

*The Use of Participatory  
Action Research (PAR) for  
the Self-Evaluation of Italian  
Provincial Centres for Adult  
Education*

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Challenges  
of the 21st  
Century: Democracy,  
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# Purpose of this study:

The present study aims to illustrate how INVALSI has tried to apply the Participatory Action Research for the elaboration of the SSE of provincial centres for adult education (CPIA)

Policies adopted to enhance SSE in Italian school system contextualized in the international debate

Emergent aspects in school improvement

The present study

Why use Participatory Action Research?

Discussion

# Background



The school self-evaluation is a recent practice of evaluation and it was introduced when school autonomy policies were adopted in several countries around the world (OECD, 1998)



The main aim of the school self evaluation is to assess the quality of school educational system in order to promote school improvement (Blok et al., 2005; Kyriakides and Campbell, 2004)



The school self-evaluation represents a useful procedure for understanding the school internal functioning and supporting the overall improvement of the school system (Schildkamp, 2007; Vanhoof & Van Petegem, 2010).



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# The School Self Evaluation in Italy

Since 2013, the Decree of the President of the Republic n. 80 establishes school evaluation processes, introducing school self-evaluation as a mandatory requirement for all Italian schools

The School Self Evaluation Model is based on CIPP model which consist in four dimensions (Context, Input, Process, Product) (Stufflebeam, 1993)

In the Italian school Self-Evaluation form, each dimension is divided into areas and indicators that analyze specific aspects of the education system

Each area is characterized by the presence of an evaluation rubric to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the service offered by the school on the basis of quality criteria.

The self evaluation report is a tool that: offers data to reflect on; helps to be aware of the internal functioning; helps to identify strenght and weakness; helps to define the objectives and actions to be implemented in an improvement plan



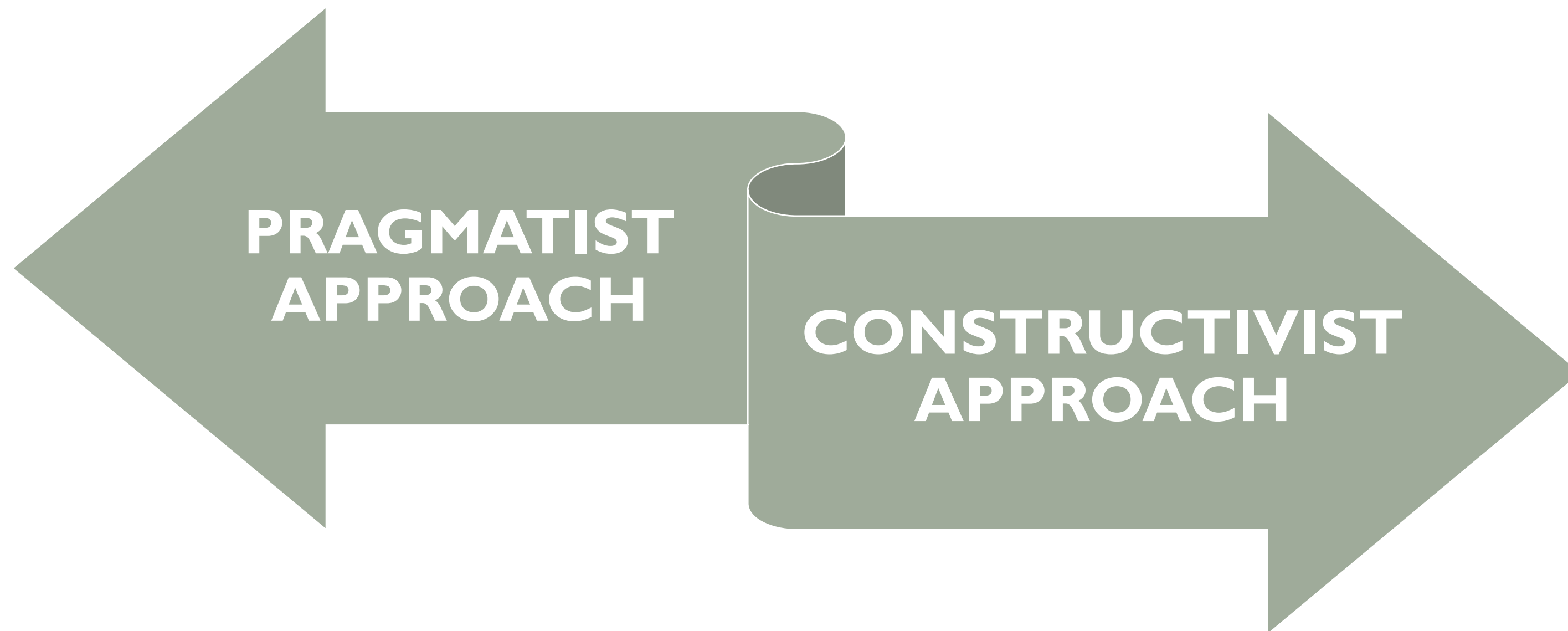
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# Italian approach to school self evaluation



- Pragmatist approach: schools express their judgements on the evaluation rubric (Scriven, 1983)
- Constructivist approach: schools motivated their judgements on the bases of strength and weakness and contextualised it (Guba, Lincoln, 1987)

# Emergent aspects on school improvement – Some evidences

- The literature on school improvement shows that the processes related to improvement are studied according to a bottom-up approach which identifies the power and control at the level of those who can actually act the changes.
- These processes are organizational conditions, teaching collaboration, teachers training, parental involvement, student empowerment, leadership, capacity building. The main goal is to improve both student results and the school ability to change. The involvement of all the school actors is crucial, including students and parents.
- Each school can improve and helps itself to avoid any dependency (Potter et al., 2002). The school is the fulcrum of change, having to interpret the innovation introduced from the outside, overcoming the professional isolation, strengthening the internal abilities.
- The research evidence shows that school improvement strategies must be custom tailored to the school itself, consistent with its culture and state of development. This involves referring to different strategies in relation to different phases of school improvement, since effective strategies for a school are not for others (Hopkins et al., 2014).



# Extending the self evaluation processes to the Provincial Centres for Adult Education - This study

## The aims:

- Extending the SSE form, used by primary and secondary schools in Italy, for the Provincial Centres for Adult Education (CPIA) which offer education and training for adults (Italian and foreign)
  - Developing a specific SSE form
  - Developing a glossary of the words included in the format to share meanings
- The CPIAs are state schools established by the Ministry of Education in 2014. CPIAs offers adult education services and activities to encourage the personal, cultural, social and economic growth.
- The CPIAs deal with both educational and research activities regarding adult education.
- The CPIAs works as a territorial service network for the lifelong learning
- The CPIAs offers:
  - First level education courses;
  - Italian Language courses;
  - Second Level Education courses;
  - Other courses

## Participants:

- 18 Regional Research Centres for Adult Education that coordinates the research activities at the regional level;
- School Principals and teachers of the 131 CPIAs (In Italy)

## Method:

### Participatory Research Action

- We organized working group for the definition of area and indicators related to the CPIAs' Self Evaluation
- The research group was composed by researchers, principals and teachers

- The courses are attended by adults and young people over 16 who have not obtained the first cycle of education or by people who want to enhance their education



## Results

### The format of Self Evaluation Report

#### Context

- Student population
- Territory and social capital
- Economic and social resources
- Professional resources

#### Student's Outcomes

- Outcomes of the welcoming and orientation activities
- Outcomes of other education activities
- Basic skills

#### Teaching and educational processes

- Educational offer, didactic planning and evaluation
- Learning environments
- Inclusion, socialization, personalization
- Welcoming, continuity, orientation

#### Organization and managing processes

- Strategic orientation and organization of CPIA
- Development of human resources
- Relationship with the territory

Results of the collaborative process were the format of SSE and glossary of terminologies included in the format, which focused on relevant dimensions of the school system (e.g., school context, educational practices). After that, each provincial centre completed the developed SSE format to analyse the school strengths and weaknesses, also comparing own school situation with other Italian provincial centres.



# Discussion: Why use Participatory Action Research?

- The methodological cornerstones of the PAR is in line with the expectations that emerge from the studies on school improvement, starting from the need to involve all the school actors in changing.
- The Participatory Action Research (PAR) assumes that the school improvement tends to be effective in presence of a local knowledge of the school through the involvement of different school actors (Hughes,2003;Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007)
- In the PAR, the actors work together to analyse the school situation and/or planning actions for changing school situation for the better.
- PAR is an 'orientation to inquiry' (Reason 2004; see also Kesby et al. 2005) which demands methodological innovation if it is to adapt and respond to the needs of specific contexts, research questions or problems, and the relationships between researchers and research participants
- Treats participants as competent and reflexive agents capable of participating in all aspects of the research process
- This study is an example of participatory trough the involvement of CIPIAs in definig the indicators of the model and the meanings of the tools.
- The use of PAR for the SSE of provincial centres for adult education may represent a relevant practice to better plan improvement actions for the school system.

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