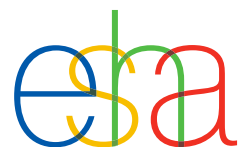




esa magazine

DECEMBER 2020

New Paradigm of School Leadership



European School
Heads Association

COLOPHON

ESHA magazine is the official magazine of the European School Heads Association, the Association for school leaders in Europe. ESHA magazine will be published four times per school year. You are welcome to use articles from the magazine, but we would appreciate it if you contacted the editor first.

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The ESHA e-magazine is free of charge.
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ESHA is an Association that consists of 37 Associations of School Heads and Educational employers in 24 countries in (pre-)primary, secondary and vocational education.

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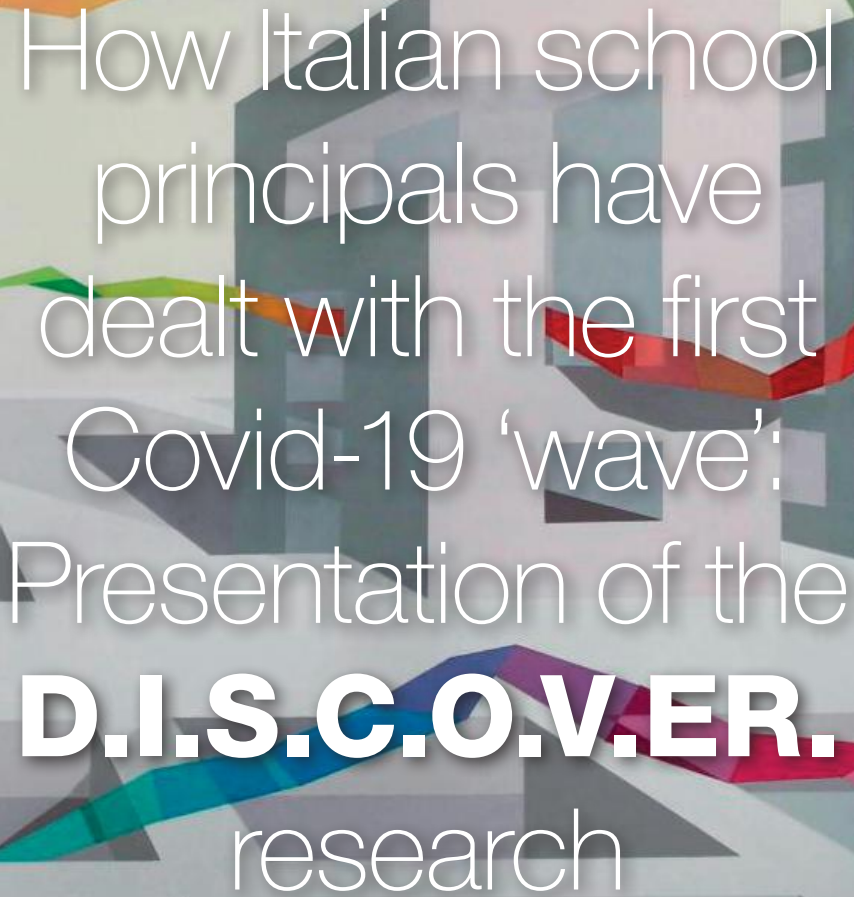
SOCIAL MEDIA



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How Italian school principals have dealt with the first Covid-19 'wave': Presentation of the **D.I.S.C.O.V.E.R.** research



BY FRANCESCA DELLO PREITE AND MARINA IMPERATO

MOTIVATIONS

School closures, the uncertainty of the times, and a strong desire to find possible solutions. All these factors combined have brought up new questions and challenges in Italian school principals forcing them in investigating and analysing a huge number of problems in a very urgent way, with responsibility and efficiency:

- Given those new cultural, economic and social circumstances how can we guarantee the right to education for all our pupils and prevent to widen inequalities that in our country are still plenty?
- How to reorganise and redesign classes whose essence is also made of words, eye contact, physical presence, ideas as well as feelings which tend to play a crucial role in the dynamics of interpersonal relationships?

- What's the most suitable training program for teachers and principals in order to provide them with *empowerment* as well as *agency* processes that they would definitely need to cope with this unprecedented educational context?
- What deal can be made between school and families in order to help them synergically cooperate with each other?

All the questions listed above represent the context in which the project 'Dirigere le scuole al tempo della pandemia' (English translation: '*School leadership in pandemic times*') was originally created. The group of research D.I.S.C.O.V.E.R is the founder and author of this project whose purpose is to explore, investigate and gather together principals' feedbacks and experiences as well as to focus on the following points:

- To understand those educational aspects that have been radically reshaped by heads of school during the first lockdown and the means that have been used in order to do that;
- The approach promoted in order to guarantee the flow and high standard education as well as, the respect and freedom of opinion in education, the right for parents to choose the most suitable educational approach for their own child, and the right to education for all pupils;
- To investigate the different resources that have been chosen during the shift between face to face education and distance learning;
- To acknowledge whether or not and also how we have been able to understand and satisfy the needs of pupils and their own families. Especially those ones who are economically or educationally disadvantaged and/or have learning disabilities;
- To understand if and what lesson in particular this unprecedented situation has 'taught' our principals. The skills that most have supported them in order to stay focus, proactive, and resilient;

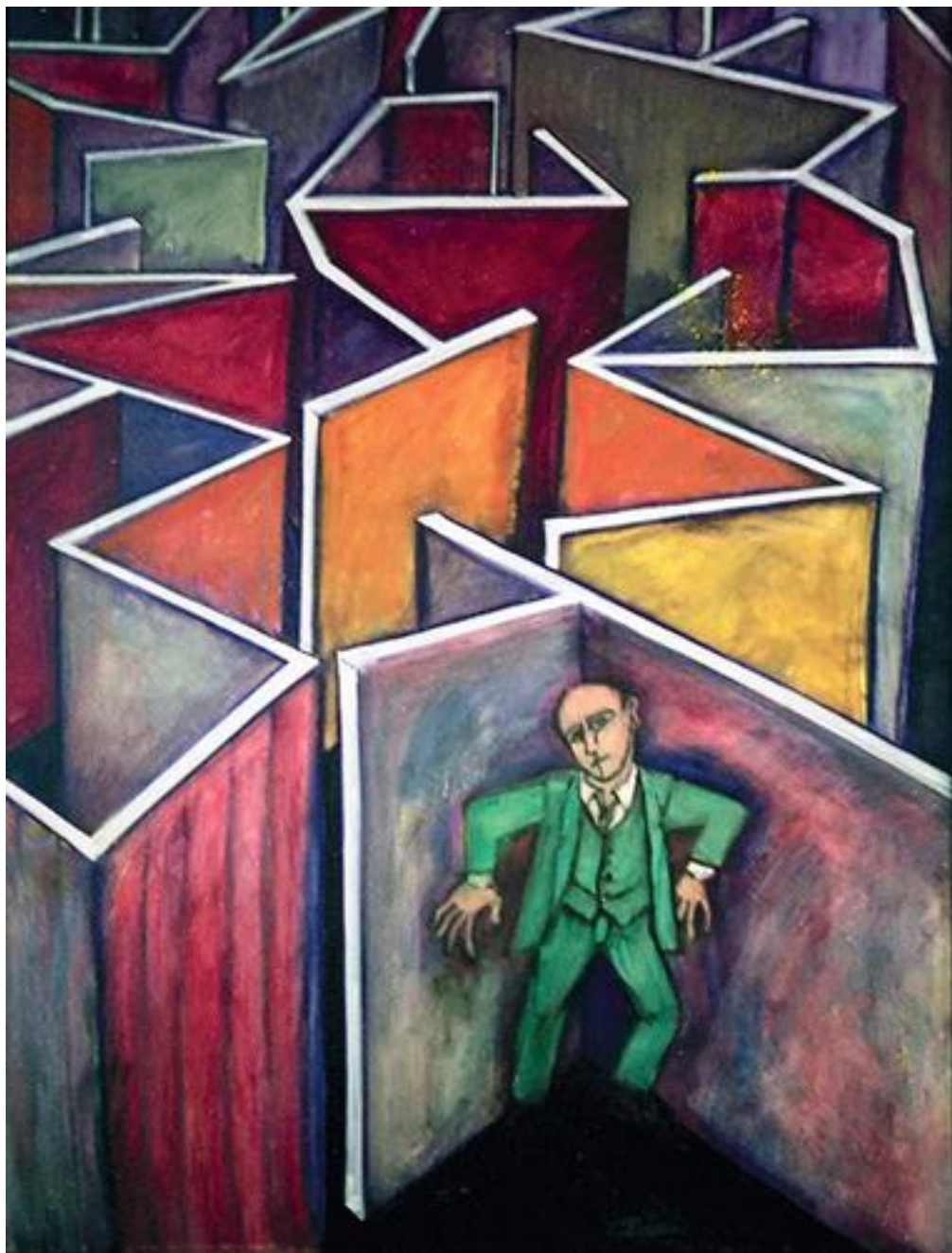
- To detect what changes need to be made in the current educational policy in order to be prepared for future educational challenges;
- To develop an up-to-date educational training for principals in order to help them grow professionally.

RESEARCH ASPECTS

The main traits of the D.I.S.C.O.V.E.R research are flexibility and observation. Both are extremely important aspects for this type of research which purpose is to cope with unprecedented circumstances, different opinions and approaches as well as address all the matters listed above. Epistemology has been the Research-Methodology approach chosen for this project which has been successful in developing a narrative research approach that focuses on principals' professional feedbacks and experiences during lockdown.

Individual Interviews have been the preferred method of data collection for this research. Interviews have been proved to be the most productive approach in order to gain subjective perspectives as well as deeper insights of a study such as the one presented in this article.

Inputs have been given to school principals. The proposed inputs mainly have attempted to investigate two aspects such as: organisation practices and conceptual frameworks, which also have supported head teachers to manage their workload. Finally, the educational leadership aspect that is extremely crucial for schools of the third millennium. Moreover, this research believes that this aspect has a central role for everyone who is part of the education system (pupils, teachers, school principals, parents, school cleaners, janitors, support staff and local entities) as it can increase motivation, agency, empowerment, self-efficacy, as well as a sense of responsibility towards themselves and the others.



THE PARTICIPANTS AND DIFFERENT STEPS OF THE RESEARCH

Interviews have taken place during the month of August 2020 until September 2020. They have been conducted on a voluntary basis and over forty school principals have taken part in this study. Participants come from schools of different grade levels (from primary school principals to secondary school principals), different Italian regions, and also have different levels of educational experience. The variety of the participants in this study made it possible to compare school leadership during the SARS2 pandemic with school management before lockdown.

- The first step can be referred to as 'enter the texts'. In fact, the feedbacks and interviews that have been collected need to be analysed with an open-minded approach. It is important at this stage, to avoid pre conceptual patterns and ideas to interfere with the study.
- The second step identifies with the process of sense-making. In other words, during this second phase the research is looking to elaborate a collective meaning, identify common patterns and draw connections among the data collected.
- During the third step, researchers have underlined those main arguments and traits of the study which are also the main components of the last two (currently ongoing) steps which are: *confirming* and *presenting the account*. The first one focuses on validating the data collected. While *presenting the account* focuses on the final outcome of the entire research.

Once all the steps are completed, in order to have a more objective perspective, a meeting between the research team and school principals will be taking place. The latter in fact, would be given access to the data collected as well as the chance to express their own personal opinion in regards to the final interpretations and conclusions of the entire research and so have a final debate. Feedbacks collected during

this meeting would be taken into account by the research team and are going to play an important role in the final report.

EXPECTED RESULTS

As it often happens with a qualitative research approach, the outcomes are not going to be taken as facts but rather they should provide us with a better understanding and insight of this particular phenomenon. Also the following points should be taken into account:

- the aspects of the professional context analysed in the research
- the relational system
- the past work context
- individual background
- the available resources.

Therefore, the purpose is to assign a broader meaning to all the decisions and actions our school principals have made during the SARS2 pandemic in order to address the complexity of the situation. Moreover, the research is hoping to identify some patterns in the data collected and present some meaningful examples of good *leadership* and *governance* which have encouraged the teaching staff in their *mission* to ensure a creative, innovative and sustainable educational program. Those *best practices* would also be shared and will become useful to cope with the current public health emergency which have led to school closure in several Italian regions, and the return to distance learning even for our youngest pupils. ■

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The deadline for submitting an article for the next issue is
Friday 26 February 2021.

Do you have interesting success stories?

A perfect programme?

Good experiences with the job shadowing project?

Liked a seminar you attended?

Have found a great solution everyone should know off?

Did you do research and found something great?

Found knowledge you have to share?

Found out something great?

An answer to all our questions?

Do you have an upcoming event you want everyone to know?

Something that shouldn't be missed?

A thing you have to go to?

A date which no one should forget?

Or do you want to read something about a certain theme?

Children's diversity

Coaching and mentoring school leaders

Hybrid integration

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Social innovation

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Please contact (luca.laszlo@esha.org) us so we can make great
next issues of the ESHA magazine for you!



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