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Reconstructing Memory, Imagining the Future. Dialogues among New Generations of Scholars

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On May 14, 2025, the seminar day *Reconstructing History, Imagining the Future. Dialogues Among New Generations of Scholars* was held at the Università degli Studi di Verona. The event was promoted by the Centro Italiano per la Ricerca Storico-Educative (CIRSE) and was open to researchers in the Scientific-Disciplinary Sector PAED-01/B (Storia della Pedagogia e dell'Educazione), as well as to those from related fields. Its objective was to offer a space for young scholars to meet and engage in dialogue, to encourage the sharing of studies, reflections, and ideas, and to foster collaboration networks.

The seminar opened with institutional greetings from Valentina Moro, Director of the Department of Humanities at the Università di Verona, and from Caterina Sindoni (Università degli Studi di Messina), President of CIRSE. It was structured into four sessions, coordinated in the morning by Paola Dal Toso and in the afternoon by Daria Gabusi, both from the Università di Verona.

The first session, strictly within the historical-educational domain, opened with an in-depth analysis by Emilio Conte (Università degli Studi di Bergamo) of the figure of Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, examined through the interplay between secular-democratic and Marxist perspectives, with particular reference to the journals *Scuola e città* and *Riforma della scuola*, respectively. Conte's reflection, supported by unpublished sources from the private archive of Lucio Lombardo Radice, held partly at INDIRE and partly at the Fondazione Gramsci, aimed to give depth to the research subject. Adele Martorello (Università della Valle d'Aosta) presented a study on Luigi Libero Pensuti's animated cinema, with particular reference to the short films made as part of the anti-tuberculosis campaign promoted by the Fascist regime. Her analysis focused on the specific narrative and stylistic techniques adopted by Pensuti, capable of conveying effective socio-health messages in a simple and persuasive way.

The session continued with a contribution in the cultural history of religions by Fernando Bellelli (Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia) on the work of Thomas Berry (1914-2009), interpreted through an eco-pedagogical lens, based on a close examination of his *The Great Work* (1999), in which the theologian foretells the transition from the Anthropocene to the Ecozoic Era. Regarding the history of childhood and educational institutions,

focusing on the local and microhistorical dimension as a key to investigating educational complexity and contributing to the reconstruction of long-term structures, Chiara C. Giovinazzo (Università della Valle d'Aosta) sought to highlight the historical memories of the Martinitt, orphans hosted in the San Martino Oratory in Milan. Thanks to archival research at the Pio Albergo Trivulzio, it was possible to bring to light some texts written by the children hosted at the facility between the late 19th and early 20th centuries on the occasion of elementary school final exams. These writings reveal everyday life stories that serve as extraordinary documents to be interpreted within the socio-historical context in which they were produced.

The session concluded with a contribution on the history of early childhood education by Renata Bressanelli (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano), who highlighted sources and research perspectives that have developed since the 1970s, in connection with the emergence of public nursery schools, the application of the 1969 *Orientamenti dell'attività educativa nelle scuole materne statali (Guidelines for Educational Activities in Public Nursery Schools)*, and a new cultural and political interest in this topic. Bressanelli's intervention proposed new research avenues and the use of sources that have so far been only partially explored in historical-educational research, such as journals aimed at nursery school teachers and the historical-cultural heritage (documents, teaching aids, photographs, furnishings) preserved in various education museums across the country. Her intent was to offer new directions for studying the history of nurseries from the Giolittian era to the late 1960s, when so-called "alternative nursery schools" became widespread.

The session ended with an incisive concluding session by Giulia Fasan (Università degli Studi di Padova) in her role as discussant, who outlined the main trajectories among the various contributions and promoted a reflection on the use of memory in its relationship with ideas, as well as on the challenges inherent in interpreting sources.

The relationship between history and memory was also central to the first two presentations in the second session, which featured contributions by Valerio Palmieri and Carmen Petrucci (both from the Università degli Studi di Foggia). Palmieri reflected on memory as a "pedagogical lever and a tool for building the future" in relation to educational pathways on legality and active citizenship characteristic of social anti-mafia initiatives – a complex of pedagogical, civic, and cultural practices aimed at countering the penetration of the mafia mindset into everyday life. Petrucci explored the relationships

among historical, autobiographical, and mythical representations of Italian emigrants (1880-1920) to highlight the tensions between documentary sources and memorial constructions.

The final presentation by Federico Piseri (Università degli Studi di Sassari) aimed to present a methodological approach to "power networks" in Sforza-era Milan through the analysis of letters sent to Bianca Maria Visconti in the second half of the 15th century. The goal was to illustrate how a multidisciplinary approach – combining traditional historiographic tools with digital humanities methodologies – can offer new perspectives on the social history of education, particularly regarding gender dynamics, power, and the construction of dynastic memory.

Alessandra Mazzini (Università degli Studi di Bergamo), acting as discussant for this session, aptly recalled how the theme of memory involves narration as a form of intergenerational communication, through which testimonies are passed on. In relation to Piseri's presentation, Mazzini also pointed out the complex relationship between appearance and reality in the epistolary genre, referencing Virginia Woolf's insightful reflections in *How Should One Read a Book?* (1944).

The early afternoon session featured presentations by four young female scholars in the fields of children's literature and the pedagogy of reading and storytelling. Elena Guerzoni (Università di Bologna) focused on the relationship between narratology and *Material Engagement Theory* (MET), engaging with the emerging field of cognitive narratology, which investigates – through an interdisciplinary lens – the connection between narrative and the mind. From this perspective, Guerzoni highlighted the effectiveness of this approach in analyzing representations of the minds of fictional children and adolescents. Chiara Martinelli (Università degli Studi di Firenze) also contributed from the field of cognitive sciences. Drawing on the works of Jerome Bruner (2004) and Jonathan Gottschall (2014), she utilized insights from neuroscience to identify, in the case study of Gherardo Nerucci's *Novelle montalesi* (1880), persistent narrative schemas through which people structure their ways of interpreting and acting upon reality. Chiara Malpezzi (Università degli Studi di Padova) presented a contribution on the literary genre of biography, reflecting on the impact it has had on the imagination of young generations from the 19th century to the present day. She emphasized biography as a privileged source for understanding the intersection of publishing history, identity representation, and socialization processes in children's and young adult literature. Lastly, Silvia Pacelli highlighted the pervasiveness of certain discourses

sive rhetorics related to the conceptual and social construct of disability in children's literary representations and their connection to iconography and imagination. Through emblematic examples, Pacelli pointed out how visual metaphors in contemporary picture books can contribute to consolidating particularly persistent image schemas.

The variety and richness of these four presentations were elaborated upon by Simone di Biasio (Università degli Studi Roma Tre), who, as discussant, observed how all contributions intersected with a "need for embodiment" within an interpretive framework that seems to favor "mental events", especially in terms of the reader's active engagement.

The fourth and final session of the seminar day addressed, as noted in the thorough analysis by discussant Sofia Montecchiani (Università degli Studi "G. D'Annunzio" Chieti-Pescara), the themes of educational responsibility, democratic citizenship education, the role of women, and the evolution of religious and philosophical instruction.

Rita Franceschetti (Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata) presented the life and literary journey of Jewish writer Laura Lattes (1883-1973) from Vicenza, emphasizing its pedagogical dimensions. Lucia Vigutto (Università di Bologna) also focused on a remarkable woman, Ada Prospero Marchesini Gobetti. Vigutto highlighted Gobetti's commitment to democratic and progressive family education in the post-war years through her editorial work on *Il Giornale dei Genitori*. Elena Girotti (Università degli Studi di Macerata) continued the focus on female identity with a presentation on the intersection of professional teacher/student identity and political/social activism within student and feminist movements. Specifically, Girotti emphasized the role of the feminist magazine *Effe* (1973) and *L'Erba voglio* (1971-1977) in forging links between 1970s neo-feminist movements and the 1968 student movements, and between activism and teaching.

The final two interventions of the day focused on the teaching of religion and philosophy, raising issues of teaching freedom and the role of the teacher. Pasquale Giaquinto (Università Europea di Roma) centered his attention on religious education in Italian public schools between 1967 and 2003. He applied the interpretative paradigm of complexity (Morin, Bocchi, Ceruti, Villani), establishing connections with the philosophy of science, anthropology, and especially the pedagogy of complexity. Andrea Suggi (Università degli Studi di Udine) focused on philosophy textbooks used in classical and scientific high schools. Specifically, he compared the texts of Eugenio Garin (Sansoni, 1946) and Ludovico

Geymonat (Garzanti, 1955) to determine how these two distinguished historians of philosophy envisioned philosophy instruction in their respective school settings. The comparison prompted a reflection on the theoretical premises, methods, and aims that would go on to shape philosophical studies in the ensuing years.

The seminar day, held online and attended by a wide audience across the country and various academic institutions, offered a variety and richness of insights that spanned both new and traditional strands of historical-educational and children's literature research. Through renewed research methodologies, the event deeply engaged its study subjects with new questions, needs, and interpretations. What emerged was a significant and multifaceted snapshot of the path our research field is taking – undoubtedly enriched by the valuable intellectual contributions of a promising new generation.