

CALL FOR PAPERS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

THE SCHOOL AND ITS MANY PASTS
School Memories between Social Perception
and Collective Representation

(Macerata, 12-14 December 2022)

PRESENTATION

This call for papers is part of the research activities envisaged for the project of significant national interest entitled *School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)*. The intention is to continue the line of research inaugurated by the international symposium on *School Memories. New Trends in Historical Research into Education: Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological Issues*, which took place in Seville in 2015.

The research project focuses on **forms of school memory, understood as the individual, collective and public practice of remembering a common school past** (Yanes-Cabrera et al., 2017). **Individual school memory** consists of self-representation supplied by former teachers, members of the school administration, and pupils through oral and written testimonies (e.g., diaries, autobiographies and memoirs in general). Ego-documents have also been widely used as historical sources in the field of historical-educational research (Viñao Frago, 2005) to reconstruct the history of schooling using the lived experiences of its protagonists rather than legislative and institutional sources, in an attempt to open what has been defined as the “black box of schooling” (Julia, 1995).

Collective school memory, on the other hand, is composed of the many ways in which the culture industry (literature, cinema, music, etc.) and the world of information represent school time, teachers and pupils, and it is subject to appreciable transformations. These representations of school past become layered from generation to generation, partly superimposing themselves on personal memories, corrupting factual reality and consolidating themselves into **stereotyped narrations**. They may also alter our awareness of the past, which is thus transformed into a real **space in our imagination** that cannot be separated from scientifically-based historical reconstructions (Alfieri, 2019).

Finally, **public school memory** consists of how schools and teachers are represented in **official contexts and public commemorations** promoted by local and national institutions based on a precise **policy of memory**, or **public use of the past** aimed at gaining consensus and reinforcing the feeling of belonging to a specific community (Yanes-Cabrera et al., 2017). Unlike individual school memory, collective memory and public memory have barely

been touched on in historical-education research as they have not been considered a subject of historiographic importance for some time.

In recent years, however, school memory – in its various meanings – has been included in international historiographic thought and has become the subject of studies of notable interest in the field of the history of education both in Latin-American countries and in the Anglo-Saxon world.

The study of memory allows us to define how the present looks at the past and interprets or reinterprets it. In this sense, school memory does not interest us merely as a channel to access the schools of the past, but as a **key to understanding what we know today or believe we know about schools of the past and how far what we know corresponds to reality**, or whether our understanding is merely the result of prejudices and stereotypes that have become ingrained in the common sentiment, and difficult to uproot. The subject of this historical research therefore, does not consist simply of exploring school environments as they once were but consists instead of exploring the complex **process of defining the sentiment that has developed over time regarding schools at an individual and collective level**, based initially on lived school experiences, followed by other social and cultural agents which have contributed in part to redetermine it.

This new research perspective allows us to address an aspect whose historical dimension has up to now escaped the attention of experts in the field: **the evolution of the perceived social status of the various professional profiles involved in the processes of schooling and the public status of education** within a community, as well as the **public image of schools** and the national school system. Studying the methods of collective symbolic representation of schools and teaching over time will help to define the origin of certain burdens that continue to weigh on the public image of schools, as well as making us aware of the overall cultural dimension of these historical phenomena. In addition, studies will restore awareness to all actors in public education of themselves and their roles.

There is no unique, unequivocal school past. There are many of them, which often coexist and alternate with one another. They may conform more or less to historical reality, but they are nevertheless real and influence the views individuals or communities have of that past. This international conference aims to discover these school pasts.

THEMES

Below is a selection of potential research themes around which colleagues may construct their proposals:

- **reflections of a historiographic and methodological nature relating to the study of school memory and remembrances** (what are the potentials? And the risks? What is the relationship between historical knowledge and other types of knowledge used in analysing the complex “phenomenology of memory”? What are the possible epistemological and methodological considerations related to or deriving from this? How

far does historical reconstruction reach, and where does mythologising start? It's useful to underline that to correctly study the many representations of school pasts, it is necessary to possess in-depth knowledge of those pasts, which itself must be based on a preliminary investigation into the "hard-core of facts" (Carr, 1961) through rigorous historical research backed by the use of traditional sources. The **benefits for the history of education deriving from the adoption of a Public History approach (Bandini & Oliviero, 2019)** may also be highlighted, so that scientifically produced historical knowledge may be effectively linked to wider social contexts, to meet latent or emerging cultural needs)

- **"visual school memory" (Colleldemont, 2010) comprises indirect memories of schools of the past generated in us by pictorial, graphic and photographic representations created over time, and also by illustrations in literary works for both adults and children and in school publications** (how do the visual arts represent schools in a specific historical period? Does that idea of school correspond to the historical reality? Other sources include photo albums (Grosvenor, 2010), as well as school portraiture and "photos of the first day at school" (Wagnon, 2016), within the context of individual memory, and those of daily life at school or its most symbolic and ritual moments reproduced in certain public settings (e.g., exhibitions) with the precise aim of creating reminiscences and icons in the collective memory)
- **memory of oneself through oral testimony, diaries, autobiographies and memoirs that constitute the wide range of "ego-documents", which enable historians to research school contexts using the experiences of teachers and students and the actual educational practices performed in class.** These also include educational routines that inertially continue to be practised even beyond their natural decay time, the conscious breaking of the rules imposed by the school authorities, the teachers' resilience to radical school reforms, all kinds of teaching taboos and so on: these things can all contribute to shatter the stereotypical public image of schools which has been artfully publicised by institutions
- **forms and methods of collective symbolic representation of schools and teaching over time** (evolution of the public image of schools from places of civil growth, cultural progress and social redemption to antiquated institutions, "unsafe places", "refuges for layabouts with no prospects" and "places to park the children", analysing the possible causes of this; evolution of the collective perception of the role and aims of education and the perception of the social status of teachers and the public duty performed by them in schools of all levels; didactic narratives of school pasts and the creation of stereotyped, nostalgic images of a past in which schools were unquestionably better (but was this really the case?))
- **representation of the school past in literary works, in the popular imagination and the popular narrative, in films, on the radio, and on television** (the idea of school and the model of teacher and student – but also of headteachers and school inspectors – proposed by novels, short stories, films, television and radio programmes, popularising them and filtering them into the collective imagination. Which factors cause the image of

each of these to vary from positive to negative? What relationship is established between individual experiences and social coding? How are questions regarding, for example, religious, political and gender discrimination dealt with?); **in the same way, it is also interesting to analyse the representation of school pasts in advertisements and articles published in the daily press and periodicals, as well as documentaries, surveys and investigative television programmes**

- **official representations and public commemorations promoted by local and national institutions based on a precise policy of memory, or the public use of the past (Brunelli et al., 2019)** (centenaries and anniversaries of the introduction of basic laws and the establishment of the various levels of schooling, and university jubilees; centenaries of great authors of children’s literature, their works and their most famous creations; the production of statues and monuments, as well as simple commemorative plaques, dedicated to representatives from the worlds of school and educational thinking, at a national and local level (including unveiling ceremonies): the minting of coins, the production of banknotes and commemorative coin sets and the issue of postage stamps commemorating outstanding figures of educators, or particular anniversaries relating to public education; local and national exhibitions and displays dedicated to the history of schools; the naming of streets, squares and/or school buildings after prominent educationalists and teachers (D’Ascenzo, 2017), with particular reference to the selection criteria adopted); the granting of awards and presentation of medals and diplomas for merit and memory (Barausse, 2019) to municipal, educational or associated institutions as well as to teaching staff and school administrations, useful for acknowledging the professionalism and the social status of teaching staff and head teachers; promotion of the socialisation of memory through the constitution of forms of associationism aimed at giving value to educators awarded with decorations and recognized for their meritorious contribution to the school. All these elements have contributed to building an “imagined community” – to pick up on the historiographic concept introduced by Benedict Anderson (1983)
- **silence and oblivion, which – following on from the observations of Marc Augé (1998) and Paul Ricoeur (2000), according to whom oblivion is an integral part of memory – are the fruit of a precise policy of memory, or rather a public use of the past** (lacunae and neglect in public commemorations of schools, the reasons for which can be explained; the erasure of certain events occurring in schools of the past from the public celebrations that were widespread up to a certain period based on political upheavals and significant changes in collective sensitivities; the destruction or movement of memorials and monuments to different sites, as well as simple commemorative plaques, dedicated to outstanding figures in the teaching and schooling fields at a national and local level)
- **funeral celebrations of famous exponents from the worlds of school and education, at a local and national level**, promoted by friends and family to fulfil a private duty but publicly spread in order to emphasise the role they performed in the civil and cultural

development of the society. What sort of teaching model is proposed by the obituaries published in school magazines (Ascenzi & Sani, 2016), the eulogies given during funerals and the commemorative booklets printed by committees offering tributes to deceased teachers? How many state funerals have been held for famous teachers and educators and how many of them have had tombs and funeral monuments dedicated to them in monumental cemeteries and memorial chapels?

- **the creation of real “sites of school memory” (Meda, 2019), understood as material or symbolic spaces able to generate collective memories concerning school in general or individual school experiences** (the foundation of museums of school and/or educational history, or museums dedicated to prestigious educators or educational reformers; the musealisation of historical schools, seen as welding points between common school memories and local identities; the promotion of historic schools (Del Pozo Andrés, 2019); the opening of museums in places in which unique, unrepeatable educational experiences have occurred, or in the birthplaces of educators, reformers or educational thinkers)
- **the artificial construction – through the use of the historiographic category of “invention of tradition”, introduced by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) – by higher education institutes, colleges and universities, of actual “founding myths” regarding their origins to flaunt a long tradition of education, which will rank them in the collective imagination as prestigious and exclusive educational establishments and give legitimacy to their qualities and functions (Sani, 2012);** in this sense, it might also be interesting to study the role played by **school yearbooks (Dávila et al., 2020)** and by the **alumni associations** of these institutions in building real communities of memory, guardians of a heritage of stories and traditions able to generate a lasting feeling of identity
- **do things have a memory?** School memorabilia either kept in schools, appropriate museums or by their old owners, are indeed objects of the material culture of schools, but they are also emotional catalysts able to instinctively evoke the schooling pasts of individuals and the wider community (Brunelli, 2014); at a time when we now dread the disappearance of the future as a horizon of meaning in our lives and we surrender to the “retrotopia” of Zygmunt Bauman (2017), a “fashion for the past” is spreading more and more rapidly, especially in the field of cultural consumption, as a result of fairly widespread social groups reclaiming their identity. Convinced that they have not yet entirely fulfilled their “generational entelechy” (Mannheim, 1964), they are therefore bent on recovering their past, by re-implementing it, and the fruit of this socio-cultural phenomenon – based on the feeling of nostalgia, which is cleverly exploited by “vintage marketing” – is the revival of historic school brands, which come back into fashion after many decades

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CALENDAR

15 December 2021: deadline for sending proposals for papers

31 January 2022: notification of acceptance or refusal of proposals received

12-13-14 December 2022: Conference takes place

15 February 2023: deadline for final contributions to be published in the proceedings

VENUE

The conference sessions will be held at the headquarters of the **Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism** of the University of Macerata.

LANGUAGES

The official languages of the conference will be **French, English, Italian, Portuguese** and **Spanish**. However, speakers must undertake to present the final version of their contributions in **English** for publication in the official Conference Proceedings.

ENROLMENT

Scholars who are interested in taking part in the conference as speakers must present a proposal (abstract) of max. **3,000 characters (including spaces)**, which must include: first and last names of the author(s), institutional affiliation, paper title and a maximum of five keywords. Title, abstract and keywords must be uploaded both in the language used for the presentation and in English.

The deadline for submission is **15 December 2021**; enrolment must be carried out using the appropriate Google Form to be found in the dedicated section on the project's official website <http://www.memoriascolastica.it/>. A special commission of anonymous referees – appointed by the International Scientific Committee presidency – will evaluate the proposals presented, taking into account thematic relevance and scientific quality. The Organising Secretariat will notify those concerned of their acceptance or otherwise of their proposals **by 31 January 2022**.

A maximum of two papers will be permitted per speaker, including in collaboration with others.

Travel expenses will be the responsibility of the speakers and cannot be refunded.

PUBLICATION OF CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

After the conference, the works presented will be published with a high-profile publishing house, able to guarantee their distribution internationally.

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