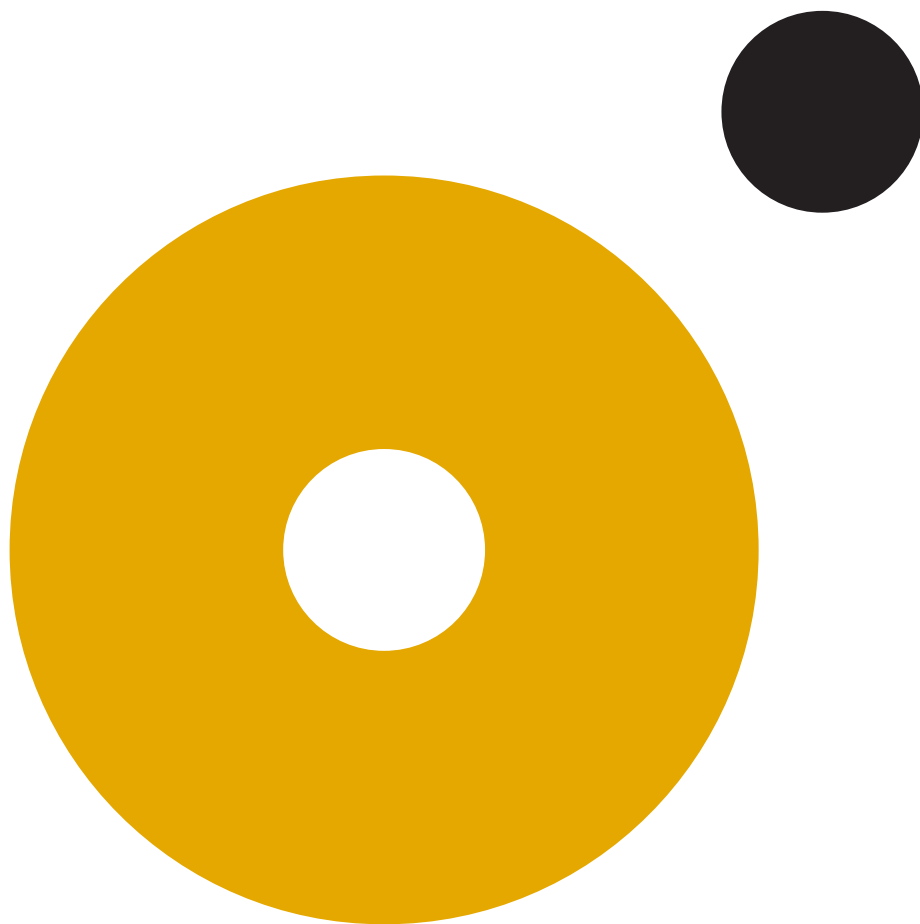


MEMORIA **SCOLASTICA**



The School and Its Many Pasts

edited by Juri Meda, Lucia Paciaroni and Roberto Sani

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and Roberto Sani



These volumes contain the official proceedings of the International Conference «The School and Its Many Pasts. School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation» (Macerata, 12-15 December 2022), organized by the University of Macerata in partnership with the Catholic University of Sacred Heart of Milan, the University of Florence and the University Roma Tre.

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Palazzo Ciccolini – via XX settembre, 5

62100 Macerata (Italy)

info.ceum@unimc.it

<http://eum.unimc.it>

The School and Its Many Pasts

I: The Different Types of School Memory

edited by Lucia Paciaroni

Introduction to the Different Types of School Memory

Lucia Paciaroni
University of Macerata (Italy)

During the first decade of the 21st century, “school memory” became the subject of studies of considerable interest in the field of educational-historical research, both in Ibero-American countries and in the Anglo-Saxon world and, later, also in Italy. Among the historians of education who first began to investigate this theme are Agustín Escolano, Antonio Viñao and Pierre Caspard. Scholars from the Iberian area, in particular, initiated pioneering reflections on the complex relationship between “educational memory” and “school culture” that Dominique Julia had placed at the centre of the historical-educational debate in 1995 and that gave rise to a veritable historiographical revolution that pushed educational historians to investigate a wide range of new sources.

The Spanish scientific community began to investigate in depth the individual school memory, to which Agustín Escolano attributed a central role. According to the scholar, careful and in-depth research on it, and thus on the individual memories of the actors of school life contained in diaries and autobiographies, but also shared through oral testimonies, could reveal the real educational practices carried out in the classroom as well as the school rituals and the disciplining practices used by teachers. This could, therefore, highlight what really happened in the classroom¹.

In recent years, innovative avenues of research have been pursued on the subject of “school memory”: scholars, through the analysis and interpretation of the various forms of school memory, have attempted to investigate the school past in greater depth, in an attempt to decipher that “black box of school” to which educational historiography has referred several times in recent years.

A rather significant occasion for discussion on the topic of school memory was the international symposium “School Memories. New Trends in Historical Research into Education: Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological Issues”, held in Seville in 2015, at which Juri Meda and Antonio Viñao defined school memory as «the individual, collective and/or public practice of recalling a common school past»². On that occasion, the epistemological foundations of the historiographical reflection inherent to school memory were explored in depth and a first systematic reflection on the topic was draft-

¹ Cf. A. Escolano Benito, *Más allá del espasmo del presente: la escuela como memoria*, «História da Educação», vol. XV, n. 33, 2011, pp. 10-30.

² Cf. J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memories: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, p. 5.

ed, defining some general theoretical frameworks, providing methodological criteria and suggesting possible intersections with the anthropology of education and the sociology of cultural processes.

This meeting marked a significant turning point for educational-historical research: school memory, from that moment on, constituted an interpretative category that drew the attention of educational historians who included it in the historiographical reflection of the educational-historical field on an international level. Italian educational historians have also recently started timely research on school memory considering it in its various meanings. Of particular importance for the dissemination of studies on the subject was the Project of Significant National Interest, “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”³, in which over fifty scholars and young researchers from fourteen Italian universities participated⁴.

On the basis of the new types of sources considered by the scholars and an interdisciplinary methodological approach, the research units involved in the project investigated the models of schooling, teaching, learning and scholarship emerging from individual memories as well as the representation of these models by the information, communication and cultural industries.

At first, as already mentioned, the focus was on individual school memories, i.e., on the self-representation provided by former teachers and former school administration officials, as well as by former pupils within oral and written testimonies. In order to reconstruct school history, educational historians have started to consider new types of sources to analyse the real experiences of its protagonists, going beyond a purely historical-legislative approach. As is well known, studies and research based on oral testimonies but also on diaries, autobiographies and memoirs in general have become widespread, bringing to light many different school histories that tell us the fundamental impact that the exercise of the profession even by apparently “anonymous” teachers had on the lives of individuals and the communities in which they worked.

In recent years, however, educational historians have also begun to investigate the other two forms of school memory, the public and the collective, which, for a long time, were not considered historiographically relevant.

Public school memory consists of the representation of schools and teachers in official representations and public commemorations promoted by local and national institutions on the basis of a precise policy of remembrance, i.e., a public use of the past aimed at acquiring consensus and strengthening the feeling of belonging to a specific communi-

³ The Project of Significant National Interest “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)” (prot. no.: 2017STEF2S), of three-year duration, was approved by Decree of the Director General for the Coordination, Promotion and Enhancement of Research of the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (no. 226 of 12 April 2019) and, subsequently, admitted for funding by the same Ministry with D.D. no. 984 of 21 May 2019. On the project, see R. Sani, J. Meda, «*School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation*». *Un progetto di ricerca innovativo e a marcata vocazione internazionale*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVII, n. 1, 2022, pp. 9-26.

⁴ The project involved scholars from the University of Macerata (lead partner), the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, the University of Florence and the Roma Tre University, as well as aggregate members from other Italian universities.

ty. Research has thus focused on gravestones, monuments, stamps and coins relating to educators and teachers working in Italian schools of all levels, but also to pedagogues, headmasters, school managers and officials of central and local administrations. This category also includes honours awarded to exponents and institutions in the realm of schools and education. Collective school memory, on the other hand, is made up of the many representations that the cultural industry (literature, film, music, etc.) and the world of information have offered over time of schools, teachers and students themselves. It is, in fact, a «social reconstruction of the past that results from the fusion of the ‘experienced school past’ (recalled by direct participants) with the ‘constructed school past’ (recalled by observers, readers and spectators)»⁵. Scholars then began to investigate the products of the various cultural promotion and dissemination agencies that were capable not only of preserving but also of constructing a shared memory, and then highlighted the fact that the representation of the school on the small and big screen – but also in works of art in illustrations and literary works – has undoubtedly contributed to forming in viewers, observers and readers «*clichés* or, in any case, specific images of our teachers – and therefore of the school – aimed at nurturing and, in some cases, even redefining the collective memory of Italians of the last century»⁶.

As a demonstration of the innovative and thorough research promoted on the topic of school memory in recent years, this publication presents a series of investigations conducted by young educational historians with the intention of contributing to promoting a broad methodological and historiographical comparison on the issues concerning the study of school memory and, at the same time, to initiate an organic comparative reflection on the same topic.

The scholars’ essays were presented at the international conference “The School and Its Many Pasts. School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation” (12-15 December 2022)⁷, during which historians – from Italy, Brazil, France, Switzerland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Ukraine, Germany, Hungary, Serbia and Israel – met. The contributions offer the opportunity to enrich the reflection on the topic, to establish valuable synergies and further forms of research collaboration and to give an authentically international scope to the in-depth study of a strand of investigation – that relating to school memory – which still has many stimuli and suggestions to offer to educational historians. The contributions highlight the heuristic potential of sources such as literary works, films and documentaries and photographs, but also of oral testimonies, diaries, school architecture and furnishings as well as gravestones, medals and awards of

⁵ Meda, Viñao, *School Memories: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, cit., p. 5.

⁶ P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando editore, 2019, p. 13.

⁷ The contributions were presented at the pre-conference “*Work in progress*”. *Research of Young Scholars on School Memories* on 13 December 2022. For a chronicle of the international conference, see L. Paciaroni, S. Montecchiani, V. Minuto, *The School and Its Many Pasts. School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation. Un recente convegno internazionale di studi*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVIII, n. 1, pp. 509-526.

distinction. The researchers also offer a timely reflection on the reconstruction and enhancement of school memory and the discovery of multiple interpretations of the school past. Indeed, there is no single school past, but there are multiple ones, sometimes non-conforming to historical reality but nevertheless real insofar as they are able to influence the vision that individuals or communities have of that past.

The book, therefore, aims to stimulate new and significant avenues of research so that a real qualitative leap can be made in studies aimed at delving into school memory, and therefore offering a genuinely comparative reading capable of accounting for contexts and scenarios that are not limited to the national or even the continental European sphere, but open to a truly global dimension.

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