

# The training of physical education teachers in Italy

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## Abstract

Obiettivo del presente lavoro è presentare l'*excursus* storico della formazione iniziale degli insegnanti di Educazione Fisica in Italia avviando una riflessione critica sui recenti sviluppi che si sono avuti a partire dalla emanazione della Legge 107/20015 e del Disegno di Legge 992/2018, in attesa di approvazione da parte del Senato. La riflessione si avvale dei risultati di recenti studi qualitativi e di una analisi delle Indicazioni Nazionali per il curriculum della scuola primaria e secondaria.

The aim of this work is to present the historical *excursus* of the initial training of Physical Education teachers in Italy and to stimulate a critical reflection on recent developments since the enactment of Law 107/20015 and Bill 992/2018 pending approval by the Senate. The reflection makes use of the results of recent qualitative studies and an analysis of the National Indications for the primary and secondary school curricula.

**Parole Chiave:** Educazione fisica, Formazione iniziale degli insegnanti, Scuola primaria e secondaria.

**Keywords:** Physical Education, Initial training teachers, primary and secondary school

## 1. Italian historical-legislative context related to the training of Physical Education teachers

Until 8th May 1998, the training of Physical Education teachers in Italy was carried out by the Higher Institutes of Physical Education.

Following the introduction of The Legislative Decree n.178 of 1998 the burden of training at university level was transferred to the university body. This move was justified by social and cultural changes and by a greater awareness, within society, of the positive influence of physical activity in the promotion of well-being and the acquisition of correct lifestyles, which was changing the sports labour market itself. In fact, if the ISEF graduate was trained exclusively for the teaching of Physical Education in the school sector, a much broader horizon would have opened up for the graduate in Motor Sciences, linked to the wide field of well-being within which new needs were arising that required specifically and appropriately trained sports professionals.

The Degree Course in Motor and Sport Sciences, started with Legislative Decree 178/1998, had a four-year system. With the subsequent Ministerial Decree n. 509 of 1999, its articulation in training courses developed in two cycles or main levels of study, the so-called "3 plus 2", i.e. the Bachelor's Degree Course and the subsequent Master's Degree Course lasting two years. The same Decree also introduced the concept of the Degree Class with the possibility for Universities to set up study paths that responded to the training needs of the relevant territory establishing independently the



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names and, in part, the programs. The adherence of these courses to a Degree Class guarantees, however, that they respect the same qualifying training objectives, which therefore have a common denominator at national level. All courses set, in fact, qualifying educational objectives, typical of the Class to which they belong, and with specific educational objectives.

The qualifying educational objectives of the Degree Class and related courses, determined by ministerial measures and, therefore, common to all universities, indicate the preparation, knowledge, skills and professional outlets that distinguish all the courses established within that Class. In addition, each course may set specific educational objectives established by the individual university, responding to specific educational needs.

In determining the classes of university degrees, the subsequent Ministerial Decree no. 270 of 2004 provides for a three-year course, divided into 180 university credits (already established in Ministerial Decree no. 509/99), with a common course of study for first-year students and not only methodological but also vocational courses, in the following two years, so as to ensure students mastery of methods and contents that meet the demands of the labor market. For the sports science sector, this corresponds to the three-year degree course of the L-22 Degree Class in Motor and Sports Science, in which the university credits are divided into the following disciplinary areas: motor and sports; medical and biomedical; psychological, pedagogical and sociological; legal, economic and statistical. The same Decree has also introduced the term Master's Degree, instead of Specialist Degree, establishing the number of university credits to be acquired of 120. The aim of the Master's Degree Courses is "to provide students with an advanced level of training for the exercise of highly qualified activities in specific areas" (DM 270/2004 art. 3) and in particular for the motor and sports sciences there are three classes of Master's Degree (DM 155/2007):

Class of Master's Degrees in Organization and Management of Services for Sport and Motor Activities in which the university credits are divided into the following disciplinary areas: motor and sports; legal, economic and statistical; psychological, pedagogical and sociological.

Class of Master's Degrees in Sciences and Techniques of Preventive and Adapted Motor Activities in which the university credits are divided into the following disciplinary areas: motor and sports; biomedical; sociological; psychological and pedagogical.

Class of Master's Degrees in Sports Science and Technology in which the university credits are divided into the following disciplinary areas: motor and sports; biomedical; sociological and legal; psychological and pedagogical.

## **2. Description of the process followed in the implementation of the specific Physical Education qualifications**

### **2.1 University education for the teaching of physical education in the first cycle**

The situation of the teaching of Physical Education in the Kindergarten and Primary School (Maulini, Ramos Echazarreta, 2013; Maulini, Migliorati, Isidori and Miatto, 2016) in Italy until the enactment of Law 107 of 2015, which triggered a, slow, reform process, was rather controversial. On one hand, the Ministerial Decree no. 249 of 2010 and the "National Indications for the Curriculum of the School of Childhood and the First Cycle of Education" (2012) of the MIUR, included it among the mandatory areas, on the other hand, the Decree Law 180 of 2008 made it difficult to implement, predicting the "prevalent teacher" who was did not require specific training for the teaching of physical education, as well as for other disciplines. The requirement in order to participate in the national public competition was, in fact, the Diploma of Magistral Institute or Magistral School, for kindergarten; the Degree in Science of Primary Education, both from the pre-existing system (article 6, Law 169 of 2008) and of the new system (article 6 Ministerial Decree 249

of 2010) or the Diploma of Socio-Psycho-Pedagogical High School obtained within the school year 2001-2002 (Ministerial Decree 10 March 1997), for primary education.

It should be pointed out that, compared to other disciplines, there is a need for specific training for the teaching of Physical Education which, because of its scientific identity and teaching methods, in some cases opposed to other disciplines, has a unique characterization that requires different approaches related to the body and movement and therefore cannot be entrusted to generalist teachers or delegated to external subjects (MIUR -CONI projects such as “Class Sports” or “Motor Literacy”).

In 2015, with the enactment of Law no. 107, the need for the “strengthening of motor disciplines” was finally recognized in order to encourage a “development of behaviors inspired by a healthy lifestyle, with particular reference to nutrition, physical education and sports” (art.1, paragraph 7, letter g), providing for the employment of “teachers qualified to teach for primary school in possession of certified skills, as well as teachers qualified to teach also for other degrees of education as specialists who are provided with specific training” (art.3, paragraph 20). With this Law (Law 107/2015) This finally seems to have recognized the importance of the presence of properly trained physical education teachers in primary school.

Immediately after the publication of Law 107/2015 and more precisely on September 15, 2015 the legislative proposal “Provisions for the promotion of motor education and sports culture was submitted, for the support of the training of student athletes and for the recognition of professions related to motor and sports activities”.

This proposal, starting from the recognition of motor education and sports culture as important factors for human development, effective educational tools for prevention and health and social rehabilitation, as well as social inclusion, solidarity and pluralism, reaffirms the right of everyone to do motor and sports activity and provides for the promotion and dissemination of an organized motor activity and sports culture. To promote this, one of the aims of this proposal is to introduce the profile of the sports educator into the Italian legislative system.

Actions are planned to promote motor activity and sports culture in all sections of the population, but with specific attention to primary and secondary schools, including recreational, motor and sports activities provided by recognized and qualified sports educators and activities aimed at facilitating the learning of sports culture, the history of Italian and international sports, the promotion of nutrition education and healthy lifestyles.

On December 18, 2018 Bill n.992 “Delegation to the Government was approved by the Chamber of Deputies on the curricular teaching of motor education in primary school”, pending approval by the Senate.

This Bill intends to reserve the teaching of motor education in primary school, following the passing of specific qualifying competition procedures, to subjects holding one of the following qualifications: Master's degree obtained in “Science and techniques of preventive and adaptive motor activities” or in “Science and techniques of sport” or qualifications equivalent to the aforementioned master's degrees in accordance with the decree of the Minister of Education, University and Research of 9 July 2009, published in the Official Gazette no. 233 of 7 October 2009.

One-cycle master's degree in “Science of primary education” along with a degree in “Science of motor and sports activities”, or a degree obtained at the former Higher Institutes of Physical Education, or a degree equivalent to the above mentioned degrees pursuant to the decree of the Minister of Education, University and Research of 11 November 2011, published in the Official Gazette no. 44 of 22 February 2012.

The same Bill n.992 foresees a test, for a maximum period of five years, during which in the primary schools involved physical education is provided for at least two hours of teaching per week.

If the experimentation is successfully completed at the end of the five years, a subsequent legislative measure will be necessary to provide for “the gradual extension of the teaching of

physical education to other educational institutions, with the aim of extending this teaching to all primary schools”.

The doubt and reflection that has been raised by several parties is as follows: if it is possible to assume that a Graduate in Primary Education Sciences does not have all the specific technical knowledge compared to a Graduate in Motor Sciences and for this reason it is necessary to obtain a Bachelor's Degree in “Science of Motor and Sport Activities”, it is equally possible to assume that the Graduate in Motor Sciences does not have the necessary teaching and pedagogical knowledge of the Graduate in Primary Education Sciences and that they are certainly fundamental for teaching in pre-school and primary school. Will the 24 university credits, aimed at developing anthropo-psycho-pedagogical, methodological and technological-didactic skills, be sufficient to fill this gap? The answer to this question could certainly come from the experimentation foreseen by the Bill and its monitoring. Certainly, this Bill could represent an important step so that physical education can finally have the deserved recognition in our country and the Italian school system can redeem itself at European level for the quality of teaching in this discipline.

## **2.2 University education for the teaching of physical education in secondary school**

The teaching of Physical Education in 1st and 2nd grade secondary schools is entrusted to qualified teachers through a national public competition, after which there is a “training and test course” lasting one year. It will be the positive outcome of the same that will lead to the introduction of this role.

Among the requirements for access to the public competition is the possession of one of the above-mentioned Master's Degrees and the possession of “24 university or academic credits [...] acquired in curricular, additional or extra-curricular form in anthropo-psycho-pedagogical disciplines and in teaching methodologies and technologies, guaranteeing in any case the achievement of at least six university credits in each of at least three of the following four disciplinary areas: pedagogy, special education and didactics of inclusion; psychology; anthropology; didactic methodologies and technologies”, in accordance with the implementing decree (Legislative Decree n. 59 of 13 April 2017) of Law 107/2015. Therefore, candidates, if they have not achieved them through the university course, in order to participate in the competition, must acquire the above 24 university credits through courses specifically activated by the Universities.

This new Decree confirms and further strengthens and enhances the role of the secondary school teacher, including physical education, with particular attention to prior possession or, where appropriate, to the development of anthropo-psycho-pedagogical, methodological and technological-didactic skills.

## **3. Critical analysis of the aims of PE's teaching for levels of education.**

The National Indications, respecting and enhancing the autonomy of educational institutions, constitute the Italian reference framework for the curricular planning entrusted to schools. These are indications that the professional community is called to assume and contextualize, developing specific choices of content, methods, organization and evaluation consistent with the training objectives indicated in the national document.

The curriculum that each school is called upon to prepare within the Training Offer Plan must have as its reference the profile of the student described in the Indications in which are indicated the competences referred to the teaching subjects and the full exercise of citizenship that he or she must possess at the end of the first cycle of education and which constitute the general objective of the Italian education and training system.

Starting from the school's curriculum, teachers identify the most effective learning experiences, the most significant teaching choices, the most suitable strategies, with attention to the integration between disciplines and their possible aggregation in areas, as indicated by the School autonomy regulation, which entrusts this task to educational institutions.

The pre-school, for all girls and boys from three to six years of age, as indicated in the Document of the National Scientific Committee for "National Indications for the Curriculum of pre-school and first cycle of education" (2018) which set itself the objective of a recalibration of the themes already present in the programmatic text of 2012, aims to promote in children the development of identity, autonomy, competence and the first experiences of citizenship. The centrality of each subject in the process of growth is found in the development of an "implicit curriculum - which manifests itself in the organization of the spaces and times of the educational day" and an explicit curriculum structured on fields of experience to be understood as "cultural and practical contexts that amplify the experience of children" and that "put at the center of learning the work of the child, his body, his actions, his languages".

In the 2012 Indications this development starts from the awareness of one's own body, as an instrument of self-knowledge in the world, through which to play, communicate, express oneself, discover, jump, run and acquire and consolidate autonomy and emotional security. As we read in the text "Preschool aims to develop gradually in the child:

- the ability to read and interpret the messages coming from one's own body and those of others, respecting and caring for it;
- the ability to express themselves and communicate through the body in order to refine their perceptive abilities and knowledge of objects;
- the ability to orientate oneself in space, to move and communicate according to imagination and creativity" (p.26).

Primary school and secondary school are the first cycle of education placed at a crucial phase in the growth of students' learning and identity development, where the foundations lay and the skills needed to continue learning at school and throughout life are gradually acquired. "The aim of the first cycle is the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills to develop basic cultural competences with a view to the full development of the person" (National Indications, 2012, p. 31). Resuming this aim, the 2018 document edited by the National Scientific Committee includes physical education among the cultural tools for the exercise of active citizenship directed to the development of safe abilities and basic skills. Specifically, it is indicated as a *hinge* discipline between the fields scientific (knowledge of one's own body, its functioning, physics of movement, correct lifestyles, etc.), communicative and expressive, relationship and citizenship, as already indicated in the 2012 National Indications according to which the main aims are those of:

- promote awareness of oneself and one's own potential in the constant relationship with the environment, others, objects;
- to contribute to the formation of the student's personality through the knowledge and awareness of one's own body identity, as well as the continuous need for movement as a constant care of one's own person and well-being;
- to consolidate correct and healthy lifestyles, as a prerequisite for a personal culture that values motor and sports experiences, including extracurricular ones, as prevention of hypokinesia, overweight and bad eating habits, involution of motor skills, early abandonment of sports and use of dependence-inducing substances;
- promoting the acquisition of new motor skills and the knowledge of one's own body, the development of relational and communicative skills and emotional intelligence;
- transmit the value of cooperation and teamwork, respect for agreed and shared rules and the ethical values that are the basis of civil coexistence; respect for oneself and the opponent, loyalty, sense of belonging and responsibility, control of aggression, denial of any form of violence;

- to make the student protagonist and aware of his/her own motor skills (MIUR, 2012, pp.76-77).

In the “National Indications” aimed at secondary school physical education (DPR 87, 88 e 89, 15 March 2010) is attributed the aim to enhance the potential of each student and specifically during those 5 years the objectives are to develop and consolidate:

- the perception of oneself and the completion of the functional development of motor and expressive skills through the improvement of coordination and conditional skills by creating complex motor schemes useful to face sport activities.
- the practice of individual and team sports with a focus on the educational component: fair play, respect for rules, taking personal responsibility and a collaborative spirit.
- health, well-being, safety, prevention, the relationship with the natural and technological environment.

At the end of the five years we hope for the “acquisition of correct behavioral styles rooted in motor activities in synergy with education on health, affectivity, environment and legality” and the “development of awareness about the importance of the practice of sport and motor activity for individual and collective well-being”.

Despite the important aims attributed to physical education by the “National Indications” of both schools, the implementation is particularly critical, as shown both by European research (Coccia, 2007; Eurydice del 2013 (Commissione europea/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013; Indire, 2013) and by several Italian qualitative research carried out in the years between 2013 and 2018 (Maulini, Migliorati & Isidori, 2018; Maulini, Migliorati, Isidori, Miatto, 2016; Maulini, Ramos Echazarreta, Miatto, 2013; Ramos Echazarreta, Maulini, 2013; Maulini, Ramos Echazarreta, 2013), which involved primary and secondary school teachers of first and second level who have highlighted important critical issues that could be partly answered by the implementation of Law 107/2015. Among these, in particular, they certainly find answers: in primary school the lack of training/upgrading for primary school teachers, and consequently this will allow a greater recognition of the value attributed to Physical Education compared to other subjects and this could encourage in both school levels the attribution of greater importance to this discipline by students, thus positively affecting the motivation to practice physical education, and more generally physical exercise and sports, thus counteracting the increasing sedentariness and problems of a relational nature (bullying, hypo-socialization, marginalization, etc..) that are registered in our country, also highlighted by the teachers involved in the studies.

This same criticality was also indicated in the “National Plan for the Promotion of Sport Activities 2014-2015” in which reference is made to the XV Legambiente Report on the quality of school building, “Ecosistema scuola” (2014), according to which “only 60% of schools have a gymnasium or sports structure” (p. 29).

This means that the “strengthening of motor disciplines” provided for by Law 107/2015 will have to take place in parallel both through the employment of teachers qualified to teach Physical Education for primary schools (for whom it would perhaps be important to develop a specific curriculum for primary school teachers in university courses), and through the upgrading or compliance and/or the provision of gyms adequate for the teaching of Physical Education in schools of all levels.

Only through this broad and systematic reform process will it be possible to start a real qualification of the discipline of EF that can finally fulfil its essential educational role aimed at the integral development of the child and at fostering the acquisition of a physical and sports habitus from childhood through school (CCE, 2005; Carraro, Bertollo, 2005; Maulini et.al., 2018, 2016, 2013; Ramos Echazarreta, Maulini, 2013), as it happens in most European countries (Coccia, 2007; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013), so that it can be established as a person's lifestyle and therefore as a set of patterns of behaviour or habits in close relation to health.

**European country: Italy**

**Current Law no. 107 of July 13, 2015**

School level	PE mandatory/ planned	Number of hours of EF per week	Qualified physical education teachers: Yes or No
Kindergarten	planned	1	No, but according to the last Law no.107 of July 13, 2015
Primary School	mandatory	2	No, but according to the last Law no. 107 of July 13, 2015
Secondary School	mandatory	2	Yes

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