

TEMA MONOGRÀFIC

From educational theories to school materialities: The genesis of the material history of school in Italy (1990-2020)¹
De les teories educatives a les materialitats escolars: la gènesi de la història material de l'escola a Itàlia (1990-2020)

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RESUM

Aquesta contribució té com a objectiu definir la gènesi i el desenvolupament de la història material de l'escola a Itàlia en els trenta anys compresos entre 1990 i 2020. A partir de la creixent influència determinada per la reflexió historiogràfica internacional

1 While this paper was jointly conceived by the two authors, the writing of the manuscript was divided between them as follows: Juri Meda drafted Sections 1, 2, and 5 and Simonetta Polenghi drafted Sections 3 and 4.

sobre els historiadors de l'educació italians, la contribució tractarà de descriure l'impuls proporcionat a aquesta tendència a principis de la dècada de 2000 pels treballs pioners sobre la història de la indústria editorial escolar, que van permetre observar per primera vegada els processos de producció i la complexa dinàmica comercial subjacent a la producció, circulació, adopció i ús de el llibre escolar a l'escola italiana. Aquests treballs van permetre determinar el paper fonamental de les principals editorials escolars italianes, inicialment en la comercialització de material didàctic i mobiliari escolar importats des de França i Alemanya i posteriorment en la seva producció directa a través de la progressiva emancipació de l'hegemonia estrangera i el naixement d'una indústria escolar nacional. En els primers vint anys de segle XXI, les investigacions s'han centrat més en com la producció a escala industrial de quaderns escolars, pissarres, mobiliari escolar i ajudes didàctiques per a l'ensenyament de les ciències i el seu ús sistemàtic a les escoles italianes van induir una homologació generalitzada dels mètodes d'ensenyament i processos d'aprenentatge.

PARAULES CLAU: escola, cultura material, història de l'educació, història econòmica, historiografia.

ABSTRACT

This paper offers an overview of the origins and development of the material history of schooling in Italy over the thirty years between 1990 and 2020. After examining the growing influence exerted on Italian historians of education by developments in international historiographical reflection, we describe the boost provided to the study of material history in the early 2000s by pioneering studies on the history of school publishing. The latter brought to light for the first time the production processes, market dynamics, and sales strategies underpinning the production, circulation, adoption and use of textbooks in Italian schools. These studies pointed up the fundamental role played by the leading national school publishing houses, initially in the marketing of educational materials and school furnishings imported from France and Germany and subsequently in producing them: as they gradually freed themselves from their earlier reliance on foreign suppliers, a domestic school supplies industry was born. In the first twenty years of the 21st century, studies have mainly focused on how the industrial production of exercise books, blackboards, school furnishings, and scientific teaching aids, and their adoption in Italian schools, served to achieve the universal standardization of teaching methods and learning processes.

KEY WORDS: school, material culture, history of education, economic history, historiography.

RESUMEN

Esta contribución tiene como objetivo definir la génesis y el desarrollo de la historia material de la escuela en Italia en los treinta años comprendidos entre 1990 y 2020. A partir de la creciente influencia determinada por la reflexión historiográfica internacional sobre los historiadores de la educación italianos, la contribución tratará de describir el impulso proporcionado a esta tendencia a principios de la década de 2000 por los trabajos pioneros sobre la historia de la industria editorial escolar, que permitieron observar por primera vez los procesos de producción y la compleja dinámica comercial subyacente a la producción, circulación, adopción y uso del libro escolar en la escuela italiana. Estos trabajos permitieron determinar el papel fundamental de las principales editoriales escolares italianas, inicialmente en la comercialización de material didáctico y mobiliario escolar importados desde Francia y Alemania y posteriormente en su producción directa a través de la progresiva emancipación de la hegemonía extranjera y el nacimiento de una industria escolar nacional. En los primeros veinte años del siglo XXI, las investigaciones se han centrado más en cómo la producción a escala industrial de cuadernos escolares, pizarras, mobiliario escolar y ayudas didácticas para la enseñanza de las ciencias y su uso sistemático en las escuelas italianas indujeron una homologación generalizada de los métodos de enseñanza y procesos de aprendizaje.

PALABRAS CLAVE: escuela, cultura material, historia de la educación, historia económica, historiografía.

I. DEVELOPMENTS IN INTERNATIONAL HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON ITALIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Novel developments in educational historiography from the 1990s onwards – when historians of education increasingly began to embrace the interpretive categories and methodological principles that decades earlier had underpinned the radical transformation of historiography as a whole (the so-called *nouvelle histoire*) – prompted a new approach to studying the history of education in Italy (similarly to other European countries²), as detailed by French historian Dominique Julia in an article published in the mid-1990s.³

2 On Julia's key contribution to the new educational historiography in Europe, see: VIÑAO FRAGO, Antonio. «Les disciplines scolaires dans l'historiographie européenne. Angleterre, France, Espagne», *Histoire de l'Éducation*, 125 (2010), p. 73-98.

3 See : JULIA, Dominique. «La culture scolaire comme objet historique», NÓVOA, António; DEPAEPE, Marc; JOHANNINGMEIER, Erwin V. (Eds.). *The Colonial Experience in Education: Historical Issues and Perspectives*. Ghent: Universiteit Gent, 1996, p. 353-382 («Paedagogica Historica»; Supplementary Series; vol. 1);

In what was to become a landmark work within modern educational historiography, Julia proposed viewing «school culture» as a historical object and – among the emergent lines of inquiry in the history of education – attributed key importance to the «history of school subjects» in light of its potential to offer a detailed picture of actual classroom dynamics.

From that point onwards, an ever-increasing number of historians focused on the historical development of school subjects and the related educational practices, within the broader framework of a «cultural history of education».⁴ In France, the historian André Chervel conducted numerous studies on the «history of school subjects», eventually specializing in this strand of research.⁵ In Belgium, Marc Depaepe and Frank Simon – in an article published shortly after Julia's cornerstone piece that is of equal interest but less well known to the Italian scientific community – promptly demonstrated the extraordinary heuristic potential of this field of inquiry, which placed everyday school experience with its spaces, timeframes, and actors at the heart of historical research.⁶ During this same period, two major conferences on the «social history of the classroom» – the first held at the University of Birmingham (1995) and the second in Toronto (1996) – were organized with a view to breaking with the history of education's traditional neglect of the need to reconstruct the social spaces of school learning: it was time to finally home in on these spaces, the routines and activities carried out in them, the learning experiences generated there, and the mediation of curricular contents. The

see also: JULIA, Dominique. «La cultura escolar come objeto histórico», MENEGUS, Margarita; GONZÁLEZ, Enrique (Eds.). *Historia de las Universidades modernas en Hispanoamérica: métodos y fuentes*. Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1995, p. 131-153; JULIA, Dominique. «Riflessioni sulla recente storiografia dell'educazione in Europa: per una storia comparata delle culture scolastiche», *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche*, n. 3 (1996), p. 119-147.

4 For further background on this theme, see: POPKEWITZ, Thomas S.; FRANKLIN, Barry M.; PEREYRA, Miguel A. (Eds.). *Cultural History and Education: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Schooling*. New York-London: Routledge Falmer, 2001; and especially: JULIA, Dominique. «La storia dell'educazione come storia culturale», *Contemporanea*, 2 (2004), p. 263-286.

5 Among Chervel's many works, see in particular: CHERVEL, André. «Des disciplines scolaires à la culture scolaire», *Education and Cultural Transmission: Historical Studies of Continuity and Change in Families, Schooling and Youth Cultures*. Ghent: Universiteit Gent, 1996, p. 181-195 («Paedagogica Historica»; Supplementary Series; vol. II); *La culture scolaire. Une approche historique*. Paris: Belin, 1998. For background on the materiality of school subjects more specifically, see: BELHOSTE, Bruno. «Culture scolaire et histoire des disciplines», *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche*, 12 (2005), p. 213-223.

6 Cf. DEPAEPE, Marc; SIMON, Frank. «Is There any Place for the History of "Education" in the "History of Education"? A Plea for the History of Everyday Educational Reality in-and outside Schools», *Paedagogica Historica*, xxxi, n. 1 (1995), p. 9-16.

innovative contents of this cycle of conferences were later published in a book edited by Ian Grosvenor, Martin Lawn, and Kate Rousmaniere.⁷

This book represented a key new departure in the historiographical developments that we have set out to describe here, because it was among the first works to directly link school culture with the material environment where it is produced and transmitted and by which it is inevitably influenced: the classroom. Not surprisingly therefore, the classroom soon became the object of exciting new lines of inquiry, particularly in Spain.

Already in 1996, the Spanish academic community had displayed a particular openness towards the newly emerging currents in European history of education;⁸ by the early 2000s, this interest had become its driving force, giving rise to highly innovative research output and inspiring many new lines of inquiry. The key milestone that marked this period was undoubtedly the publication of the proceedings of the *XII Coloquio Nacional de Historia de la Educación*, organized by the *Sociedad Española de Historia de la Educación (SEDHE)* in collaboration with the University of Burgos on 18-21 June 2003 and devoted to the «ethnohistory of schooling».⁹ The SEDHE event focused

7 GROSVENOR, Ian; LAWN, Martin; ROUSMANIERE, Kate (Eds.). *Silences and Images: The Social History of the Classroom*. New York: Peter Lang, 1999.

8 We are referring here to the article: ESCOLANO BENITO, Agustín. «Postmodernity or High Modernity? Emerging Approaches in the New History of Education», *Paedagogica Historica*, xxxii, n. 2 (1996), p. 325-341, which reviewed emergent themes in the new history of education, especially those on which ethnographic methodological approaches were then being brought to bear, a development that was occurring later than in other historical disciplines.

9 In reality, using this term to define the history of material culture in schools could give rise to misunderstandings, given that ethnohistory – as a scientific discipline – has predominantly concerned itself with the historical reconstruction of events in societies of ethnological interest, that is to say, in primitive (generally non-European) societies that were illiterate and therefore essentially ahistorical. Accordingly, an «ethnohistory of schooling» would be a contradiction in terms, given that the schooling process is typical of complex societies, constituting their main instrument for fighting illiteracy; it would be different to speak about the «ethnohistory of education», which could plausibly investigate – through the study of folkloric sources – the educational apparatuses of «low-ranking» pre-industrial cultures and their historical survival within complex societies. In conclusion, for these reasons, we feel that it is more appropriate to refer to the «material history of schooling» than to the «ethnohistory of schooling», although the latter term does bear the advantage of expressing the discomfort of historians engaged in «cutting edge» research with limiting themselves to using classical interpretive categories and traditional research instruments when this might mean compromising the outcomes of their inquiry. In a 2012 article, in a journal published by the *Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul*, Antonio Viñao Frago also came down on the side of ascribing this new and fruitful strand of historiographical research to the category of the «material history of schooling» rather than to the «ethnohistory of schooling», on the grounds that a historiographical lens (with the capacity to leverage – within a multidisciplinary framework – «the interpretive categories, methodological models and scientific instruments of economic history and – more specifically – the history of commerce, industry, and enterprise») would be more appropriate than an ethno-anthropological one

on the study of «material culture in schools» via the ethnographic registers in which this culture may be observed, that is to say via objects, images, texts, and oral sources describing actual educational practices from a historical perspective.¹⁰ The output of this academic gathering was of great interest, especially the papers presented in the section «Los objetos de la escuela y la historia material de la enseñanza» [School objects and the material history of teaching], one of the best attended of the conference.

The publication of this volume definitively confirmed, from a historiographical perspective, both the gap between «school culture» and the «material culture of schooling» – where the latter is understood as the history of the resources and methods employed in the production and consumption of educational objects and instruments¹¹ – and the division of the original field of inquiry into two distinct, albeit closely interconnected, branches. Spanish scholars embarked on researching the «material culture of schooling» in increasing numbers, ultimately making a prominent contribution to scientific output in the field over the first decade of the new millennium. Their lead was later followed by historians of education in the rest of Europe.

Indeed, following this «material turn» by Spanish historians of education, in 2005 the English historians Martin Lawn and Ian Grosvenor¹² – with whom a fruitful scientific partnership was already underway – began editing an anthological work on the «materiality of schooling». Significantly, this volume in-

for the purposes of analysing the «broad panoply of school objects» and adequately bringing to light their «nature as industrial and commercial products with their own designers, manufacturers, distributors, clients, and consumers» (cf. VIÑAO FRAGO, Antonio. «La historia material e inmaterial de la escuela: memoria, patrimonio y educación», *Educação*, xxxv, 1 (jan.-abr. 2012), p. 7-17; cit. on p. 7).

10 Cf. JIMÉNEZ EGUIZÁBAL, Juan Alfredo et al. (Eds.). *Etnohistoria de la escuela: actas del XII Coloquio Nacional de Historia de la Educación (Burgos, 18-21 de junio de 2003)*. Burgos: Universidad de Burgos – Sociedad Española de Historia de la Educación, 2003.

11 This definition is a reworded version of the well-known definition of «material culture» formulated by Polish historian Witold Kula (cf. KULA, Witold. *Problemy i metody historii gospodarczej*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1963) and is stated in: MEDA, Juri. «Contro il tanto deprecatò mercantilismo scolastico»: i controversi rapporti tra produttori di quaderni, insegnanti e cartolai e l'intervento del regime fascista», MEDA, Juri; MONTINO, Davide; SANI, Roberto (Eds.), *School Exercise Books. A Complex Source for a History of the Approach to Schooling and Education in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Florence: Polistampa, 2010, p. 550.

12 The following articles are of particular note: GROSVENOR, Ian; LAWN, Martin. «This is what we are and this is what we do»: teacher identity and teacher work in mid-Twentieth Century English Education Discourse», *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, ix, 3 (2001), p. 355-370; GROSVENOR, Ian; LAWN, Martin, «Ways of seeing in education and schooling: emerging historiographies», *History of Education*, xxx, n. 2 (2001), p. 105-108; GROSVENOR, Ian; LAWN, Martin, «When in doubt, preserve»: exploring the traces of teaching and material culture in English schools», *History of Education*, xxx, 2 (2001), p. 117-129.

cluded two essays by Spanish authors,¹³ proof of growing international interest in the work of Spanish historiographers.¹⁴ It homed in on the study of various kinds of educational objects and instruments that had long been overlooked and viewed as minor or secondary sources to be collected by individual school museums, recognizing that these same artefacts – when appropriately linked to the educational practices implemented in classrooms and schools at the time of their use – can contribute to a richer and more complete historical reconstruction of what actually happened in schools. The material history studies conducted by Lawn and Grosvenor represent, in some sense, the natural evolution of the «social history of the classroom» that had been their focus from 1995 to 1999. They marked a broadening of their authors' heuristic perspective beyond the narrow confines of the place where schooling is delivered (the classroom), understood as a container for the actors in the learning process, their educational practices, and the tools used to mediate the principles and contents such practices were intended to convey. Indeed, the heuristic focus of this new line of inquiry comprehended the material dimension of education, which – following the introduction of mass schooling – could no longer be viewed as a purely intellectual exercise in transmitting knowledge.¹⁵

A further overview of the “material culture of schools” was offered by the Spanish historian Agustín Escolano Benito in 2007, when he curated an anthology of essays to mark the centenary of the *Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios*.¹⁶ Escolano's own introductory essay – written from the perspective of a scholar who had seriously and productively studied this theme – provided key insight into the historiographic importance of the body of research on the «material culture of schooling» conducted during the decade spanning the late 1990s and early 2000s. Escolano noted that the preceding years had seen the beginnings, within the history of education, of a new historiographical line of inquiry into «material objects in schools»; this new research agenda did not bear an exclusively historical-technological focus but also encompassed

13 The two authors in question were Antonio Viñao Frago and Pedro Luis Moreno Martínez, both based at the University of Murcia, and both among the most active Spanish exponents of this innovative field of inquiry.

14 LAWN, Martin; GROSVENOR, Ian (Eds.). *Materialities of Schooling: Design, Technology, Objects*, Routines. Oxford: Symposium Books, 2005.

15 For further background on this concept, see also: DANE, Jacques; EARLE, Sarah-Jane; VAN RUITEN, Tijs. «The Material Classroom», BRASTER, Sjaak; GROSVENOR, Ian; DEL POZO ANDRÉS, Maria del Mar (Eds.). *The Black Box of Schooling: a Cultural History of the Classroom*. Brussels: Peter Lang, 2011, p. 263-276.

16 ESCOLANO BENITO, Agustín (Ed.). *La cultura material de la escuela*. Berlanga de Duero: CEINCE, 2007.

investigation of the cultural meanings of these objects, the ways in which they were used, their relationship with the actors in the learning process, their role in the educational practices actually implemented in schools, and their physical location within school learning spaces. In Escolano's view, therefore, for history of education research to retain its epistemological identity, scholars should not limit themselves to describing the technological and material evolution of individual objects used in schools, but should strive to understand the relationship between these objects and the context in which they were produced and used, seeking to develop a sort of «archaeology» of objects and to relate this to their «genealogy».¹⁷ This was the umpteenth exercise in «staking out historiographical boundaries» with respect to a new field of inquiry that was rich in stimuli but also full of hazardous distractions for scholars those investigating the material culture of schools were at risk of deviating from the history of education proper, thus cancelling out their innovative contribution to the broader discipline.

2. ITALIAN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL THINKING: FIRST STEPS AND THE IMPETUS PROVIDED BY STUDIES ON THE HISTORY OF SCHOOL PUBLISHING

Italian studies on the history of material culture in schools have had their own peculiar genesis, and it is only over the last ten years that they have become open to the influence of international historiography.¹⁸ It is true – as Mirella D'Ascenzo pointed out¹⁹ – that the first scholar to use the term «material school life» was Dario Ragazzini in 1983;²⁰ however, it is equally true that the

17 ESCOLANO BENITO, Agustín. «La cultura material de la escuela», ESCOLANO BENITO, Agustín (Ed.), *La cultura material de la escuela...* *Op. cit.*, p. 15-27 (cit. p. 21). The author has recently restated the same general principles in: ESCOLANO BENITO, Agustín, *La cultura empirica della scuola: esperienza, memoria, archeologia*. Ferrara: Volta la Carta, 2016 (the first Italian-language edition of which bears out the keen interest of Spanish and Portuguese scholars in Italian historiographical research and its potential.)

18 For an initial reconstruction of developments in Italian studies on the history of material culture in schools, see: MEDA, Juri. «La "historia material de la escuela" como factor de desarrollo de la investigación histórico-educativa en Italia», MORENO MARTÍNEZ, Pedro Luis; SEBASTIÁN VICENTE, Ana (Eds.). *Patrimonio y Etnografía de la escuela en España y Portugal durante el siglo XX*. Murcia: Sociedad Española para el Estudio del Patrimonio Histórico-Educativo – Centro de Estudios sobre la Memoria Educativa (CEME), 2012, p. 17-32.

19 Cf. D'ASCENZO, Mirella. «Dalla mostra al museo? Ipotesi per un museo della scuola e dell'educazione», *Ricerche di Pedagogia e Didattica*, VII, n. 1 (2012), p. 20-21 (footnote 7).

20 Cf. RAGAZZINI, Dario. *Storia della scuola italiana. Linee generali e problemi di ricerca*. Florence: Le Monnier, 1983 (especially, p. 111-118); the concept was taken up again by the author in: RAGAZZINI, Dario, *Tempi di scuola e tempi di vita: organizzazione sociale e destinazione dell'infanzia nella storia italiana*. Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 1997.

meaning then attributed to this expression – while most consequential from a historiographical perspective – is slightly different to that usually attributed to the «material culture of schooling». Indeed, as interpreted by Ragazzini, it stood for the practices, rituals and customs that characterize and dictate the rhythm of school life, rather than the materiality of the classroom and its equipment, in terms of furnishings, teaching aids and student materials.²¹ And indeed «school things» were the theme of a chapter authored by Egle Becchi in 1996 for the volume «Storia dell'infanzia», co-edited with Dominique Julia, on the theme of changes in the use of educational materials and teaching aids over time.²² However, the avenues of inquiry mapped out in these early works on the material dimension of educational processes were not immediately pursued: the historiographical discipline was only gradually beginning to free itself from epistemological constraints shaped by the decade-long dominance of the history of educational ideas and theories, and to take on board the methodological lessons of social and cultural history.

Thus, it was not until after the turn of the millennium that systemic research programs were finally conducted in this field. The first of these focused on schoolbooks, whose heuristic value had already been brought to light by the pioneering works of Ilaria Porciani, Marino Raicich, Marcella Bacigalupi, and Piero Fossati.²³ The ambitious TESEO project – led by

21 In reality, however, the revolutionary studies produced in the early Twentieth century by Emilia Formigginì Santamaria and Giuseppe Manacorda, who to some extent perceived the same need for historiographical innovation expressed some years later by the French *Annales* school, had already been amply treated in that which – following a concept developed by Saverio Fausto De Dominicis in the second volume of his *Linee di pedagogia elementare* (Roma: Società editrice Dante Alighieri, 1897) – the two scholars termed the «internal history of schools». For example, in 1912, in Emilia Formigginì Santamaria's *L'istruzione pubblica nel Ducato Estense, 1772-1860* (Genova: Formigginì, 1912), an entire chapter was devoted to *La vita interna della scuola* (p. 95-186) in terms of: how schools were organized and what educational practices teachers actually implemented in the classroom. A year later, Giuseppe Manacorda in the second volume of his *Storia della scuola in Italia: Il Medio evo*, entitled: *Storia interna della scuola medioevale italiana* (Milan: Remo Sandron, 1913), presented abundant documentary sources illuminating specific topics such as the evolution of the role of elementary teacher, the teacher-pupil relationship, disciplinary methods, and school curricula, but also school books, school buildings and even the educational materials in use in schools; in order to describe the last-mentioned category – which was not treated in detail in the written sources – he drew on representations featured in works of art.

22 BECCHI, Egle. «Cose di scuola», BECCHI, Egle; JULIA, Dominique (Eds.). *Storia dell'infanzia. Vol. II: Dal Settecento a oggi*. Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1996 (French ed.: Paris Seuil 1998). p. 160-174.

23 We are referring here to the following works: PORCIANI, Ilaria. «Il libro di testo come oggetto di ricerca: i manuali scolastici nell'Italia unita», *Storia della scuola e storia d'Italia*. Bari: De Donato, 1982, p. 237-271; BACIGALUPI, Marcella; FOSSATI, Piero. *Da plebe a popolo: l'educazione popolare nei libri di scuola dall'Unità d'Italia alla Repubblica*. Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1986; RAICICH, Marino, *Di grammatica in retorica. Lingua, scuola, editoria nella Terza Italia*. Rome: Archivio «Guido IZZI», 1996.

Giorgio Chiosso and completed over a ten-year period (1998-2008) – remains a key point of reference for studies on this topic. The aim of that program was to map the editorial production of Italian school books, understood not only as «educational objects» but also as «economic objects» that were conditioned by the consensus-seeking requirements of political institutions, publisher's cultural preferences, and the laws of the market.²⁴ Consequently, the history of school publishing dominated the research interests of Italian historians of education for the entire first decade of the new millennium. It was also the object of authoritative treatments by historians of the contemporary era (such as Monica Galfré and Nicola Labanca) and historians of publishing (such as Maria Iolanda Palazzolo and Gianfranco Tortorelli).²⁵

The large corpus of studies on school publishing produced between 2000 and 2010 undoubtedly fostered the inauguration of a parallel line of inquiry into the history of the material culture of school, which retained a solidly historiographical approach without any *a priori* assimilation of the ethno-anthropological influence coming from Spain.

Thus, in Italy, the «history of material culture in school» has corresponded in practice to a «history of the school supplies industry», with a particular focus on production processes and complex market dynamics in an economic sector that is entirely unique. This history begins with the first signs of mass cultural consumption, which took hold across European countries – albeit at different speeds – during the period spanning the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scholarly interest in the school supplies industry was inspired by

24 The project led to the publication of two major catalogues of Italian school publishing houses during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: CHIOSSO, Giorgio (Ed.). *TESEO: tipografi e editori scolastico-educativi dell'Ottocento*. Milan: Bibliografica, 2003; CHIOSSO, Giorgio (Ed.). *TESEO '900: editori scolastico-educativi del primo Novecento*. Milan: Bibliografica, 2008.

25 We are referring here to the following works: CHIOSSO, Giorgio (Ed.). *Il libro di scuola tra Sette e Ottocento*. Brescia: La Scuola, 2000; BETTI, Carmen (Ed.). *Percorsi del libro per la scuola fra Otto e Novecento. La tradizione toscana e le nuove realtà del primo Novecento in Italia*. Florence: Pagni-Regione Toscana, 2004; ASCENZI, Anna; SANI, Roberto (Eds.). *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo. L'opera della Commissione centrale per l'esame dei libri di testo da Giuseppe Lombardo Radice ad Alessandro Melchiorri (1923-1928)*. Milan: Vita & Pensiero, 2005; SALVIATI, Carla Ida (Ed.). *Paggi e Bemporad editori per la scuola. Libri per leggere, scrivere e far di conto*. Florence: Giunti, 2007; GALFRÉ, Monica. *Il regime degli editori. Libri, scuola e fascismo*. Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2005; TARGHETTA, Fabio. *La capitale dell'impero di carta. Editori per la scuola a Torino nella prima metà del Novecento*. Turin: SEI, 2007; BARAUSSE, Alberto (Ed.). *Il libro per la scuola dall'Unità al fascismo. La normativa sui libri di testo dalla legge Casati alla riforma Gentile (1861-1922)*. Macerata: Alfabetica, 2008; ASCENZI, Anna; SANI, Roberto (Eds.). *Il libro per la scuola nel ventennio fascista. La normativa sui libri di testo dalla riforma Gentile alla fine della seconda guerra mondiale (1923-1945)*. Macerata: Alfabetica, 2009.

the earlier focus on a specific branch of this industry, the publishing sector, whose mission was to produce textbooks and readers for schools of all levels. Specifically, the publication of increasingly in-depth studies on the school publishing sector and – especially – the striking outcomes of the first systematic census of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century school publishers and printers, stimulated further research into the school supplies industry more broadly. Thanks to that first wave of research, historians of education became aware of the need to draw on a wider range of sources than those they had traditionally relied on, for example by consulting company statutes and accounts, sales catalogues, industrial yearbooks or lists of companies registered with the Chambers of Commerce. All these sources had more to do with the industrial nature of school publishing than with its cultural dimension and none of them had never been taken into consideration in the past.

3. FROM THE HISTORY OF PUBLISHING TO THE HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL SUPPLIES INDUSTRY VIA THE STUDY OF EXERCISE BOOKS

It was no coincidence that – shortly after the 2003 publication of the first catalogue listing Nineteenth-century school publishers and printers (TESEO) – the *Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa (INDIRE)* in Florence launched a wide-ranging and in-depth study – to be coordinated by Juri Meda – on the historical evolution of that quintessential item of school material, the exercise book. The historic Florentine institute holds a vast collection of school exercise books and learning products of various kinds, which are divided into a series of archival funds. In the interest of making these materials more accessible to researchers, the institute went about developing software to support a semantically-indexed electronic catalogue. The FISQED software application – whose final version was completed in 2006 – classifies school materials in terms of their type, provenance, and location index; it describes their physical characteristics, situates them in space and time, indexes the names of the students and teachers responsible for their contents, and reports the names of the schools the items came from; it provides a certain amount of information about the catalogue items' conceptual and graphic content by providing a brief abstract for each and a thesaurus-based semantic index for the entire database. In addition to this information, the application offers a detailed description of each «support-container» in its own

right, that is to say, of a «commercial product» (exercise book, drawing album, homework notebook, etc.) that was purchased and subsequently completed by a pupil, and that bears other information of historical interest (manufacturer and printer; authors and illustrators; format in terms of whether ruled with lines, squares, etc.; watermarking of the paper; etc.).²⁶

The FISQED software has been used to analytically catalogue the «Materiali scolastici» [School Materials] collection of INDIRE; this data is kept in a cumulative national inventory, which may be accessed online via the project portal.²⁷ The inventory also stores data of other collections of exercise books and learning products that have joined the project and are currently being catalogued. The cataloguers with responsibility for analytically describing the diverse range of materials held in these estates have been provided with a set of tools to ensure the highest possible level of conformity with predefined standards of description. These tools include a detailed list of manufacturers and printers of exercise books, which was drawn up – with disambiguation provided where necessary – based on data entered in the descriptive fields by pilot project cataloguers and subsequently compared with other reference data drawn from industrial yearbooks and sales catalogues. It comprises over 270 publishing houses, paper factories, printers and in some cases printshops and bookshop-stationers, which – in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – produced school books and stationery, such as the various kinds of exercise book, homework notebooks, drawing albums, scrapbooks and colouring books.²⁸

This list was the outcome of one of the most systematic and well-organized investigations ever conducted on one of the longest standing objects in the material culture of schools. It helped to shed light on a world – the manufacturing of school materials and teaching aids – that had previously remained unexplored. The studies carried out at this time advanced our understanding of the full-blown «genetic mutation» undergone by this most classical of aids

26 For further background on the concept of «commercial support-container» specifically, see: TRIGARI, Marisa. «La documentazione che fa la differenza: densità semantica, massa critica e integrazione virtuale nella Rete documentaria nazionale FISQED», *School Exercise Books*, cit., p. 55-56.

27 <http://www.indire.it/progetto/fisqed/> (checked on 13/08/2020).

28 This list was subsequently published in: *Appendice 1 – Elenco dei produttori e stampatori di quaderni attivi in Italia tra 1861 e 1950*, in MEDA, Juri. *Mezzi di educazione di massa: saggi di storia della cultura materiale della scuola tra XIX e XX secolo*. Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2016, p. 163-173. This book also contained a list of manufacturers of school furniture that supplied Italian schools over the period 1880-960 (p. 184-187) and a list of manufacturers of stationery, school materials, teaching aids, and science equipment that were active in the Italian market between 1860 and 1960 (p. 184-198).

to children's school work, which at a certain point went from being a hand-crafted product to an industrial one that was increasingly mass-produced and mass-marketed. The similarities with the schoolbook, whose evolving physical characteristics have been studied by the team of scholars coordinated by Chiosso, are numerous and suggest stimulating new lines of inquiry.

The preliminary outcomes of these studies were presented to the scientific community during a conference entitled «I quaderni scolastici: una fonte per la storia dell'educazione» [School exercise books: a source for the history of education], held at the Catholic University of Brescia on 27 October 2005.²⁹ In a paper delivered at this conference, Juri Meda explored the exercise book as a material object, also offering a detailed statistical analysis of the data in the reference list of producers and printers of exercise books that had been drawn up for the FISQED cataloguers.³⁰ In this case too, it was clear that the new work presented was a direct offshoot of the recent studies on school publishing: exercise books were now viewed as sources for a «history of minor school publishing»,³¹ an ambiguous definition that nonetheless reflected the desire to build on the fruitful studies on school publishing of the preceding years and leverage their innovative methods to extend the scope of inquiry to other segments of the highly diversified school supplies chain.³² This definition was encouraged by the fact that school publishers' sales catalogues included – alongside books and manuals – an extremely lengthy list of other materials that were distributed but not manufactured by the publishing house, such as stationery items, teaching aids, science equipment, and even school furniture and fittings.

29 The conference proceedings were published in the special issue: «I quaderni di scuola tra Otto e Novecento», *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche in Italia*, n. 13 (2006), p. 13-188.

30 On this conference paper, see: CHARTIER, Anne-Marie. «Notes critiques», *Histoire de l'Éducation*, 118 (2008), p. 143-146.

31 Cf. MEDA, Juri. «Quaderni di scuola: nuove fonti per la storia dell'editoria scolastica minore», *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche in Italia*, n. 13 (2006), p. 73-98.

32 This need was more recently reaffirmed by Giorgio Chiosso, who wound up his presentation at the *I Workshop Italo-Español de Historia de la Cultura Escolar* (Berlanga de Duero, 14-16 novembre 2011), by observing that: «Many lines of inquiry remain to be explored and charted, some of which are highly promising (I will only cite by way of example the relationship between the evolution of school subjects/text books and developments in the production sector parallel to the school publishing industry proper, which often marketed [the former's] offerings, such as teaching aids, gymnastics equipment, geographical maps and school furniture), but at least we are now equipped to navigate a territory that had long remained virtually unknown» (CHIOSO, Giorgio. «La manualistica scolastica in Italia: tematiche, metodologie, orientamenti», MEDA, Juri; BADANELLI, Ana María (Eds.). *La historia de la cultura escolar en Italia y en España: balance y perspectivas. Actas del I Workshop Italo-Español de Historia de la Cultura Escolar* (Berlanga de Duero, 14-16 novembre 2011). Macerata: EUM, 2013, p. 59).

Scholarly awareness of the extraordinary semantic complexity and the far from secondary methodological implications inherent in this new line of historiographical research culminated in September 2007, when the University of Macerata and INDIRE jointly organized the international symposium «School Exercise Books: a Complex Source for a History of the Approach to Schooling and Education in the 19th and 20th Centuries».

Among the numerous conference sessions scheduled, one was entitled «An article of stationery or an editorial product? The exercise book as a source for the history of educational publishing», while the relative call for papers invited a focus on «the exercise book as an editorial object, produced by specialized publishers, distributed via specific commercial channels, and subject to normative processes defining its functions, formats, and graphic design. Of particular interest, therefore, is the process by which the exercise book's graphic design and internal graphic space were codified, leading to the development of different sizes and styles of ruling and their gradual standardization over time». The title given to this session was emblematic. On the one hand it mistakenly (as observed above) clung to the notion that the exercise book might represent a «source for the history of educational publishing». On the other hand, however, it asked – somewhat rhetorically – whether it was actually an item of stationery or a true «editorial product». In sum, the field was proceeding step by step, with the occasional stumble, towards the definitive recognition of the exercise book (and by extension of other basic student materials) as an «industrial product».

The conference organizers' hopes were disappointed: few scholars presented papers at the session on exercise books as an editorial object, showing that this line of inquiry still had few adherents, including at the international level.³³ Thus, when the proceedings were later published in 2010, this small number of papers were grouped together with those presented at another session on the exercise book as an iconographic source, under a new heading: «Tools of Mass Education: the Exercise Book as a Source for a History of the School Industry and Market». The historiographical domain in which to situate

33 Significantly, the two papers most salient to the theme outlined in the call for papers were presented by Italian scholars: ASCENZI, Anna. «La Cartiere Pigna e i quaderni scolastici della "Terza Italia" (1870-1945)», *School Exercise Books*. cit., p. 487-505; MEDA, Juri. «Contro il tanto deprecoato mercantilismo scolastico», op. cit., p. 507-551. For an analysis of these studies' contribution to the developing history of material culture in Italian schools, cf.: SANI, Roberto. «Bilancio della ricerca sui quaderni scolastici in Italia», MEDA, Juri; BADANELLI, Ana María (Eds.). *La historia de la cultura escolar en Italia y en España*. Op. cit., p. 83-103.

studies of school supplies and teaching aids as material objects appeared to have been definitively established. From the vague «history of minor school publishing», we had now shifted to speaking about the history of the «school supplies industry», a category that had never previously been contemplated.

In his introduction to the published proceedings of the section on the exercise book as a material object, Juri Meda attempted to provide a more targeted and detailed explanation of the complex category of sources now to be labelled «tools of mass education». These consisted of a wide and diverse range of educational materials, which are to be used with or without the mediation of the teacher and are designed to bring about key learning processes in an undifferentiated plurality of beneficiaries. The evident mingling of media and educational characteristics in the exercise book as well as in many other educational materials within the same broad category arose from the progressive massification of educational processes that took place at the turn of the twentieth century, leading to an exponential increase in the production of school materials and thereby fostering as we shall see – at both the formal and informal levels, – the standardization of learning processes.³⁴

4. THE MATURING OF A NEW INTERPRETATION OF THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF SCHOOLS

The results of these early studies bolstered scholars' conviction that the exercise book was not the only educational material to have become – from a certain point onwards and as a function of specific dynamics – a mass-distributed industrial product, as well as a full-fledged consumer product: in other words, both an outcome and an expression of the ongoing expansion of the school supplies market. This hypothesis was put forward for the first time by Juri Meda in a 2010 article in the journal *History of Education & Children's Literature*³⁵ and later formalized in a book published in 2016.³⁶

34 Cf. MEDA, Juri. «The Exercise Book as a Material Object», *School Exercise Books*. Op. cit., p. xxv-xxviii.

35 MEDA, Juri. «Mezzi di educazione di massa. Nuove fonti e nuove prospettive di ricerca per una "storia materiale della scuola" tra XIX e XX secolo», *History of Education & Children's Literature*, vi, 1 (2011), p. 253-279.

36 MEDA, Juri. *Mezzi di educazione di massa: saggi di storia della cultura materiale della scuola tra XIX e XX secolo*. Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2016.

Here, Meda outlined in detail his theory about tools of mass education, or the vast assortment of school furniture and educational materials that at a certain stage in history began to be produced on an industrial scale and serialized with a view to inducing a generalized standardization of teaching methods, learning processes, and educational content. He specifically examined the evolution of the school desk in the second half of the nineteenth century and that of the exercise book in the first half of the twentieth century, showing that these items went from being handcrafted to being industrial products with particular formal characteristics, as the process of mass schooling drove the emergence of a flourishing new market for school supplies.³⁷ Meda analysed the progressive entry of the Italian industrial sector into the production of school furniture and educational materials, a segment that had initially been dominated by foreign manufacturers. He also examined the use of industrial patents, with a view to shedding light on the dynamics underlying the conception, design, and industrial production of school supplies and the commercial strategies adopted by manufacturers to enhance their market share and penetration (e.g., by taking part in international exhibitions and trade fairs where they were often received medals and honourable mentions).³⁸

A key contribution to the development of this theory was the 2010 publication of an interesting study by Pierre Mœglin, a professor of information and communication sciences at the University of Paris 13 and director of the *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Paris Nord*, on what he defines as *industries éducatives* [educational industries],³⁹ or companies specialized in the production of educational materials and teaching aids.

37 In 2017, Meda once again remarked on the multiple interrelationships between the affirmation of the simultaneous method of instruction in Italian classrooms, the progressive advance of compulsory schooling, and the proliferation of educational materials being used on an increasingly vast scale to enhance the mediation of learning – previously left entirely up to the teacher – with the aim of standardizing educational processes. See: MEDA, Juri, «Genesi ed evoluzione dei consumi scolastici in Italia tra XIX e XX secolo», *Rivista di storia dell'educazione*, VII, 2 (2017), p. 103-117; this article featured in the special issue «Educazione, scuola e consumo: analisi e prospettive storico-educative» [Education, school and consumption: historical-educational analysis and perspectives] n. 2 (2017) of *Rivista di storia dell'educazione*, edited by Stefano Oliviero (p. 7-241).

38 Meda returned to the theme of industrial patents in: MEDA, Juri. «Patentes e monopólios industriais: novas fontes para uma história da indústria escolar. Primeiras sondagens nos arquivos italianos (1880-1960)», GASPARD DA SILVA, Vera Lucia; DE SOUZA, Gizele; CASTRO, César Augusto (Eds.). *Cultura material escolar em perspectiva histórica: escritas e possibilidades*. Vitória: EDUFES Editora, 2018, p. 452-459.

39 MŒGLIN, Pierre. *Les industries éducatives*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France – PUF, 2010.

According to Mœglin, the extraordinary growth seen around the turn of the twentieth century in this sector of production was helped by multiple factors; however, it mainly arose from the need to impose an efficient and rational model of elementary school education that emulated the rigidly structured production processes of the emergent capitalist economic system. The idea was to develop «educational prostheses» with the capacity to speed up and consolidate learning and significantly reduce rates of academic failure. In order to achieve these goals, as the US psychologist Jerome Bruner – a fervent supporter of educational structuralism and programmed instruction – suggested in a book published in 1996,⁴⁰ educational technologies were introduced into schools on a vast scale, with a view to teaching as many people as possible in the least time and with better outcomes.⁴¹

The only flaw in Mœglin's work was the perspective from which he chose to analyse his question. He attributed the technologization of the classroom and the increase in the range of educational materials for students entirely to the modernization of Western society during the Second and Third Industrial Revolutions. In his view, a form of progressivist determinism pushed a society undergoing constant scientific and cultural development to deliberately equip schools and students with educational materials and learning aids with the end goal of making the new generations progress even more rapidly. While a broader pattern of modernization undoubtedly contributed to these developments in education, we nonetheless contend that the introduction into schools of new technologies and additional materials should also be examined from an economic point of view. This implies viewing these innovations as not only arising from a positivist quest for progress on the part of far-sighted Western education authorities, but equally as shaped by the efforts of commercial enterprises. The entrepreneurial class saw the expansion of the school supplies market as an extraordinary opportunity to make profit and not only attempted to cater for schools' demand for educational materials but actively sought to continually create new needs.

It is clear that Mœglin's findings contributed to a further redefinition of the directions of educational historiographical inquiry. The merit of his work – although it fell short of providing a comprehensive overview and only drew

40 Cf. BRUNER, Jerome. *The Culture of Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.

41 For further background on this theme, see also: CUBAN, Larry. *Teachers and machines: the classroom use of technology since 1920*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1986, which was not widely read in Italy.

passing conclusions from a historiographical perspective (Mœglin is not a historian) – was to further broaden the heuristic reach of the «material culture of schools». The material history of education was now becoming a history of the resources and methods employed in the production and consumption of educational materials and technologies. As such, it necessarily took into account the economic processes associated with the advent of mass education and its role in fostering the development of a new sector of production with a flourishing market of its own. A further consideration here is that just as Spanish scholars – when initiating their inquiry into the close relationship between teaching and educational objects – were obliged to draw on ethno-anthropology (which supplied some of the interpretive tools they needed to analyse material sources held in school museums⁴²), so too – in this case – the history of education would do well to embrace a multidisciplinary approach and similarly leverage the interpretive categories, methodological models, and research instruments of economic history, especially business history and the history of industries.⁴³

5. A CONTINUOUSLY GROWING STRAND OF RESEARCH

Another scholar who pursued the line of historiographical inquiry that, from the history of school publishing, led to the first historical studies on the school supplies industry was Fabio Targhetta: first in 2006 with a paper on the production of educational materials and science equipment by the publishing company Paravia⁴⁴ (which was particularly active in this sector as we shall

42 It is interesting to note in this regard that, in Spain, the following is still considered as a key reference work: SACCHETTO, Pier Paolo. *El objeto informador. Los objetos en la escuela: entre la comunicación y el aprendizaje*. Barcelona: Gedisa Ed., 1986.

43 This historiographical perspective has recently been reinforced by studies conducted by Wiara Rosa Rios Alcântara for her doctoral thesis, supervised by Diana Gonçalves Vidal at the Faculty of Education at the University of São Paulo (Brasil) and entitled «Por uma história econômica da escola: a carteira escolar como vetor de relações. São Paulo, 1874-1914» (2014). The same author has recently produced new work on this theme: Rios Alcântara, Wiara Rosa. «Material culture and science teaching history in São Paulo: an administrative-economic perspective», *Rivista di Storia dell'Educazione*, v, 1 (2018), p. 343-361; RIOS ALCÂNTARA, Wiara Rosa; VIDAL, Diana. «The Syndicat Commercial du Mobilier et du matériel d'Enseignement and the transnational trade of school artefacts», *Paedagogica Historica*, 2020 (DOI: 10.1080/00309230.2020.1796721; last accessed on 13/08/2020). For a more general background on the material history of schools in Latin American scholarship, see: VIDAL, Diana. «História da Educação como Arqueologia: cultura material escolar e escolarização», *Revista Linhas*, xviii, 36 (jan./abr. 2017), p. 251-272.

44 TARGHETTA, Fabio. «Tra riorganizzazione industriale e sviluppo editoriale: la casa editrice Paravia tra le due guerre», *History of Education & Children's Literature*, i, 2 (2006), p. 209-229.

see) and a year later – in a fine study of the school publishing sector in Turin – an account of how, during the interwar period, Paravia had recognized the potential of the school supplies market and invested considerable resources in it. Specifically, the company set up a dedicated production unit for the manufacture of teaching and learning materials (especially wall maps, and from the 1920s onwards, also models of the human body, models of plants, stuffed animals, physics and chemistry equipment, etc.). Targhetta observed that this product diversification strategy proved highly successful, given that during the 1930s – when the publishing sector was beginning to recover from the post-war recession, and the export of educational materials to the Italian colonies, Albania and Latin America was on the increase – Paravia's turnover grew considerably, coming to exceed one million lire by the end of the decade.⁴⁵ Three years later, aware of the need to more closely examine the economic dimension of mass schooling in terms of the historical development of the domestic school supplies industry, Targhetta explored a theme that he had already touched on in his two earlier works: the importation and domestic production of educational materials. In this new work, he analysed Italian schools' slow but steady emancipation from reliance on foreign suppliers over the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁶

An alternative research perspective – albeit still within the broader domain of the material culture of schools – was developed over the same period by Monica Ferrari and her research team at the University of Pavia. In 2008, Ferrari published the outcomes of a study she had coordinated on educational objects that were produced, used, and kept at infant schools in Mantua over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: her analysis encompassed the educational setting, its educational practices and the use to which investigated objects had been put in the classroom during the period under study.⁴⁷ Ferrari unequivocally showed that her interest lay in the «educational mechanics» of

45 Cf. TARGHETTA, Fabio. *La capitale dell'impero di carta...* Op. cit., p. 22-29.

46 TARGHETTA, Fabio. «*Uno sguardo all'Europa*». *Modelli scolastici, viaggi pedagogici ed importazioni didattiche nei primi cinquant'anni di scuola italiana*, CHIARANDA, Mirella (Ed.). *Storia comparata dell'educazione. Problemi ed esperienze tra Otto e Novecento*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2010, p. 155-176 (especially p. 167-171).

47 FERRARI, MONICA; MORANDI, MATTEO; PLATÉ, ENRICO. *La lezione delle cose: oggetti didattici delle scuole dell'infanzia mantovane tra Ottocento e Novecento*. Mantua: Comune di Mantova – Settore Politiche Educative, 2008. On this topic, see also: FERRARI, MONICA; MORANDI, MATTEO; PLATÉ, ENRICO. *Lezioni di cose, lezioni di immagini: studi di caso e percorsi di riflessione sulla scuola italiana tra XIX e XXI secolo*. Azzano San Paolo: Junior, 2011.

these objects (which she elsewhere termed «educational devices»⁴⁸) and the educational practices they enabled on the ground, rather than in the dynamics underpinning their invention, production and marketing, or their fit with the social and cultural needs of a late-Nineteenth/early-Twentieth Italian society in the throes of an – admittedly belated – industrialization process. Hence, Monica Ferrari's perspective on the material culture of schools – as she herself would emphasize again in 2010⁴⁹ – was strictly historical-educational, while the other Italian line of inquiry into the material culture that we have described here was historical-social, or more properly, historical-economic.

All in all, these early Italian research campaigns – together with growing pressure from the international scientific community for Italian scholars to conform to current trends in history of education research, also with a view to facilitating cross-cultural comparison, and the Italian academic community's need to strengthen its international publication output following changes in national evaluation guidelines – have made the material history of schools into one of the up-and-coming fields of inquiry in Italy. This trend is borne out by the special issue «Per una storia dei luoghi della materialità educativa» [Proposing a history of the places of educational materiality] edited as recently as 2014, by Carmela Covato, for the journal of the Italian History of Education Society (CIRSE), which featured articles by Monica Ferrari, Egle Becchi, Lorenzo Cantatore, Francesca Borruso, Matteo Morandi, Fabio Pruneri, Tiziana Pironi, and Fulvio De Giorgi among others.⁵⁰

48 Cf. FERRARI, Monica. *Lo specchio, la pagina, le cose. Congegni pedagogici tra ieri e oggi*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2011 (cf. especially the chapter entitled «Delle cose»); FERRARI, Monica. «Education and Things. Pedagogical Ideologies and Didactic Materials in Two European Courts (15th-17th Centuries)», PRIEM, Karin; KÖNIG, Gudrun M.; CASALE, Rita (Eds.). *Die Materialität der Erziehung: Kulturelle und soziale Aspekte pädagogischer Objekte*. Weinheim-Basel: Beltz Verlag, 2012, p. 92-104.

49 Cf. FERRARI, Monica. «Il bambino e il suo ambiente: cose dei bambini e cose per i bambini nel dibattito storiografico», *Studi sulla Formazione*, XIII, 1, 2010, p. 39-55, in which the author essentially recalls and revisits Egle Becchi's (1996) theorizing about «school things» – albeit applying it to the history of childhood.

50 Cf. Special issue «Per una storia dei luoghi della materialità educativa», *Rivista di storia dell'educazione*, I, 1 (2014), p. 5-116. In this issue, see especially: MORANDI, Matteo. «Gli spazi della scuola secondaria in Italia: tracce per una storia» (p. 55-62); PRUNERI, Fabio. «L'aula scolastica tra Otto e Novecento» (p. 63-72); PIRONI, Tiziana. «La Casa dei Bambini di Maria Montessori: un nuovo spazio educativo per l'infanzia» (p. 73-84); DE GIORGI, Fulvio. «Appunti sulla storia del banco scolastico» (p. 85-98). We should note here that – in recent years – Pruneri has continued to assiduously pursue this line of inquiry, producing some interesting publications: «Pluriclassi, scuole rurali, scuole a ciclo unico dall'Unità d'Italia al 1948», *Diacronie: studi di storia contemporanea*, XXXIV, 2 (2018), p. 1-25; «Civilisation and the Italian school toilet: insights for the cultural history of education», *Paedagogica Historica*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2020.1831030>.

Finally, a promising novel methodological perspective was proposed by Marta Brunelli in a paper – published in the proceedings of the international conference «Éducation et culture matérielle» [Education and material culture]⁵¹ (Bordeaux, 29-30 April 2014) – on the industrial production of educational materials in Italy around the turn of the twentieth century. In this work, Brunelli laid down a set of guidelines for using schools' cultural heritage assets as material sources in building up a rightly oriented historical reconstruction of the material culture. They must not to be fetishistically treated as totemic objects, a risk earlier flagged – as noted in the opening section of this review – by Agustín Escolano Benito. This issue is of no little importance, especially if we consider that the fetishistic bias has often been a feature of the recent historiographical literature from Latin America. Contributors to this literature, while overlooking the historiographical guidelines and methodological foundations developed by authoritative scholars who previously treated the theme of material educational objects (such as Escolano Benito, Viñao Frago, and Moreno Martínez), have occasionally focused on the formal characteristics of individual educational objects in such minute detail that the broader historical context is lost from view. In other words, the historical evolution of the objects under study is never adequately situated *vis-à-vis* the complex political, social and cultural dynamics of a given society, with its collective educational knowledge, school system, and present degree of industrial development.

In her work, Brunelli avoids using «collectors' taxonomies», proving that it is possible to conduct in-depth investigation of the industrial production of educational materials based on a range of sources including – alongside

51 BRUNELLI, Marta. «Pour une histoire de la production industrielle des matériels didactiques en Italie de la fin du XIXe à la première moitié du XXe siècle: premières indications et perspectives de recherche», FIGEAC-MONTHUS, Marguerite (Ed.). *Éducation et culture matérielle en France et en Europe du XVIIe siècle à nos jours*. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2018, p. 109-131. A revised and expanded version of this work has been published in Spanish: BRUNELLI, Marta. «Posibles metodologías de trabajo histórico sobre la cultura material de la escuela: entre el material didáctico y los catálogos de enseñanza. Primeros resultados de una investigación en curso», GASPARD DA SILVA, Vera Lucía; DE SOUZA, Gizele; CASTRO, César Augusto (Eds.). *Cultura material escolar em perspectiva histórica: escritas e possibilidades*. Vitória: EDUFES Editora, 2018, p. 181-215.

more conventional options (corporate statutes and accounts, sales catalogues,⁵² industrial yearbooks, etc.) – the educational objects themselves, currently held in museums and the science labs of historic schools. The presence of exemplars of these items in scientifically curated collections offers an alternative source of empirical data when it is not possible to obtain reliable historical statistics concerning their wider production, effective distribution, and – indirectly – the popularity of the educational practices for which they were intended. Objectively analysing these educational objects in terms of detecting superimposed commercial labels that attest to the practice of fraud, or verifying the dates that individual objects were first recorded in the inventory of a museum with a view to identifying possible time lags between their production and sale, is a highly innovative research method with the potential to extend the heuristic capacity of the scholars engaged in this strand of research.⁵³ However, it should

52 For fuller background on this particular type of source, see: MORENO MARTÍNEZ, Pedro Luis. «El mobiliario escolar en los catálogos de material de enseñanza: consideraciones metodológicas», NAYA GARMENDIA, Luis María; DÁVILA BALSERA, Paulí (Eds.). *La infancia en la historia: espacios y representaciones*, Vol. 1. San Sebastián: Erein, 2005, p. 342-355; BRUNELLI, Marta. «Cataloghi commerciali dei materiali scolastici e collezioni storiche dei sussidi didattici. Nuove fonti per la storia dell'industria per la scuola in Italia (1870-1922)», *History of Education & Children's Literature*, XIII, 2 (2018), p. 469-510.

53 The material sources are not the only type of alternative source that allows the effective distribution and modes of use of educational materials and school furnishings to be analysed independently of education legislation and the recommendations of contemporary health and education authorities. For example, it would be possible to examine how items of school furniture often continued to be used well beyond their natural lifespan, for organizational, economic and/or cultural reasons, or to document how local authorities traditionally failed to invest in school buildings and educational equipment by conducting empirical analyses of geographically and chronologically representative photograph collections or examining purchase records held in the archives of town or city councils. The systematic analysis of a significant corpus of photographs held in municipal or school archives would be required to obtain statistically significant data and to quantify the overall extent of patterns about which we are currently only able to surmise. Another alternative that could potentially shed light on gap between «school as it was officially meant to be» and «school as it really was» is oral sources, which have already proved – in studies published by research teams that have far-sightedly been set up at the University of Firenze (Gianfranco Bandini and Stefano Oliviero), University of Molise (Alberto Barausse, Valeria Viola and Rossella Andreassi) and University of Macerata (Lucia Paciaroni) – their potential to attest to what really happened in classrooms, especially in relation to issues (such as corporal punishment, forbidden educational practices and other educational taboos) that are not documented in any of the official records but are nonetheless verifiable historical phenomena (on this topic, cf. PACIARONI, Lucia. *Memorie di scuola. Contributo a una storia delle pratiche didattiche ed educative nelle scuole marchigiane attraverso le testimonianze di maestri e maestre, 1945-1985*. Macerata: EUM, 2020, p. 87-112). The large-scale collection of oral testimonies at the national level would certainly enable researchers to directly ascertain from the living voices of the protagonists of school life how the educational materials purchased by schools were actually used by teachers in the course of their educational practice, as well as the actual technologies and teaching aids with which classrooms were equipped. This data could then be compared with official guideline documents and memos issued by the Ministry of Education, in order to evaluate the degree to which real-life educational practice in schools conformed to the official ideal.

be pointed out that such research practices can only yield meaningful statistical outcomes in a context where – as Monica Ferrari has also called for – historical educational objects are subjected to systematic cataloguing based on univocal criteria and collections are made fully accessible to researchers, goals which currently remain relatively distant, as studies on the «health status» of Italian historical-educational heritage have clearly shown.⁵⁴

Undoubtedly, much remains to be done. As Fabio Targhetta has rightly pointed out, many questions remain to be answered: «In what terms may we link the history of economic processes with the advance of mass education? What repercussions did the emergence of a modern manufacturing sector have at the educational level? What role did teachers play in the rise of industrial production at the expense of handcrafted materials? For how long, in the less developed areas of Italy, did handmade learning materials continued to be used in classrooms? And with what effects? Was there any resistance to the process of standardization?». ⁵⁵ These are but some of the key questions that need to be addressed over the coming years. Nevertheless, promising studies on the material culture of schools that have recently been undertaken by young scholars (such as Domenico Francesco Antonio Elia's work on the material culture of physical education⁵⁶ and Valeria Viola's research on school buildings⁵⁷) reflect a historiographical vitality that will surely set the pace of Italian history of education research going forward, partly reshaping it and further extending its heuristic reach.

54 We here particularly refer to: FERRARI, Monica; PANIZZA, Giorgio; MORANDI, Matteo (Eds.), Special issue «I beni culturali della scuola: conservazione e valorizzazione», *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche*, 15 (2008), p. 15-191; MEDA, Juri. «La conservazione del patrimonio storico-educativo: il caso italiano», MEDA, Juri; BADANELLI, Ana María (Eds.). *La historia de la cultura escolar en Italia y en España*. Op. cit., p. 167-198.

55 TARGHETTA, Fabio. «Tra produzione industriale e alfabetizzazione diffusa: nuovi approdi per la storia della cultura materiale della scuola», *History of Education & Children's Literature*, XIII, 1 (2018), p. 592.

56 ELIA, Domenico Francesco Antonio. «Uno strumento di ricerca per la storia materiale sportiva: la banca dati dell'Ufficio italiano brevetti e marchi», *Italia Contemporanea*, 281 (2016), p. 133-153; ELIA, Domenico Francesco Antonio. «Per una mappatura del consumo degli attrezzi ginnici e sportivi nella scuola italiana: i marchi e i brevetti delle aziende italiane nel Ventennio Fascista (1922-1943)», *Rivista di storia dell'educazione*, IV, 2 (2017), p. 143-166.

57 VIOLA, Valeria; MICELI, Valeria. «In iscuola meglio che in casa». L'edilizia delle scuole rurali durante il ventennio fascista. Primi risultati di uno scavo documentario», *Rivista di storia dell'educazione*, 2 (2016), p. 83-89; VIOLA, Valeria. «“The school house”. History and evolution of the urban and rural school building in Italy during the fascism», DÁVILA BALSERA, Paulí; NAYA GARMENDIA, Luis María (Eds.). *Espacios y patrimonio histórico-educativo*. San Sebastian: Erein, 2016, p. 377-389.