

Improving Education through accountability
Lessons from around the world
Rome, 3-5 October 2012

Rapporteur Session
Teachers

Gianluca Argentin
Milano-Bicocca University

“Learning from around the world”

I’m going to talk mainly to the Italian audience,

but

I’ll also try to convince our international
guests to use their research skills
analyzing our country

(we have little previous knowledge,
many brand new national datasets and
our educational system presents interesting features).

What is well known (mainly abroad, even driving policy makers)

1/2

- Teachers are *the* crucial resource in every Educational system

They absorb a huge part of Educational expenditure and they are the main school factor influencing student achievement.

- Teacher effectiveness varies a lot.

- “*Attracting, recruiting and retaining effective teachers*” is the main challenge

for educational systems (macro-level) and for schools (micro-level).

- Teaching is an occupation

In Italy, we still tend to consider teaching as an “art” and teachers as individuals almost entirely driven by altruistic values.

- Albeit teaching takes place in an highly regulated labour market, teachers make a lot of choices.

These choices are heavily affected by the regulation governing the market.

- Hence, the way we regulate teaching labor market influences school effectiveness and teaching labor force composition.

Four relevant topics

1. Is teacher effectiveness just a lucky and temporary mix of many simultaneous and contextual factors or is a teacher effective thanks to a permanent individual feature? How can we identify effective teachers?
2. How much does teacher selection matter?
3. Can we distribute the resource of “teacher quality” across schools?
4. Does teacher assessment/accountability lead to improvement in student achievement?

Why do these topics matter for Italy?

1/2

- We have a strongly centralized Educational system (especially in teachers recruitment/career)
- Teachers are not assessed (neither nationally nor locally): we are building only now a National *School* Assessment System
- We have the oldest teaching labour force in the world: the most experienced?
- We have many “out of field” teachers and only few have attended specific training aimed at improving their teaching skills

What about our teacher quality? Could we increase it through teacher assessment?

Why do these topics matter for Italy? 2/2

- We observe high variability in student achievement among regions/provinces/schools (we have a single institutional setting but very different socio-economic contexts)
- Students' marks seem biased (*Fiore & Romeo*)
- There is very high (and worrying) teacher mobility across schools.

It is associated with self-segregation and it generates additional achievement gaps, especially for students located in disadvantaged schools (*Barbieri et al.*)

What can we do about the distribution of effective teachers among schools?

The (unobservable) teacher effectiveness

- We are working on indicators of teacher effectiveness based on multiple measures (*Mihaly et al.*).

Statistics could help (optimal weighting) but we need value assumptions and policy choices (target criterion): researchers *really* need to collaborate with policymakers and stakeholders.

- Schools turnaround succeeds when a relevant change in the staff-productivity takes place, also without turnover (*Hansen*): teacher productivity seems not to be fixed over time.

The management of teacher effectiveness

- Teacher effectiveness is portable across school settings (*Xu et al.*), even to high-need schools.
- A RCT revealed that it is difficult to move high-performing teachers to low-performing schools (*Glazerman et al.*)

They observed very low take up rates (less than 25%) using an incentive of \$ 20.000

but: it can work, having a large enough pool of high-performing teachers.

Mixed effects of teacher assessment

- The introduction of teacher hiring/promotion examinations in Colombia led to positive effects on students' outcomes, but not on all of them (*Ome*)
- The NCLB generated pressure on teachers (increasing/decreasing their working hours depending on subject and reducing the feeling of job security – higher risk of future lower retention?)
and produce short term “not negative” effects on students' attitudes and achievements
(*Reback et al.; Hannaway; Ladd*)

Investment in teachers selection

- The case of “Teach for America” (*Hannaway*).
- In a simulation model, performance pay policies have only tiny effects on teacher quality (*Rothstein*): these policies require substantial increase in total teacher compensation in order to improve student achievement and they strongly depend on interaction with external labor market.
- Highly achieving countries in maths could rely on incoming highly knowledgeable teachers thanks to selection and pre-service training (*Tattoo et al.*).

Reccomandations to INVALSI

- Investing on longitudinal data on students.
But we need also to investigate the related teachers' choices and practices.
- Internationalize research projects, helping foreign scholars to invest in our country:
 - international documentation about the educational system and the INVALSI datasets;
 - supporting cross-national research teams;
 - promoting learning opportunities to build a new generation of Italian scholars in this field.
- Support schools in giving feedbacks to their teachers, based not only on test results.

Reccomandations to our policy makers

- Start to manage the (spontaneous) teacher mobility across schools:
We have a powerful leverage to improve our educational performance:
 - reducing staff segregation among schools;
 - turning-around low-performing schools (staff).
- Manage the expertise of effective teachers:
there is not career pathway for experienced teachers and many young teachers move across schools every year (an opportunity for individualized mentoring?).
- Remember that teachers accountability and assessment do not automatically lead to improvement in student achievement.

Two advices for our policy makers

- Invest in data collection and learn from empirical results

(invest on INVALSI and promote collaboration among datasets' "holders").

- Accept (and try to communicate to the general public) that we do not know many things about "how it works out there".

Many Educational policies should be not implemented directly at scale (and "overselled"), but previously (and cautiously) evaluated through pilot studies.