

Inside School Lives: Historiographical Perspectives and Case Studies. Teachers' Memories Preserved at the Centre for Documentation and Research on the History of Schoolbooks and Children's Literature*

Dentro de la vida escolar: perspectivas historiográficas y estudios de caso. Recuerdos de los profesores conservados en el Centro de documentación e investigación sobre la historia de los libros de texto y la literatura infantil

Anna Ascenzi

e-mail: ascenzi@unimc.it
University of Macerata. Italy

Elisabetta Patrizi

e-mail: elisabetta.patrizi@unimc.it
University of Macerata. Italy

Abstract: This work focuses on teachers' memories and intend to dwell on the heuristic potential of this source category, comparing it with the traditional sources of theoretical-regulatory and educational type. After a presentation on the state of art of historical and historical-educational studies on teachers' memories, it will offer an overview of the different kinds of memories preserved in the centres of documentation and research of historical and educational interest, examining the books and documentary heritage of the *Centre for documentation and research on the history of schoolbooks and children's literature of Macerata University*. Finally, through the analysis of a case study, the *Memorie* (Memoirs) of the teacher and pedagogist Lorenzo Bettini (1855-1917), we will offer an exemplification of a possible integrated use of sources, for a plural reconstruction of teachers' history.

* The research we propose in this articles has been presented during the International Symposium on School Memories, recently held in Seville (22-23 September 2015), of which are now available the abstracts (cf. Ascenzi, Patrizi, 2015). All the paragraphs of this article are the result of a shared reflection between the authors. But, we specify that: Elisabetta Patrizi is responsible of paragraphs 1 and 2, while Anna Ascenzi is responsible of paragraphs 3 and 4. Finally, we point out that the translations of quotations in the text are by authors.

Keywords: school memories; individual memory; history of the teaching profession; history of school; Italy 19th-20th centuries.

Resumen: Este trabajo se centra en los recuerdos de los profesores y tiene la intención de hacer hincapié en el potencial heurístico de esta categoría de fuente, comparándola con las fuentes tradicionales de tipo teórico-normativo y educativo. Después de una presentación sobre el estado de la cuestión de los estudios históricos e histórico-educativos sobre los recuerdos de los docentes, se ofrecerá una visión general de los diferentes tipos de recuerdos que se conservan en los centros de documentación e investigación de interés histórico y educativo, se examinarán los libros y documentales patrimonio del Centro de documentación e investigación sobre la historia de los libros de texto y la literatura infantil de la Universidad de Macerata. Por último, a través del análisis de un estudio de caso, *Memorie* (Memorias) del maestro y pedagogo Lorenzo Bettini (1855-1917), se ofrecerá una ejemplificación de un posible uso integrado de las fuentes, para una reconstrucción plural de la historia de los docentes.

Palabras clave: recuerdos de la escuela; memoria individual; historia de la profesión docente; historia de la escuela; Italia siglos XIX y XX.

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1. The historical-educational research in comparison with experiences and practices of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses

Autobiographies, memoirs, annotations, notes, journals, diaries, correspondence, CVs, autobiographical interviews, stories and teachers' novels, photo albums or memories, etc.: teachers' memories can have many forms, also very different from each other in terms of typologies and qualities of the returned information. They have been defined in many ways, for example, we have talked about ego-documents, self-reference writings. They have also been classified with rigorous taxonomic grids, useful to seize their wealth and complexity (Viñao Frago, 1999, 2002). Here, more simply, we will talk about teachers' memories as a specific category of historical sources, whose lowest common denominator is given by the author, if this is the name we can use, i.e. schoolmaster or schoolmistress, who – in a more or less conscious way (Lejeune, 1975) – leaves to posterity (and historians too) direct evidence of their school past.

The memories are sources that should be treated with caution, because – as Viñao Frago (1999) has rightly pointed out – «a memory is not a mirror» faithful to reality, but a «filter», which tends to change remembrances and, in some cases, can also twist them completely. How can we establish the reliability of a «memory» as a historical source, then? The situation varies from case to case and the only right way, in our view, is of methodological type. In fact, the memories' source has not only to be analysed carefully (style, author, context, cited events), but it must also and above all be put into dialogue with the traditional sources (school legislation, textbooks, teachers' periodicals, ministerial inquiries, school inspectors' reports, statistical sources, etc.). Within these conditions, teachers' memories may represent valuable tools for the historian of education.

Specifically, we can identify in these sources two levels of heuristic significance in terms of research. On one side, teachers' memories allow us to bridge some knowledge gaps, because they throw a light on the school «inner life», namely on: concrete educational, didactic and disciplinary practices (ways of teaching/learning, didactic materials, school rituals, etc.), on the concretely-lived history of the teaching profession and, more generally, on protagonists, processes and places of the school culture materially experienced and narrated.

On the other hand, they allow to establish comparisons and parallels with the traditional sources, providing key information to implement, specify and, in some cases, refute, the knowledge on school past acquired through the usual research channels, contributing sometimes to the demolition of those historiographical stereotypes, built without a direct confrontation with reality. In either directions, teachers' memories allow to strengthen the widely shared opinion among historians of education, that: «there is no one single privileged source for historical pedagogical research but that a nuanced and contextualised history of education rests in any event on a combination of all sorts of source material» (Depaepe, Simon, 2012, p. 478).

Since the II World War, teachers' memories have aroused a strong interest among historians tout court, giving rise to a variety of research topics, which have opened a new use of these sources, previously studied mostly by historians of literature, with an exclusive intent of biographical or literary analysis. From the innovative investigations of Ozouf spouses on the teachers of the Belle Époque, undertaken in the 1960s and then merged in the book *La République des instituteurs* (Paris, 1992); to studies on the biographies and autobiographies of teachers and people belonged to the education world by Tom Gammage (1980) and António Nóvoa (1998), up to those on personal writings (autobiographies, diaries, notebooks, private archives) gathered, most recently, in the volume *Refúgios do Eu: educação, história, escrita autobiográfica* (Florianópolis, 2000) edited by Ana Chrystina Venancio Mignot, Maria Helena Camara Bastos and Maria Teresa Santos Cunha; from the studies of Harry Smaller (1999) and Jo Anne Preston (1999) aimed to light up the «image of teachers» category and school life through the analysis of epistolary sources; to the considerable researches on teachers' stories and novels by Simonetta Soldani (1993), Carmela Covato (1996) and Anna Ascenzi (2012): the bibliographical panorama that is displayed to the scholar who intends to undertake studies in this research field is now very rich and varied and is set to expand further because of the wide appeal aroused by these sources. This general change has also affected the history of education, which in recent decades has been completely cleared from the paradigm of the single source of theoretical type to embrace that of the plurality of sources (See for e.g. the reflections proposed by Depaepe, Simon, 2012).

As regards teachers' memories we can say that from the historical-educational point of view there have been several advances in at least two directions. First, this type of sources, once neglected, was deemed worthy and, therefore, to be discovered and preserved in *ad hoc* structures, such as research centres of historical and educational relevance and museums of school and education. Second, teachers' memories have been brought to the attention of the scientific community through an accurate process of inventory and classification and, subsequently, also through targeted researches. In this last respect, however, we believe that much more still has to be done. In particular, we think that the case studies have to be increased and correlated with traditional sources, in order to verify the qualitative and quantitative jumps of knowledge these historical sources allow us to accomplish, if any. In this perspective, the research proposed here will analyse some documental deposits preserved in the Centre of documentation and research on the history of textbooks and children's literature of Macerata University (hereinafter Cesco), putting specific attention on an exemplar case of study (in the last paragraph).

2. Looking for teachers' recollections: a first survey on Cesco's collections

The Centre of Macerata University was officially constituted with Rector's Decree no. 475 dated 20 February 2004 as a centre of documentation and research aiming to reach two objectives. On the one hand, preserving the documentary and printed material of historical-educational interest, in order to protect it from neglect and systematic destruction to which it was and, unfortunately, is still subjected today in Italy. On the other hand, that to promote researches in the field of history of education, based on the enhancement of such sources. Cesco is not the only centre of documentation and research in Italy; other «virtuous realities» of this type have fortunately arisen in recent years, as has emerged from the researches carried out as part of the mapping project *History of education and children's literature in the Italian universities (1988-2013). Anatomy of a university discipline between teaching, scientific research and cultural presence*, presented last year at ISCHE (International Standing Conference on the History of Education) by the history of education group of Macerata University. In fact, the project is bringing to light an interesting variety of initiatives and resources for historical-educational research in Italy, showing the evolution recorded by the sector as well as its development potentials (Ascenzi, Caroli, Pomante, Sani, 2014)¹.

¹ Without any pretense of completeness, being the research still in its implementation phase, we should remember that in Italy, in addition to the Centre of documentation and research and the School Museum in Macerata, there are other important interest poles. We refer to: the Archive for the history of education of the Catholic University of Milan - Brescia, the Center of documentation and research on the

During its first decade of life, Cesco, according to the objectives stated in art. 2 of its statutes, approved at the time of its establishment and recently renovated with Rector's Decree no. 157 23rd April 2015, has been working on two aspects. On one side, to establish «a specialized library and archive» in support of the researches promoted by its members and open to students and scholars with historical-educational interests; and, on the other side, to give a contribution to the scientific debate on history of education field with the promotion of «conferences, seminars, series of lectures, exhibitions, publications» and research projects². Detailed reports of the initiatives developed on this direction have been provided elsewhere (Brunelli, 2009; Sani, 2015a, pp. 150-159). For this reason we will just mention: as regards to the convention and project activities, the International Conference *School Exercise Books. A Complex Source for a History of the Approach to Schooling and Education in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, held in Macerata from 26 to 29 September 2007 (Meda, Montino, Sani, 2010) and the European project *History on Line*, approved under the Life Long Learning Programme, and Erasmus Sub-programme, coordinated by Cesco's research team in 2007-2009; and as regards to scientific production, the specialised journal «History of Education & Children's Literature – HECL», born in 2006 and by now known at international level (Sani, 2015b), and the studies published in the scientific series books promoted by Cesco's research group, namely «Biblioteca di History of Education & Children's Literature» (The Library of HECL) and «Strumenti della Biblioteca di History of Education & Children's Literature» (The Tools of HECL), published by Macerata University Press, eum - edizioni università di Macerata, the book series «Storia dell'educazione e della letteratura per l'infanzia e la gioventù» (History of education and children's and youth literature) published by Edizioni Nerbini in Florence, and the book series «Storia delle istituzioni educative e della letteratura per l'infanzia» (History of educational institutions and children's literature) edited by FrancoAngeli, Milan. In the perspective of this article, it is instead important to pay specific attention to books and documentary heritage of Cesco.

Established in 2008, the Library of the Centre is composed of a main collection (made up of critical literature and printed sources mainly related to history of education, school, schoolbooks and children's literature), and several special collections (made up of books and documents coming from donations of private individuals, educational institutions and various collections). Currently,

history of educational institutions, school books and children's literature (Ce.SIS) and the Museum of school and popular education of Molise University (Campobasso), the «Mauro Laeng» Historical Teaching Museum of Roma Tre University and the Museum of Education of Padua University.

² The Statute, from which we quote, is available on the website of Cesco: <http://www.unimc.it/cescom/it/il-centro/statuto>. A description in English of the Center's objectives is available at the same site on the page: <http://www.unimc.it/cescom/en/centre/mission>. Accessed: September 2015.

the Library of the Centre has: about 8,000 books relating to the most recent studies; 72 Italian and foreign specialised journals (between historical and current titles); more than 5,000 works with a historical-documentary value (in part in microfilm or electronic version), composed by textbooks, children and youth books, collection of legislative disposals and school-law, concerning the Italian context of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries³. Part of this latter type of Cesco's book heritage is attributable to the special collections of the Centre, which represent the distinctive and characteristic element of this structure. At present, at Macerata Institute of documentation and research there are 20 special collections available to the general public, which are part of the Census Project *Archivio dei fondi librari speciali e delle collezioni significative* (Archive of special and significant library collections), started by Macerata University in 2012⁴. These collections have a library, archive or mixed nature and, in many cases, also gather a documentary heritage, precious to rebuild the school inner life; a heritage that often escapes from most common channels of cataloguing and consultation (e.g. national and local OPACs). We refer to: wall maps, school weekly posters, diplomas, certificates, report cards, school photographs, diaries and exercise books, teaching aids (geometric solids, plane geometric figures, globes, abacuses, spelling and reading books, etc.), stationery objects (straws, nibs, inkpots, pencils, rulers, squares, etc.) and elements of school furniture⁵. Some of the most interesting examples of this heritage, more directly related to the primary school life of the Italian Fascist period, are displayed in the permanent exhibition of Paolo and Ornella Ricca' School Museum of Macerata University Macerata, born in 2012 as a result of the development of one of Cesco's research lines⁶.

Although each specialised collection of Macerata institute has its history and peculiarities, hardly reducible to preconceived schemes, it is appropriate and possible to offer a whole picture, using general categories, useful to understand the nature, origin and resources of these collections⁷.

³ The Library, since its establishment, has begun to catalog his books collection in the Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) of Macerata's Pole: <http://opac.unimc.it/>.

⁴ For more information on the Project and to consult the census forms of the collections, please visit the Library System of Macerata University: <http://biblioteche.unimc.it/biblioteche/fondi-librari/progetto>; accessed: September 2015.

⁵ For a more detailed image of the special collections of Cesco, please see the Institute's website, which provides general descriptions of the individual collections and some data on Cesco's heritage: <http://www.unimc.it/cescom/it/il-centro/fondi>. The inventory and cataloging project of the collections, steadily increasing, is coordinated by Juri Meda and is carried on with the cooperation of the library staff of Macerata University.

⁶ We refer to the exhibition «*Book and musket, schoolboy perfect*». *Ideology and propaganda in primary schools of the Fascist period (1922-1943)*, edited by Juri Meda. For an overview about the origins and activities of Paolo and Ornella Ricca School museum see: Ascenzi, Patrizi, 2014.

⁷ The categorisation system of Cesco's collections, which is proposed here, is the result of a shared reflection, developed by a specific research group of Cesco, composed by: Anna Ascenzi, Juri Meda, Marta

A first category is represented by private collections, related to the activities of documentation, collection and study of donors or scholars. In this category we can include six Cesco's collections: *Paolo and Ornella Ricca collection*, *Correspondence and documents of Luigi Bertelli* (alias Vamba) *collection*, *Journal Confederation of Vamba collection* (Confederazione giornalinesca), *Andrea Greco collection*, *Special Education of Death in Italy collection* (19th-20th centuries) and *Davide Montino (Mantova) collection*⁸. The first five collections, inter alia, belong to the historical core of Cesco's library and among these a «place of honor» is occupied, for the size and quality of materials, by Paolo and Ornella Ricca collection. It is an extraordinary collection, which comprises several thousand pieces, including manuscripts and printed documents, school furniture, teaching aids and other original materials related to the Italian school of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century, which takes its name from the two forward-looking spouses from Calabria region from whom, not surprisingly, also the title to the School Museum of Macerata derives.

A small group of Cesco's special collections is formed by some institutions of Macerata. We refer to: *Luigi Raggi collection* on University history, deriving from former Luigi Raggi Institute of Macerata University; ISREC collection on school manuals, donated by «M. Morbiducci» Historical Institute on Resistance and Contemporary Age of Macerata, and O.N.P. collection, coming from the historic library of «Santa Croce» Neuropsychiatric Hospital of Macerata. The *collection of «Giacomo Leopardi» National Boarding School*, instead, belongs to the school libraries category. This library fund consists of about 2,000 volumes (mostly textbooks and reading books for children and youth) received at Cesco's spaces according to the formula of the loan for use.

A particularly interesting type of collections, linked to the topic of teachers' memories discussed here, is that of private archives of pedagogists, in which *Ferruccio Boffi collection* and *Giovanni Calò collection* are included. These funds are mostly formed by the personal correspondence of two leading figures of the Italian scene: Ferruccio Emilio Boffi (1875-1942), because he was head teacher and press secretary of the Minister of Education Giovanni Gentile at the time of

Brunelli and Elisabetta Patrizi.

⁸ For a detailed description of each fund, please see Cesco's website, according to the references mentioned above in note no. 5. Here, we should point out that: the two funds linked to the figure and work of Luigi Bertelli, alias Vamba, have been studied in depth, because we are in front of one of the leading authors of Italian children's literature (cf. Ascenzi, 2009, pp. 123-159); the collection dedicated to David Montino gathers school exercise books acquired in the collection campaign promoted during the Festival of Literature in Mantua in 2011 and was founded in memory of a brilliant Italian scholar, who has devoted a significant part of his research activities to study children's writings. (See for e.g. Montino's article entitled *Da scolari a Bambini? Scritture disciplinate e scritture personali nei quaderni di scuola*, in Meda, Montino, Sani, 2010, pp. 1289-1303).

the educational reform of 1923; and Giovanni Calò (1882-1970), a pedagogue and political protagonist of fifty years of Italian history⁹.

The last category we're going to deal with is the one represented by *didactical archives and teachers' libraries*. In this way we come to talk about the types of funds which host teachers' memories preserved in Cesco. It is the most represented category of Macerata Institute's collections, as it consists of 8 funds, related to the professional and/or personal history of masters and mistresses from various parts of Italy, who worked in the school in the Nineteenth and Twentieth century.

- *Lorenzo Bettini collection* (Marche and Veneto regions): received as a result of the 2011 conference dedicated to the teacher, school inspector and pedagogue from Marche region¹⁰; the collection includes digital copies of published and unpublished writings of Lorenzo Bettini (1855-1917); among these, of particular note are the first editions of the successful history school manual *I Martiri d'Italia e i fattori della sua Unità e Indipendenza* (The Martyrs of Italy and the factors of its Unity and Independence) and the rich pages of the autobiographical manuscript text *Memorie* (Memoirs).

- *Giovanni Lucaroni collection* (Mogliano, Macerata, Marche region): it collects the documents of schoolmaster Giovanni Lucaroni (1891-1980), who worked in the small town of Mogliano; it is notable for the presence of the original manuscripts of textbooks and reading books written by Lucaroni and for the correspondence that the teacher from Mogliano had with relevant personalities of the Italian scenario such as Giuseppe Lombardo Radice and Alfredo Saraz¹¹.

- *Maria Riccini collection* (Ancona, Marche region): consists of a large collection, for a total of 2,120 pieces, including manuals for teachers, textbooks for primary schools, school exercise books and diaries, album of school correspondence and various kinds of teaching aids that belonged to Maria Riccini (1892- 1975), teacher at the rural and urban primary schools of Ancona province, who had a leading role in the school and teachers' events of the Marche territory in the first half of the Twentieth century.

⁹ For a first biographical profile of these figures see the entries by Juri Meda in Chiosso, Sani, 2013, vol. I, pp. 177-178 (Boffi); pp. 246-247 (Calò).

¹⁰ We mean the Symposium *Lorenzo Bettini. La riscoperta di un protagonista della didattica italiana tra '800 e '900*, held in 2011 and organized in two separate sessions: Venice, 14 May 2011 and San Lorenzo in Campo (Pesaro-Urbino province), 28 May 2011.

¹¹ To an updated picture of the life and work of Lucaroni and two eminent Italian personalities with whom Lucaroni entertained relationships, see the bio-bibliography entries written by Juri Meda (Lucaroni), Lorenzo Cantatore (Lombardo Radice) and Luisa Lombardi (Saraz), in Chiosso, Sani (2013, vol. II, pp. 43-45, 58-59, 475-476).

- *Livia Verrini-Marri collection* (Modena, Emilia-Romagna region): comprises the teaching library and archive of schoolmistress Lidia Verrini (1926-2009); it contains numerous manuals for teachers, textbooks and reading books of 1940s-1970s, as well as various kinds of teaching aids and school materials, among which there is a large collection of educational boards of 1960s.
- *Pacifico Topa collection* (Cingoli, Macerata, Marche region): donation of teacher Pacifico Topa (1920-2010), primary school teacher, then professor at the Teaching Institute of Cingoli and Camerino and poet; consisting of a significant sample of masterful journals, among which we can mention two important journals of the late Nineteenth century with a very long history, namely *Scuola italiana moderna* (Italian Modern School) and *I diritti della scuola* (The school rights)¹².
- *Caramel-Leotta collection* (Treviso, Veneto region) preserves the large teaching library and archive of schoolmistresses Maria (1922-2012) and Angela (best known as Lina, 1924-2010) Caramel and Prof. Sebastiano Leotta († 2000 c.), teachers from Valdobbiadene, Treviso province; it includes several manuals for teachers, textbooks and reading books of 1930s-1970s, as well as personal notes and memos, notebooks and pupils' works and an interesting collection of educational posters of 1950s-1960s.
- *Luigi Scoccaro collection* (Marcon, Venice): large collection of educational materials of various types related in particular to the fascist and post-war reconstruction period (textbooks, school almanacs, catalogues of educational publishers, propaganda posters, teaching journals, copies of comics for children, alphabet blocks, school calendars and yearbooks, papers written by pupils, etc.); it points out the complete collection of *Il Giornale dei Fanciulli* (The Journal of Children) and the presence of about 200 educational filmstrips of 1950s-1970s, produced by: Fratelli Fabbri Editori, La Scuola Editrice, Libreria della Dottrina Cristiana, Edizioni Cinedidattica and Walt Disney.
- *Ivano Palmucci collection* (Treia, Macerata, Marche region): donated by teacher Ivano Palmucci from Treia, it consists of a selection of textbooks and reading books of different periods, linked to the teaching activities of schoolmaster Palmucci.

From this brief description, it is evident that Cesco's teaching archives and libraries receive different kinds of sources. They range from more traditional

¹² On the two teachers' journals, see the specific entries edited by Giuseppe Tognon («I diritti della scuola») and Giorgio Chiosso («Scuola italiana moderna»), in Chiosso (1997, pp. 234-239, 622-628).

sources of educational type (school manuals, reading books for children and young adults, journals for teachers and pupils, alphabet blocks, teaching posters, until educational filmstrips), to sources relating to everyday school life (registers and school journals, school and class exercise books, teachers and pupils' diaries, albums with children's stories), up to the sources of personal nature, which is closely related to the private and professional life of the teacher who is entitled to the collection. In this last case we find: album of memories and photos, personal correspondence (also of some importance, such as the letters of teachers Lucaroni and Lombardo Radice and Alfredo Saraz), teaching personal notes and, of course, also autobiographical texts. Within of this group of funds, Lorenzo Bettini collection has a particular relevance, because it includes a very significant example of teachers' written memories. We mean the manuscript entitled *Memorie* (hereafter *Memoirs*) by Lorenzo Bettini.

3. For a reflection on the use of autobiographical sources: the *Memoirs* of Lorenzo Bettini

The *Memoirs* by Lorenzo Bettini are very peculiar, both for the relevance of the author and for the richness of the autobiographical text. We are in front of a person whose cultural profile is of relevance: Bettini is a man that has a high level of awareness of what he writes. He is also a character representative of the school world in all its facets, because he assumes different roles and, therefore, different points of view. Bettini is a schoolmaster, school inspector, head teacher and an author of school books. Therefore, his life story allows us «to live» the application path of ministerial provisions from the inside. Through his *Memoirs* we can look at the school from different perspectives: that of a teacher performer of educational programmes, that of a school inspector that controls and directs, and – finally – that of an author who provides tools for teaching, as a result of his rich school experience, lived not only in first person but also as supervisor and manager of other teachers¹³.

¹³ Before starting the analysis of Bettini's *Memoirs*, we think it is important to offer some details on the author's life. Lorenzo Bettini was born on December 9, 1855 in a humble family of San Lorenzo in Campo (Pesaro Urbino province). He privately attends the early studies, which he continues at the seminary in Pergola (1864-1871). In 1871 he attends the technical school of Pergola; two years later, in Urbino, he passes the exam to become a primary school teacher (lower grade) and, once completed the training year prescribed by regulation, in 1874 he obtains the teaching license. After teaching as private teacher for some time, he works as schoolmaster in Sassoferrato from January 1875 until the 1888. In 1880 he obtains the upper grade teaching licence. Then, he works as scholar inspector in Chieti until 1895. In this period he devoted himself to writing textbooks and collaborates with several journals for teachers. After other relocations (Guastalla, 1895-1897 and Siena, 1897-1900), on 26 January 1899 he is appointed head teacher of Venice, role that he held until his death, in 1917. He leaves his rich library to the city of Venice. To his memory, in 1929, the city establishes «Lorenzo Bettini Pedagogical Library», that is still active. This

Bettini's *Memoirs* are a sort of «monument source», as it does not only provide details related to the biographical and personal path of the author, but – just like a monument to the past – it also provides many «clues» and «details» of the political, cultural, ideological, religious and educational environment, which go far beyond the story of the protagonist and narrator. In fact, Bettini's *Memoirs* tell many parallel stories, which intertwine to the narrator's path of life and work and that allow you to know a world very varied in several respects. Geographical perspective: Bettini travels through various regions of Italy (from north to the mid-southern regions: the northern of Marche region, the province of Chieti, Reggio Emilia, Siena and Venice). Psychological perspective: Bettini offers physical and personality descriptions of the people he meets in the circle of family, friendship and work, in which he adopts a Lombrosian approach¹⁴, by showing his judgments on moral qualities and skills of the described person. Socio-Economical perspective: Bettini tells the Italy of the «two peoples», the Italians of the ruling class who want to *dirozzare* (refine and educate) and those of the populace that must be *dirozzata* (educated). In the centre there is the developing middle class, to which he belongs, who wants to conquer a higher status. In fact, Bettini is the perfect example of the Italian self-made man, who starting from a humble condition, manages to achieve the highest social-economical level he can aspire to in that historical period¹⁵.

His *Memoirs* embrace the first fifty years of life of the Kingdom of Italy and the Italian school. Bettini was born in 1855, just six years before the National Unification, and died in 1917, at the height of the First World War. During this period, the process of nationalisation of the Italian educational system is accomplished (from the «founding law», the 1859 Casati law, to the law through which the control of primary school passes from the municipalities to the State, the 1911 Daneo-Credaro law); the educational and recruitment systems of teachers change (normal schools and teaching license are introduced for this purpose); the conditions, methods and tools of primary teaching change too (from private school to public school, from the memorisation to the objective

unique path of life is recorded in every nodal passage in Bettini's *Memoirs*. On the figure of Lorenzo Bettini see: Codignola (1939); Miatto (1989-1990); Ascenzi (2011 and 2013) and the entry written by Alberto Barausse in Chiosso, Sani (2013, vol. I, p. 160). Also noteworthy is Bettini's obituary appeared in teachers' journal «*Scuola italiana moderna*» (Modern Italian School) 15 September 1917, 26 (28), pp. 118-119], in which Bettini is celebrated as «apostle of education», untiring servant of school good and its protagonists: teachers and pupils.

¹⁴ We refer to the notorious physiognomic approach adopted by Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909). For an overview of life and work of this distinguished personage see the entry by Giuseppe Armocida in DBI (1961-), vol. 65 (2005), pp. 548-553.

¹⁵ The *Memoirs* were written by Bettini between the first months of 1909 and 1917, year of his death. An forthcoming transcription with comments of this work has been edited by Alvaro Rossi. We thank the editor for having allowed us to read this work in preview. The references and quotations to the source in this article are taken from the original manuscript, hereafter indicated as *Memoirs*.

method, from *Santa Croce* to the reading books of new generation); it is the very idea of primary education that changes (from the school for a few to the school for all the Italians) (cf. Pazzaglia, Sani, 2001).

Bettini is a man of the Old Regime for social background and education, and a man of the «new era» for his profession. His *cursus studiorum* is typical of the middle-high class of the Pre-Unification generations, which was based on the Sixteenth-century educational standard: private primary education at native country entrusted to the priest uncle and higher education at the nearby diocesan seminary of Pergola. The school focused on reading, writing and arithmetic Bettini knew is that of *Santa Croce* (an old reading book) and *Offiziolo della Madonna* (Daily Office of Our Lady), where next to the Italian grammar there is still space for the Latin grammar, still studied on *Donatus* (cf. Lucchi, 1978 and 1982; Grendler, 1982). Even the high-school education completed in seminary is based on educational practices (rigid discipline, memorisation exercises, award certificates, performances open to the outside public) and centuries-old rituals (rigid and precise organisation of time), which directly refer to the Jesuit educational colleges of the Sixteenth century (cf. Brizzi 1981 and 1987; Grendler, 1989).

Bettini adopts the culture of «new Italy» for professional duty. Intransigent catholic in his youth and, then, moderate catholic in adulthood, Bettini is favourable to national unification, but hostile to the liberal-radical, republican and socialist currents, that strengthen after the unification. In fact, he likes neither the Mazzinians, nor the *Garibaldini* (Garibaldi's followers), the Masons, the unbeliever Liberals and the Materialists, as well as he doesn't appreciate all the passive interpreters of «modern pedagogy». But he is surrounded by them. So, in his role of school inspector, head teacher and author of textbooks, he adopts the «strategy of rigor»; i.e. he preserves to bring his ideological and pedagogical beliefs in the only context in which he can have margin of action: the school. Bettini is aware of being a simple State official, embroiled in a centralized system difficult to change, but he wants to give his contribution to society improvement, working from inside, to improve an institution, like school, which he believes is invested with a real ethical, civil and redeeming mission¹⁶. In fact, for Bettini the school should not only prepare 'good heads', but has also the duty to act on the hearts and, above all, the souls of younger generations, to deliver good citizens, with a strong ethical-religious foundation, to the building of the Italian society.

In a context, as that of Post-Unitarian Italian school, characterized by strong changes and conditionings, Bettini reserves one special glimmer of freedom,

¹⁶ The category of school teacher as State official is very well known and studied in Italy. See in this regard: Barausse (2002); Ghizzoni (2003); De Fort (2015).

i.e. the opportunity to photograph the school world that surrounds him and in which, after all, he works with passion. He does this through detailed reports, meticulous inspections of schools and, last but not least, through his *Memoirs*, which show the intention of revenge and redemption for himself and the School and also the intention of a revenge for a category which he feels has not been adequately recognised and valued: that of school men and women. In this respect, Bettini's *Memoirs* allow us to cast a light on the confirmations and surprises the historical-educational scholar can discover by analysing the autobiographical teachers' memories.

In terms of confirmations, Bettini's autobiography integrates *general historical and historical-educational knowledge* already acquired through traditional sources (statistics, surveys, teachers' press, minutes of teachers' associations, etc.), providing detailed information on general phenomena, such as: conflicting relationships between teachers, teachers and school authorities, and between these latter and local authorities; the dichotomy between rural schools and urban schools; the gap between the schools of the North and those of the mid-southern regions of the peninsula in terms of materials and teachers' quality; the education and recruitment processes of teachers and leadership class¹⁷; the progressive marginalisation of private schools in comparison with State schools, identified as public schools (a specific Italian mark), etc. (See e.g. Ascenzi, 2009 and 2012).

Bettini's *Memoirs* absolve to a similar function of confirmation and integration on the side of *local history of school*, because they allow to clear out context variables of social, economic and cultural character, which play an incisive role in the diverse school realities, often resulting in significant differences in terms of: teaching practices and tools, school environment¹⁸, mentality and ideas on school and education. In this perspective the autobiographical sources give back levels of reality that the general history is not able to tell and consign them to the history and memory of education.

¹⁷ Interesting information (titles of exam papers, exam programmes, evaluation committees) are derived from the descriptions of the exams taken by Bettini for the teaching license of lower and higher grade, but the richer episodes concern the reconstruction of the background (coalitions of parties and newspapers, letters of recommendation, manipulation of lists) of the two competitions for one post of general teaching director to which Bettini participates: that of Rome in 1897, concluded with an unfavourable outcome, and that of Venice in 1900, closed successfully.

¹⁸ There are numerous Bettini's notations on the miserable and tragic conditions of rural and mountain schools (improvised and dilapidated classrooms, poor or improvised school furniture, non-existent or outdated educational materials, unhygienic conditions, etc.) which he visits as school inspector of Chieti, Reggio Emilia and Siena. For a comparison with the documentation from the parliamentary investigation into the primary and popular education and the ministerial inspections on schools of the villages and rural and mountain towns of the peninsula, see Cives (1960-1967); Tomasi (1982).

In terms of surprises Bettini's *Memoirs*, as exemplar document of autobiographical sources' genre, allow us to identify relevant information on the side of the *history of school manuals*. The study of this line often fails the objective to go beyond the surface of the investigation object. Autobiographical texts as Bettini's one, instead, allow to enter in the real «authors» laboratory' and know more about processes, tools, origins and spread of their works. Bettini is author of several textbooks and works with important Italian publishers, such as Trevisini in Milan and Bemporad in Florence¹⁹. He writes a bit for passion, but mostly out of necessity. The proceeds of his production contribute to family income and help his career. Bettini himself reveals his real intentions in his *Memoirs*, where he also explains on several occasions his thoughts on national pedagogy and educational policies, which he follows. Talking about some of his works, published in 1870s, for example, he says:

Those works of mine, in general, had the defect to condemn the past, enhancing the present, as if the methods expounded in them were all the result of new educators and around them Rayneri, Lambruschini, Tommaseo and many others had not said anything. It depends on my poor reflection capacity, cultural lack and, I confess, on that «proud ignorance», for which we talk bad about things which we do not know. Ignorance is also the prerogative of nowadays schoolmasters, who still believe that teaching methods have been invented by modern barbassori (pundits) who sit on their scranna (chair for authorities), by pygmies who infest the chairs of pedagogy, who hide the giants and fathers of Italian pedagogy to young students, just to exalt themselves. So it is no wonder that the school is prey to sophists, and politicastri (bad politicians) and sectarian of the worst race (*Memoirs*, pp. 242-243)²⁰.

In this way, we can know the author's opinion on his early works, which he judges immature, not complying with the past pedagogical tradition and ready to chase the fads of that time. This is a significant evidence, which allows us to go beyond the textbook itself, because it is the author himself that, in a personal judgment of adult age, reveals not only the background of his works, but also those of contemporary school literature. Bettini is not hostile to pedagogical and didactic trends a priori; on the contrary, he studies and tries to acquire them for himself and for others. What Bettini fights, especially once he has acquired a significant professional experience, is the passive adoption of models, the

¹⁹ In this regard, we just need to remember that Trevisini published the first school manuals written by Bettini, while Bemporad not only published the textbooks of his latest years, but personally recommend Bettini for the position of school head of Venice. About the two Italian school publishers see the entries by Flavia Bacchetti (Bemporad) and Roberto Sani (Trevisini) in Chiosso (2003, pp. 65-68, 600-604).

²⁰ The writings of which Bettini talks about are the two schoolbooks written with Denti, *Manuale a metodo intuitivo* and *Il Bambino e i suoi primi doveri*, published by Trevisini, respectively in 1881 and 1882, the reading book *Primo libro del Fanciulletto*, published as well by Trevisini in 1890, and some articles of 1881-1883 appeared on the journal «La Scienza dell'Educazione» (The Science of education).

sterile and decontextualized use of educational theories in vogue. In fact, he doesn't hesitate to show himself as support of the Pedagogical Positivism and objective method (see for e.g. the famous manual in two volumes published by Bemporad in 1901 with the title of *L'insegnamento oggettivo*), but in the *Memoirs* he openly shows as the uncritical application of this pedagogical and didactic model is completely useless if not harmful. So, it happens that Bettini has no qualms in saying that his aunt Lucia, based on her 'natural pedagogical instinct', had educated him to observation capacity with exercises and methods that had nothing to envy to those adopted by the «present teachers through «lezioni per aspetto» (it is another way to indicate the lessons of things or objective method» (*Memoirs*, p. 11). Teachers' practical common sense for Bettini is better than the emblazoned pedagogical theories. So to schoolmaster Angelo Antonini of Colleponi di Genga, champion of the objective method, pointed as a model during the series of educational conferences held in Sassoferrato, Bettini seems to prefer by far teachers with a concrete and practical spirit, as schoolmistress Neri, known in Siena countryside, who teaches Maths to her pupils, suggesting problems populated by sheep and pears.

From here we can see as the autobiographical source allows us to go beyond the text itself.

In the same way, the heuristic potential of the *Memoirs* is revealed also in terms of the effective use of textbooks. For e.g. schoolmaster Bettini declares that he loves teaching «the beautiful pages [...] chosen from *I promessi sposi*, as well as the triplets (i.e. verses) by Dante and octaves by Ariosto» (*Memoirs*, p. 246) to his pupils in Sassoferrato, even if these works are not included in the educational programmes of the time. Still, the author appears satisfied to record that the canon of good books for children, represented by Thouar, Dazzi and Collodi, has not yet been supplanted by the sterile modern anthologies (*Memoirs*, p. 385)²¹. Or, he learns with relief that the prestigious Normal School in Siena, at the time he was a school inspector, had not yet penetrated the modern philosophical positive theories so appreciated by the ruling class and already adopted in Siena high schools (*Memoirs*, pp. 493-494).

Reject the stereotypes: autobiographical sources can reach this objective. In this regard, there is a very relevant passage in the *Memoirs*:

To tell the truth, in my wanderings – Lorenzo Bettini writes, remembering the years when he was scholar inspector in Chieti – luckily I've never bumped into those very countryside schoolmistresses who, in their straw hats and holding a little bunch

²¹ About these representative figures of Italian children's literature see the entries by Alessandra Vanzini (Dazzi e Thouar) and Anna Ascenzi (Collodi) in Chiosso, Sani (2013, vol. I, pp. 437-438, vol. II, pp. 50-52, 578-579).

of flowers, look at the sky with romantic eyes and ‘write their thoughts’, as told by De Amicis in his *Il Romanzo di un maestro* (A schoolmaster novel).

This is undoubtedly a very impactful statement. For all the Italian scholars, in fact, *Il Romanzo di un maestro* by Edmondo De Amicis represents the literary source that best describes the Italian teachers’ condition towards the end of the Nineteenth century. Actually, De Amicis proposes a credible fiction that evokes the image of countryside schoolmistress we all expect. The writer from Oneglia describes teachers’ general profiles using journal chronicles and teachers’ journals as sources (De Amicis, 2007, pp. 5-32). He therefore proposes credible but not real portraits. This is the gap Bettini fills with his *Memoirs*. He describes «flesh-and-bones» schoolmasters and mistresses he really meets and observes thus allowing us to reject some stereotypes and abstract generalisations which do not fit a world so varied and complex, as those of teachers and schools is, and therefore hard to chart and depict with ready-made images. All the schoolmasters and mistresses Bettini meets first as a pupil and then as a colleague and, finally, as a State official allow us to enter the kaleidoscopic school world: from teachers out of vocation to teachers out of necessity, from former priests employed at municipality schools to new generation teachers who studied at normal schools, from miserable and sad teachers, far away from their homes, to the ingenious teachers able to advance in their careers... this list of characters could go on *ad libitum*, because the *Memoirs* do not talk just about Bettini and his biographical and professional path, but they are a great collective autobiography representing lives and real experiences of the Nineteenth century Italian schools (Lejeune, 1985).

At the end of this analysis we think we can state that teachers’ memories, as Bettini’s one, are real *Lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1984-1992) we must preserve but also rediscover and appraise, not only for historians but for present men and women too, as they provide us with essential tools to access, understand and interpret our school and educational past free of stereotypes, prejudices and anachronisms²².

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²² The issue of relation between past and present is one of classical topics of historical and historical-educational reflection. An effective synthesis on this regard is proposed in propositions 2, 3 and 4 of the well-known Depeape’s *Ten Commandments of Good Practices in History of Education Research* (Depeape, 2012, pp. 464-466).

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