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**The last shall be the first: competencies, equity and the power of resilience in the Italian school system.**

Learn. Individ. Differ. 51, 19-28 (2016).

Summary: The aim of the paper, based on an Italian sample of 9960 fifteen-year-old students, is to identify those variables on which teachers could effectively intervene in contexts where students are very unlikely to attain even the most basic levels of competence in mathematics. We adopted a specific conceptual framework and a two-stage methodological procedure in order to discover the interplay between factors of disadvantage and to identify resilient students along with malleable variables associated with resilience. The results show that there is an interaction between the degree of development of a geographic region, the socio-economic and cultural background of schools and families, and the gender of students which can create great initial disadvantages for students. The resilience of students to such disadvantages is related to factors such as teaching strategies and academic self-efficacy which appear to be valid and modifiable also in local, school and family contexts with less resources.

*Classification:* D33 D43 C63 C33 C43

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