What is the sense, in Italy, of a translation of an American essay on the unfashionable theme of educational pluralism? Today’s public education space seems dominated by union claims and oppositions to this or that reform. Without prejudice to the good faith of everyone, the scene is hardly conducive to reflection, and this fact alone justifies the opportunity to revisit fundamental issues, questioning, as does Ashley Rogers Berner in *Not School, but Schools: Public Education and Pluralism in America*, “how we should educate our children and why,” and recognizing that these questions “necessarily imply deeper visions of human nature, of the meaning of human life, the source of authority, moral responsibility, and what constitutes a just society.” Such questions are both timeless and urgent...

At the center of the reflection for Berner, deputy director of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, is a preference for educational pluralism accompanied by [common denominators such as] a rigorous curriculum that all schools must teach. In fact, as the author articulates, the inefficiencies of the American educational system are due to two wrong choices that took place between the nineteenth and the early twentieth century: the decision "to favor a uniform over a pluralistic educational system" and "the abandonment of the traditional school curriculum."
Berner argues that the debate about education in the United States, and the inevitable political choices, are characterized by mistaken assumptions, such as the idea that only state schools "can form good citizens and offer equal opportunities for all children...." According to Berner, the resulting uniform structure, in which American children mostly attend State-run schools on the basis of geographical proximity, is "problematic" not only because of its low performance in terms of student learning, but also because of its departure from American principles of freedom.

The author leads us through the philosophical and historico-political reasons that led the United States to abandon educational pluralism in the 19th century and embrace a uniform vision whose ultimate goal was to guarantee "common attitudes, loyalty and values, under the central directive of the State...." Berner argues that the idea that a uniform school run directly by the State can be neutral is misleading: every element of education imposes, even implicitly, a philosophical and political vision. Educational pluralism intentionally clarifies the different visions and allows families to choose amongst multiple types of schools within a common framework of democracy and public responsibility.

Berner also addresses the repercussions for teachers. Here, Berner identifies a distinctive way out. She asks that we consider the diminished "professional consideration" and "moral autonomy of teachers" that result from educational uniformity....School administrators, too, cannot create intentional communities; they cannot hire teachers on the basis of a shared vision...Pluralistic systems remedy this.

_Not School, but Schools: Public Education and Pluralism in America_ offers a relevant reflection on new ideas that are stirring in the world of American education which Italian readers should consider.... In Italy, perhaps even more than in the United States, publicly funded but non-state-run schools are viewed with suspicion, and educational pluralism remains confined to the margins. Italy has laws on autonomy and parity but seems to default towards “neutrality” and uniformity. It is time to think more deeply.