



Il patrimonio storico-educativo come fonte per la *Public History of Education*. Tra buone pratiche e nuove prospettive
Historical-educational heritage as a source of Public History of Education. Between good practices and new perspectives

a cura di / edited by Anna Ascenzi, Gianfranco Bandini, Carla Ghizzoni



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Anna Ascenzi, Gianfranco Bandini, Carla Ghizzoni

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School books exhibition. The historical collection of the G. Leopardi boarding school library in Macerata

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Abstract

This article intends to apply a Public History perspective to the study of school libraries by proposing a project related to a school library.

School libraries, especially ones with a historical background, are an extremely stimulating area of research for historians of education, especially if it is explored through the dual interpretative key of historical-educational heritage and school memories. This is because, as demonstrated in some recent studies (Ascenzi, Patrizi, 2023a, Ascenzi, Patrizi, 2023b), school libraries are the result and therefore the custodians of educational paradigms, which can be reconstructed through an analysis of book catalogues. However, they are also “collectors” of actual scholastic experiences, and of individual and collective experiences, which can re-emerge from a careful analysis of individual examples, perhaps focused on the dedications and extra-textual elements.

Public History practices can therefore offer the opportunity to overturn the usual clichés about school libraries, often associated with dusty shelves or locked display cases, full of books that remain untouched, or at the very least are little used or difficult to access. These realities did exist and certainly still do so, it is pointless denying it (cf. Fiore, 2005), but there are also completely opposing past and present experiences, which testify to very different situations, in some cases extremely virtuous, where the school library becomes the place where reading habits are formed, which can range from simple incentive initiatives for recreational or elective reading to more structured projects conceived as an integral part of the school educational path (Lombello, 2006).

There could be numerous and potentially infinite possibilities for the description of Public History in relation to school libraries. Here, we have chosen to present the project of an exhibition dedicated to the historical collection of the Giacomo Leopardi boarding school library in Macerata.

The book collection in this instance is important due to its size (over 2000 books) and also the history of the institution that hosted it (which dates back to 1862 and which continues today). But not only that. The library of this boarding school in Macerata was designed above all for students, and not only presents a conspicuous percentage of texts intended for recreational reading (22%), but also preserves numerous specimens bearing dedications, *ex libris* and extra-textual notes, all elements from which it is possible to obtain interesting data on the use of the works.

The historical collection from the Macerata library is currently housed in the Documentation and Research Center on the history of school books and children's literature at Macerata University (Cesco). We therefore count on being able to host the exhibition in the exhibition spaces at "Paolo and Ornella Ricca" School Museum in Macerata, founded as an emanation of Cesco and located adjacent to it. The exhibition project will be divided into four sections, each of which will be accompanied by illustrative panels, characterized by short informative texts and images, and by display cases, in which books and documents discovered while exploring the library will be presented.

The first section, History, will allow you to briefly retrace the history of the G. Leopardi boarding school in Macerata and to learn about the main "evolutionary phases of the library", from its foundation in the late 19th century to the new inventory during the Fascist period up to the constitution of class libraries after World War II.

The second section, the authors and their works, will, on the one hand, identify the most important works and the collections present in the library and, on the other, provide insight into the literary genres and the authors most representative thereof in the library, with a specific focus on children's and youth literature and historical texts, which form the two pillars of the book collection.

The third section, Dedications and donations, will offer an opportunity to explore the history of some specific specimens from the library, donated by people connected with the boarding school (professors and rectors) or by family members of boarding students or by boarders to other boarders.

The last section, The Readers, will make possible to establish a more direct and intimate approach to the library, as it will focus on the numerous extra-textual notes that accompany various examples of narrative texts from this library and from which opinions on the text, on reading habits, on the life of the boarders and on the history of the boarding school often transpire.

The idea is to offer an exhibition itinerary that can be used by various types of public, which allows different levels of reading and in-depth analysis depending on the interests and attitudes of the users. We hope to realize this during the next academic year with the help of the students from the Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism at Macerata University, who will be called upon to develop laboratory experiences under the guidance of the history of

education teachers aimed at secondary school and university students, capable of exploiting the enormous heuristic potential of this book heritage, both as an expression of the cultural heritage of the school and of the schooldays memory of some students of the past and, more generally, of a community.

Keywords: Schoolbooks; School library; Historical-educational heritage; History of education; Public History.

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