality' among the students. The regular sports practice is common among the 55% of the surveyed sample aged 11–14 [7], but many children drop-out of sports practice around adolescence (age 14–18), mainly because of uneasiness and troublesome situations.

Guidelines: the national curriculum specifies the essential level that must be granted by all school, the number of compulsory hours (2 hours per week) and the quota reserved to the autonomy of each school (up to a maximum of the 20% of the whole curriculum).

Targets: becoming aware of his own physical efficiency through self evaluation and basic rules for accident prevention.

Contents: improvement of coordination and motor skills, self evaluation of skills and performance, highway code for cycles and motorcycles, training methods, body expression and communication.

Evaluation: a mark of 6 out of 10 or more allows to pass to the next class; a lower score entails a 'debt' that will need to be fulfilled at the beginning of the new year; at the state exams (taking place at the end of the cycle) the evaluation can also involve PE with a written or oral test.

Teacher: physical education is taught by PE specialist teachers.

### **Physical Education in the Higher Secondary School**

The compulsory teaching hours are subdivided in the same way. The teaching of sport and motor sciences is compulsory over the five years of the second-level secondary school and involves 2 hours per week. Additional hours of sports practice can be made available through the same school teachers, included in the

school's Educational Offering Plan and are chosen by the parents.

Guidelines: the same of the middle school.

Targets: learning the basic principle and techniques for sport performance, well-being and physical improvement.

Contents: structure and rules of individual and team sports, basic principles of training theory and methodology, principles of nutrition in physical activity, doping health problems versus an appropriately physical training.

Evaluation: the portfolio of the acquired skills combines to form the final credit score that will contribute to the result of the final evaluation at the state exam (maturità).

Teacher: Physical Education is taught by PE specialist teachers.

### **Extracurricular Sports Activities**

Already in the primary school, the children can join physical education and introductory sports activities that are free and elective. They are supported through the funding for the widening of educational offerings.

In the secondary school, sports activities are well structured and are supported through the special funding from the Ministry of Education and the Regional School Offices for the widening of educational offerings, allowing students to train and prepare for competitions in the various sports selected. This is done through the teachers of physical education assigned to the school or involving teachers of other schools. Forms of sport integration are organised for disabled students.

The sport activities combine in the definition of the student's curriculum and acquired competences as well as in the final mark attributed to the state exam.

The sports most widely practised are: Cross Country Races and Track Races, Swimming, Gymnastics, Alpine Skiing, Orienteering and among the team sports: Volleyball, Soccer, Basketball.

In the 1970s, the cooperation between the Ministry of Education and C.O.N.I. allowed the beginning of introducing into sports practice elementary and first-level secondary school children, through the realisation of the Youth Games, an important event in which every year

thousands of young people took part, and for whom the programmes of the various sports specialities were especially adapted.

### Physical Education Evaluation

In the primary and lower secondary school, the evaluation of pupils takes place through:

- an evaluation document called “the pupil Personal Record”, recording the periodic assessments and the final assessment made at the end of years 1, 3 and 5;
- a Summary Report reporting whether the pupil has been admitted to the next class;
- the Portfolio of Individual Competencies, which is the document where the educational team, the pupil and the family record the documentation assembled during the entire school path.

For disabled pupils, an *Individual Educational Plan* is designed jointly by the educational team with the family and the responsible medical officer. The evaluation refers to the differentiated path the pupil must have followed with the help of a support teacher.

In the higher secondary school each teacher makes specific periodical and final assessments through a mark in tenths. A mark of 6/10 or over allows access to the next class, otherwise a lower mark entails a “debt”. The periodical assessment made by PE teachers involves the areas of motor learning and the pupil’s physical abilities. The assessment is generally organised as an integrated process combining:

- observational techniques and motor tests, so as to evaluate the motor competencies attained;
- the written and oral tests to evaluate the knowledge of disciplinary contents.

At the State Exams taking place at the end of the cycle, the evaluation can also involve motor and sports sciences. The calculation of school credits includes the sports credits acquired in out-of-school context and contribute to the final evaluation.

### Extracurricular Physical Activities

The initiatives that are taken in the school context, though taking place outside of the school hours, are recognised for their educational value by the school. This typically refers to school sports

activity, conducted by PE teachers with school pupils, even with classes different from their own. They typically refer to the promotion and practice of an educational sport, which involves competition but in which competition is not seen as an aim of its own and which rather offers the opportunity to play and feel well with the others, promoting social cohesion, responsibility and the sharing of common aims.

### Extra-School Physical Activities

The school gymnasium is sometimes offered to sport associations which organise various sport or game activities. In this case, the family pay a share of the costs. When the associations are recognised by C.O.N.I. or a Sport Federation, the instructor is a technician certified by the Federation.

### Out-of-School Physical Activities

Sport Associations, Federations and private subjects can organise sports centres offering introductory courses to the various sports. There are generally no contributions for these activities and the families must bear the costs of participation. One of the most widely practised activities is soccer.

## Training

### Physical Education Teachers

To qualify as a PE teacher a University master degree is needed, plus one year of teaching training (3+2+1). This is provided by Faculties of Physical Education. Physical Education teachers generally also have additional competences acquired with the sports organisations and National Federations.

### Sports instructors

They are trained from the National Sport Federations in a multi-level qualification path, from the initial level of Assistant Instructor, after several intermediate steps, to Federal Technician. Access does not require any school degree.

Volunteering is a valuable asset, particularly for the non-élite sports sector. This involves large associations which promote sports (practised at all ages and in all conditions) all over the country and a variety of minor ones. Almost all are

non-profit sports associations, typically very small and run by volunteers. A sports association can be established without necessarily having a qualified sport technician, although those who work as instructors generally have a qualification issued by National Federations or recognised associations. Sport is here understood largely as

a tool for the prevention of social pathologies, and educators, coaches, technicians and managers combine in offering organised and systematic sports activity to overcome such problems as solitude and fear, youth deviation and dependencies.

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