

WOLFGANG SAHLFELD

MÉTHODE INTUITIVE: INTERREGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL  
CIRCULATION OF A PEDAGOGICAL IDEA  
(END OF 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)

METODO INTUITIVO: CIRCOLAZIONE INTERREGIONALE  
E INTERNAZIONALE DI UN'IDEA PEDAGOGICA  
(FINE DEL XIX SECOLO)

*The circulation, in late 19th Century's Western Europe, of the idea of intuition-based teaching and learning, is a typical case of cultural transfer as defined by Michel Espagne. Following Alexandre Fontaine's suggestion about Switzerland as a privileged platform of cultural transfers in pedagogical issues, we have tried to understand what happened around French re-semantisation, during transfer processes, of German Anschauungsunterricht as méthode intuitive. We found out a very interesting case of resemantisation in the case of Switzerland's Italian-speaking Canton Ticino, where the word metodo intuitivo was redefined as a "Swiss" pedagogical approach with the clear intention to take the distances from Italy, where the same word was used in a more generic sens and without being reconducted to Pestalozzi and Girard as the "fathers of (Swiss) intuition-based teaching method". Other interesting cases of re-semantisation are the famous discourse of Ferdinand Buisson around the alleged "philosophical" differences between German and French intuition-based teaching, that hides in the facts a "cleansing" operation with the goal to hide the German origins of the méthode intuitive. French- and German Switzerland's allows to see that this was not really necessary for a successful transfer of the concept from one linguistic space to the other but the reasons are clearly political.*

Nell'Europa occidentale del tardo diciannovesimo secolo la circolazione dell'idea di insegnamento e apprendimento *intuition-based* è un tipico caso di *transfer* culturale come definito da Michel Espagne. Seguendo le idee di Alexandre Fontaine sulla Svizzera come piattaforma privilegiata di transfers culturali per le questioni pedagogiche, si è cercato di capire cosa sia accaduto nella risemantizzazione francese del termine tedesco *Anschauungsunterricht* in *méthode intuitive* durante il processo di *transfer*. Un caso molto interessante di risemantizzazione è stato individuato nel Canton Ticino di lingua italiana, dove la parola metodo intuitivo è stata ridefinita come un approccio pedagogico "svizzero", con la chiara intenzione di prendere le distanze dall'approccio italiano, dove la stessa parola era usata invece in un senso più generico e senza ricondursi a Pestalozzi e Girard come "i padri del metodo (svizzero) di insegnamento basato sull'intuizione". Altro interessante caso di risemantizzazione è rappresentato dal famoso discorso di Ferdinand Buisson sulle presunte differenze "filosofiche" tra l'insegnamento *intuition-based* tedesco e quello francese, celando in effetti un'operazione di "pulizia" avente l'obiettivo di nascondere le origini tedesche della *méthode intuitive*. Tale operazione non era in realtà necessaria, come il caso della Svizzera francese e tedesca permette di evidenziare, per trasferire con successo il concetto da una regione linguistica all'altra, sebbene le ragioni fossero chiaramente politiche.

*Key words: intuition-based teaching; cultural transfers; Switzerland; late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.*

Parole chiave: insegnamento basato sull'intuizione; transfer culturale; Svizzera; tardo XIX secolo.



*Méthode intuitive: a complex discourse around a pedagogical leaning*

In the last quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century the pedagogical debate in France and Italy was deeply influenced by the discussion about so-called *méthode intuitive*, also called *enseignement intuitif*, and its Italian equivalent *metodo intuitivo*. The goal of our contribution is to see, outgoing from the term's presence in Italian-speaking Swiss Canton Ticino's curricula in the period 1880-1910, if the term's migration between different national and regional curricula is a result of cultural transfers as they have been defined by Michel Espagne (2013). A well-known fact is the word's success in the French-speaking area after 1880, when a definition was given in the *Dictionnaire de pédagogie* (published in 1882), and in Italy where it appeared very often in pedagogy handbooks and even schoolbooks after the Pedagogical Congress of Rome (1880). But what is exactly the meaning of *méthode intuitive* (and its synonyms in other languages) and where is the word coming from?

An important part of any definition is the importance given to intuition, i.e. the child's understanding of objects, animals, plants etc., by direct or indirect perception and not by language-mediated explanation given by a teacher or other adult. So the keyword is *intuition*, in German *Anschauung*<sup>1</sup>. The teaching-method is based on the *object lessons*. According to the *Dictionnaire de pédagogie* (Buisson 1882, 1376, s.v. *Leçons de choses*) this word has been translated into French as *leçons de choses*:

1° *L'intuition par les sens*. – C'est l'*Anschauung* proprement dite des pédagogues allemands: on l'a nommé chez nous l'*enseignement par l'aspect*, ce qui en rétrécit un peu le caractère; les Américains l'ont résumée dans le procédé qu'ils ont assez heureusement nommé "object lessons", *leçons de choses* (Buisson 1882, 1529)<sup>2</sup>.

Here we see a very important part of the problem: the French author of the article in the *Dictionnaire* sais that the idea of teaching by intuition has become more efficient during its migration from German pedagogical culture into French, because the French educators don't limit the intuition-based teaching to perception by senses but they have a more global approach to intuition and they distinguish between teaching based on the only visual perception and teaching based on children's entire intuitions<sup>3</sup>. The object lessons are, according to the article's author, only a small part of

<sup>1</sup> The word's meaning in German is not limited to the only visual perception, although it is grammatically based on the verb *schauen* = to see. It is sometimes difficult to understand if the word *Anschauungsunterricht* refers to the only visual sphere or to the perception by all senses. As we will see, this fact created translation problems and discussions in the transfer processes.

<sup>2</sup> [1° *Intuition par les sens*. – That's the very same thing as the *Anschauung* of German pedagogues: it has been named in France *enseignement par l'aspect*, which makes its nature and definition a bit narrower; in the United States it has been resumed in the procedure they very well defined as "object lessons".] (This translation and all the following translations of citations in other languages are ours).

<sup>3</sup> «En quoi consiste la méthode intuitive dans toutes les études primaires qui ne se peuvent borner aux leçons de choses? En une certaine marche de l'enseignement qui réserve à l'enfant le plaisir et le profit, sinon de la découverte et de la surprise, ce qui serait peut-être trop promettre, au moins de l'initiative et de l'activité intellectuelle. On peut dire qu'on ne lui montre ni objets ni images, toutes les fois qu'au lieu de lui faire suivre passivement son maître et répéter docilement une leçon toute faite, on le provoque à chercher, on l'aide à trouver, on le met sur la voie, suivant une

what the French call *méthode intuitive*, and the pedagogical idea of *Anschauungsunterricht* (i.e. teaching based on the children's perceptions and consequent intuitions) is said to have obtained a new meaning. Following Michel Espagne's studies about cultural transfers, we can say that this is what happens when an idea is transferred from a context to another.<sup>4</sup> But did French educators really transform the method, or is their definition of "French" intuition-based teaching a mere *maquillage* because they wanted to hide the method's German origin? We nowadays know that this frequently happened during the transfer processes in the European space of education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, as it has been very well explained by Alexandre Fontaine:

Emprunter aux nations concurrentes comportait certains enjeux de taille, comme celui [...] d'afficher son retard et l'on remarque dans les faits un présupposé psychologique non négligeable qui sous-tend un certain déshonneur à emprunter chez le voisin, à s'identifier à ses productions. D'où l'émergence d'une certaine forme de discours basé sur le dédain de la copie servile. (Fontaine 2015, 209)<sup>5</sup>.

So can we say that the *Dictionnaire's* discourse about French improving German *Anschauungsunterricht* is a discourse to avoid the impression of a *copie servile*? To understand this, we must try to understand the discourse strategies of those who used in French the term *méthode intuitive*. As it is very well explained by Ubrich (2011, 60-71), the *Dictionnaire's* editor Ferdinand Buisson insisted deeply about the difference between German and French way of teaching by intuition, and he reconducted the *méthode intuitive* to French philosophers like Descartes and Victor Cousin. This may be due to ideological and historical reasons:

La blessure reçue de la défaite de 1870 est sans aucun doute encore trop vive pour que les esprits, même en matière de pédagogie, puissent s'accommoder sans réaction d'un rapprochement étroit avec ceux qui en sont la cause. Il est possible que son enthousiasme exprimé dans le rapport sur l'exposition universelle de Vienne ait créé un certain malaise qui l'oblige à plus de discrétion pour ce qui concerne ses références (Ubrich 2011, 52)<sup>6</sup>.

vieille et bien juste image, lui laissant ensuite le mérite d'y faire quelques pas de lui-même.» [What does the *méthode intuitive* mean in primary schools when doing more than object lessons? Well, it means reserving to the child the pleasure and the gain of discovering and being surprised, or at least of initiative and intellectual activity. One doesn't show to the child nor objects neither images, but every time it's possible to promote autonomous thinking instead of listening the lesson, the teacher should try to help the children to search, to find out, to go onto the right way. According to a very old metaphor, it can be said that the child is brought to do some steps without help.] (Buisson 1882, 1376).

<sup>4</sup> «Any cultural object passing from one context into another results in a transformation of its meaning and the dynamic of re-semantisation it undergoes can only be fully recognised by taking into account the historical vectors of that transfer. We can therefore say that research dealing with cultural transfers concerns most of the human sciences even though its development was first rooted in specific domains. The study of cultural transfers forces us to downplay the notions of comparison, and, above all, of centre» (Espagne 2013, 1).

<sup>5</sup> [Learning from the concurrent nations created some psychologic difficulties, since it meant admitting the own delay. That's why we can see a psychologic presumption of dishonour that accompanies every process of loan from the neighbour and self-identification in the neighbour's products. This may be the reason why discourses often reject the mere copy.]

<sup>6</sup> [The defeat of 1870 was still very alive in the people's records, and that's why people's mind perhaps did not accept without a reaction of reject a too straight contact with those who were at the defeat's origin (the Germans), even in educational issues. It may be that his [Buisson's] first enthusiasm, as expressed in the report about the Vienna World Exposition, created a malaise and that he was obliged, after that, to be more careful when declaring his references.]

*Anschauungsunterricht in the German curricula and its “cleansing” during the transfer process*

Using a stronger theoretical frame, we can even try to show that the difference between German and French intuition-based teaching was a form of “cleansing”<sup>7</sup> with the goal to prevent any fear of ideological “contamination” by (German) intuition-based teaching.

If we want to test the accuracy of this hypothesis, the first question is about the real nature of intuition-based teaching in German-speaking countries. Was the *Anschauungsunterricht* really a merely illustration-based teaching, as it is affirmed by the French pedagogues? Looking to German-speaking school curricula in Switzerland, we can see that the meaning of *Anschauung* wasn't only focused on visual perception. The word *Anschauungsunterricht* can be found in the curricula after 1860, so in Aargau (*Lehrplan für die Gemeindeschulen*, 1862), Bern (*Unterrichtsplan für die Primarschulen*, 1870) and Basel-City (*Unterrichtsplan für die Primarschulen in Basel*, 1882). It is mostly used for the only teaching of mother-tongue, very often as a specific branch of teaching that precedes literacy and grammar teaching. *Anschauungsunterricht* is a conversation between the teacher and the children about objects and concepts they already know or they are able to understand, but without knowing the object's or concept's name. (We should not forget that in the sociolinguistic context of German-speaking Switzerland children spoke only dialect<sup>8</sup> and often had to learn the necessary high-German words for naming things.) Some syllabi even used the word *Anschauung* also while speaking about mathematics (e.g. Luzern, *Lehrplan für die Primar- und Fortbildungsschulen*, 1881<sup>9</sup>). The same use of the word can be seen in French-speaking Cantons, e.g. Fribourg (1881) or Vaud (1868), where we find the *enseignement intuitif* as a preliminary part of mother-tongue lessons before reading, and the idea of intuition as a part of the first mathematics' teaching<sup>10</sup>. In the Swiss context, the German word *Anschauung* and its French equivalent *intuition* meant

<sup>7</sup> «On comprend dès lors mieux le recours aux nettoyages qui permettent, lors du processus de transfert, de relativiser ou de se défaire d'une origine de l'emprunt parfois bien encombrantes, il suffit de penser à la relation franco-germanique. [...]» [One understands so very much better why there were tentatives of cleaning or elimination of embarrassing origins of leaning, like for example in the German-French relationship.] (Fontaine 2015, 209).

<sup>8</sup> The word “dialect” means here a vernacular local language and not a sociolinguistic language variety.

<sup>9</sup> «Anschauliches Auffassen der Zahlbegriffe von 1-10. Veranschaulichung an wirklichen, leicht überschaubaren Gegenständen und entsprechende Darstellung der Zahlbegriffe durch vielerlei Realzeichen. / Die 4 Operationen. Anschaulich, rein, mit benannten Zahlen und in praktischen Beispielen. [...] auch an Münzen, Massen, Gewichten und Zeiteinteilung. [...]. Als Veranschaulichungsmittel dient auch die Zahlfigurentafel.» [Easy understanding of numbers from 1 to 10. Explanation with simple objects and representations in practical examples with signs. / Addition and subtraction, multiplication and division, with named numbers and in practical examples, like coins, measures, weights and time. [...] The teacher may also use the arithmetic board to illustrate the items.]

<sup>10</sup> *Plan d'études pour les écoles primaires du Canton de Vaud* 1868: «Nombreux exercices oraux et intuitifs sur la valeur relative des unités, des dizaines et des centaines». [Many oral exercises about intuition and the value of units and numbers, multiples of 1, 10 and 100.] *Programme prescrit pour les écoles primaires du Canton de Fribourg* 1881: «Perception intuitive des nombres fondamentaux et de la dizaine par l'addition, la soustraction et la multiplication et la division d'objets réels». [Intuition-based perception of fundamental numbers and decimals by addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of real objects.]

clearly something different from the only visual perception, since the word included also the child's intuitive thinking, e.g. about numbers, additions, subtractions, moral and even religious ideas etc. In the German States this was not different:

Der Anschauungsunterricht hat die Schüler unterrichtsfähig zu machen und die Geistes- und Sprachbildung derselben zu begründen; seine Aufgabe ist demnach: Übung und Schärfung der Sinne, Weckung und Förderung der Aufmerksamkeit und der Beobachtungsgabe, Bildung neuer, sowie Berichtigung, Ergänzung und Erweiterung schon vorhandener (realer, sittlicher und religiöser) Anschauungen und Vorstellungen, Weckung und Bildung des Sprachgefühls, Erweiterung des Sprachschatzes und der Sprachfertigkeit durch Übung im sprachgesetzlich richtigen dialektfreien Sprechen<sup>11</sup>.

As we can see, the curriculum mentions moral and even religious intuitions as well as object lessons. The difference between a “narrower” (i.e. only based on visual perception) German teaching method and the more “philosophical” French *méthode intuitive* in the *Dictionnaire de pédagogie* is a mere construction that doesn't correspond with the facts. In the French-speaking Cantons of Switzerland, meanwhile, there is no such discourse findable because there was no need to hide a “dishonour” due to using the neighbour's education methods. Switzerland is so the very proof that the word's translation and the method's application were possible in a different context (no rivalry, no revanchism), which helps to understand that Ferdinand Buisson and his *compagnons de route* were *de facto* the protagonists of a much more difficult but nevertheless efficient process, because it was a true cultural transfer in the meaning of an intermediation that defeated the existing resistances by cleansing strategies.

The French debate, we must remember, was deeply influenced by the French Army's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. There was a need to improve the quality of teaching methods and schooling system. Ferdinand Buisson, head of the French Primary Education and editor of the *Dictionnaire de pédagogie*, went to know about teaching based on *Anschauung* when he visited the World Exposition of Vienna, in 1873. Two years later he published a report about the Exposition in which he called what he had seen *méthode intuitive* (Ubrich 2011, 31-35). The protestant Buisson (whose wife was a Swiss reverend's daughter) belonged to a network of French and French-speaking Swiss intellectuals and pedagogues (Fontaine 2015), so it's not surprising that he knew, for example, that the French-speaking Swiss teacher Xavier Ducotterd had published in 1868 – two years before Sedan! – a handbook about intuition (*Anschauung*) in teaching of French as a foreign language<sup>12</sup> and had

<sup>11</sup> [Intuition-based teaching must make the pupils able to follow teaching and must found their intellectual and linguistic capacities; its aims are therefore: exercising and improving of senses and observation, formation of new and correction of existing (real, moral and religious) intuitions [*Anschauungen*] or representations [*Vorstellungen*], up-growing of vocabulary and linguistic capacities and exercises in a correct speaking of standard-language.] *Lehrplan für die Werktags-Volks-Schulen der königlichen Haupt- und Residenzstadt München*, 1880. URL: [http://www.comenius.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/index.php/Bayern/München:\\_Lehrplan\\_Aller\\_Fächer\\_Volksschule\\_1880](http://www.comenius.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/index.php/Bayern/München:_Lehrplan_Aller_Fächer_Volksschule_1880). Accessed October 20, 2018. The same definition can be found in the syllabus for rural Bavaria.

<sup>12</sup> *Die Anschauung auf den französischen Sprachunterricht angewendet. Nach den 16 Wilke'schen Bildern*, 1868, Wiesbaden: Verlag vom Limbarth (the deaf German teacher and designer Karl Wilke published his 16 pictures in 1839. They were largely used in German-speaking countries for intuition-based school lessons).

tried later to make the same in the opposite procedure (teaching German as a foreign language in French-speaking countries). Ducotterd was the initially foreseen author of the article *Intuition* in the *Dictionnaire de pédagogie*, but for unknown reasons he was later excluded from the *Dictionnaire's* board (for all these informations see Fontaine 2015, 141-143). Probably Ducotterd, a pragmatic Swiss pedagogue, would not have accepted to “clean” the idea of intuition in an acceptable way for the internal needs Buisson had as a politician and school reformer.

### Metodo intuitivo in Italian-speaking Switzerland

Outgoing from the above explained facts, we can now try to examine the meaning of the Italian word *metodo intuitivo* and the way it was used in Ticino's discussions of the period 1880-1910. In Canton Ticino's teaching-program for primary schools, published in 1894<sup>13</sup>, *metodo intuitivo* is proposed as the central idea and it is transversally applied to Italian language, mathematics, geography, education into citizenship, education about hygiene, design, musical education etc. As we see, the whole curriculum is influenced by the idea of a teaching method based on intuition. How did this idea reach Switzerland's only entirely Italian-speaking Canton?

It's in the period around 1880 we find the word's first mentions in Ticino in texts published by Giuseppe Curti (1876, 1881, 1884), a liberal statesman and teacher. A few years later Brenno Bertoni, a liberal lawyer and statesman, used the term in a review of Paul Bert's *Instruction civique* (Bertoni 1885, 51). Bertoni was not a pedagogue, which makes us understand that the term had a very common use. It may be important to remember that Bertoni uses it for reviewing a French-speaking author, saying that Paul Bert was “devoted to the *méthode intuitive*”. As we have already seen, in France Ferdinand Buisson had introduced the term in 1875 and then had given the word a clear meaning by the article *Intuition et méthode intuitive* in the *Dictionnaire de pédagogie* (first édition 1882). It is difficult to prove Bertoni's direct knowledge of the French debate, but we think it's highly probable he had heard about it. Reading his review, one understands that he knew very well the political debate in France and its protagonists, so it seems reasonable to presume he also knew the discussions about public education in the post-1871 French Republic.

In 1884 Ticino's Teacher Journal (“Educatore della Svizzera Italiana”) published monthly model-lessons based on intuition (*lezioni di cose*). This fact makes us understand that intuition-based teaching was the official method in the Canton, since the “Educatore” was the journal of the pedagogical and political élite (Giudici 2014). But what kind of definition of *metodo intuitivo* was given by the pedagogical and political élite in Ticino? According to Curti the method's father had been Pestalozzi. In 1885 Curti published a small book with the subtitle *Lettere di un pestalozziano* (Curti 1885)

<sup>13</sup> *Programma d'insegnamento per le scuole primarie* (1894), available on the web-repository fondo-gianini.supsi.ch

that surely had a high number of copies, since we still find it in several libraries of Canton Ticino and it had a second edition in 1888. (The book is anonymous, but we are sure the author is Giuseppe Curti<sup>14</sup>.) In this text we can read what follows:

Qui comincerò a ricordare che il metodo *intuitivo* o *pestalozziano*, detto anche *naturale*, è da tutti i pedagogisti proclamato e in tutti gli Stati civili ormai riconosciuto come il più eccellente che mai si sia immaginato, il più naturale, il più facile, il più profittevole, in una parola l'*unico* per l'istruzione fondamentale e per la scuola popolare. [...] Perciò da ogni parte si sente benedire come gran benefattore del popolo e dell'umanità il nostro concittadino svizzero, il sommo educatore Pestalozzi che ne fu l'autore (Curti, 1884, 1-2)<sup>15</sup>.

In other chapters of the book the method is also defined as a result of Grégoire Girard's pedagogical and didactic ideas. But what was exactly Curti's idea about *metodo intuitivo*? He had already defined it in a small book published in 1881 about "natural language teaching" (we should not forget that he was himself a language teacher):

Altri chiamano l'Insegnamento naturale anche metodo *euristico*, *oggettivo*, *sperimentale*. Il comm. Sacchi scriveva testè: "Col *metodo sperimentale* vogliansi ora trasformare le scuole... Siamo lieti di vedere acclimatizzarsi questo metodo naturale." – E il prof. Somasca: "Il tema prediletto e caratteristico dell'ultimo Congresso pedagogico Italiano (Roma, autunno 1880) mirava a sancire la necessità di applicare nelle scuole Italiane il metodo d'osservazione che sogliamo dire *intuitivo*... Il Congresso, *proclamando la superiorità di questo metodo*, accolse il proposito di applicarlo in tutte le scuole primarie e coordinate (Curti 1881, 3)<sup>16</sup>.

The above-mentioned Angelo Somasca was the chairman of the Roman Pedagogical Congress of 1880 and we should remember that on this Congress Gabelli pronounced his famous speech (Gabelli 1880), to whom our text directly refers. Gabelli, however, does not mention nor Pestalozzi neither Girard, which makes us understand that the attribution of the method's origin to these two Swiss educators is not a universally accepted idea. Curti, reconducting the method's origin to Pestalozzi and Girard, did so perhaps for political and not scientific goals, wishing to stress the "Swiss" character of *metodo intuitivo*<sup>17</sup>. Gabelli, on the other hand, had created another myth about the method, based on the idea that its origin was due to German protestantism. It is

<sup>14</sup> Caldelari (1995, s.v. Giuseppe Curti) to whom we agree, attributes the text to Curti. He remembers that the letters had been already published in the Journal "L'Ape" directed by Curti, and that in the letters Curti's *Grammatica popolare* (Curti 1873) is said to be an example of "*metodo intuitivo*".

<sup>15</sup> [Here I shall begin by saying that *metodo intuitivo* or *metodo pestalozziano*, sometimes also called *metodo naturale*, has been declared by pedagogues in all countries to be the most excellent ever tried, the most natural, the easiest and the most useful, in one word the only method for primary teaching and popular schools. (...) That's why everywhere our Swiss fellow citizen Pestalozzi is defined as the most important and helpful educator, since he had invented the *metodo intuitivo*.]

<sup>16</sup> [Other people, speaking about *Insegnamento naturale*, call it *metodo euristico*, *oggettivo*, *sperimentale*. Sacchi wrote: "With the *metodo sperimentale* schools are now to be changed... We are very happy to see that method's diffusion." – And prof. Somasca: "The most important subject of the recent Pedagogical Congress of Italy (autumn 1880) has been the necessity to use in the schools all over the Italian Kingdom the observation-based method we call *metodo intuitivo*. The Congress, *stressing the method's superiority*, voted for its use in all Italian schools.]

<sup>17</sup> However, it must be remembered that Buisson in the *Dictionnaire de pédagogie* had introduced Girard as a reference, too (Ulbrich 2011, 40).

well known that Gabelli deeply admired German civilisation and pedagogical ideas, and so it's not surprising that for him every pedagogical progress is due to German way of thinking and teaching<sup>18</sup>. But whatever experts said about its origin, the new method was very successful in Italy. After the Pedagogical Congress of 1880 there was in Italy a very important publishing activity with dozens of handbooks about the new method. It is of course very difficult to have a complete idea about the exact meaning of the word *metodo intuitivo* in all those texts, but what can be seen in all the texts we read are the following ideas:

- a) The father of the so-called *metodo intuitivo* is Pestalozzi.
- b) The method's origin is in German-speaking and protestant northern Europe.
- c) The method is based on the children's real seeing and perceiving of objects.
- d) The method is better than traditional sterile grammar-teaching.

As we have already seen, the French debate about *méthode intuitive* began in 1875 with Buisson's report about Vienna World Exposition. It is interesting to know that the Italian's champion Gabelli had also published a long article about the Vienna Exposition (Gabelli 1873), and had also given long explanations about *Anschauungsunterricht* (some examples, e.g. the teacher's description of an elephant, were later recycled in the discourse of 1880). But Gabelli never tried a resemantisation of the term, and even did not use, in the report he published in 1873, the word *metodo intuitivo*. He translated the word *Anschauungsunterricht* into *istruzione intuitiva* o *istruzione visiva* (stressing in the second way the importance of pictures, wallpapers, illustrated books and other teaching supports based on visual perception). So it seems clear that there's intentional resemantisation and even cleansing in the transfer process towards France but not towards Italy.

Trying to find out the reasons of Curti's stressing the rule of Pestalozzi and Girard, we must ask what the French said about this problem. As we have already seen, the *Dictionnaire de pédagogie* contains an article about *Intuition et méthode intuitive* by Ferdinand Buisson himself (1374-1377) and another very long article about *Leçons de choses* signed Plâtrier (1528-1534). Buisson recognizes an important role of Pestalozzi in the history of an intuition-based pedagogy, but he does not think the Swiss educator is really the father of *méthode intuitive*:

[...] Malheureusement ni Pestalozzi ni ses disciples ne parvinrent à dresser un véritable plan d'études fondé sur l'intuition: les exercices d'observation limités d'abord à l'observation du corps de l'enfant, puis successivement étendus à d'autres objets de manière à élargir le cadre de l'encyclopédie des connaissances enfantines, devaient dégénérer très vite en un nouveau genre de routine et de scolastique. [...] (Buisson 1882, 1376)<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> «Il principio fondamentale della pedagogia in Germania, principio non già chiuso e sepolto nei libri, ma vivo, in pratica nelle scuole, è questo: che il maestro non debba mai nominare egli, né lasciar nominare agli alunni cosa alcuna, di cui non dia loro subito l'idea più netta, più determinata e precisa che per lui sia possibile. (...)» [The fundamental idea of pedagogy in Germany, concretely applied in the schools and not limited to mere theory, is the following: the teacher must not name himself objects to the children, neither must he make them say nothing that does not give them immediately a clear idea of the object, clearer than his explanation would be able to produce.] (Gabelli 1880, ed. 1992, 79. See also Gabelli 1867).

<sup>19</sup> [Unfortunately nor Pestalozzi neither his disciples succeeded in the construction of a real intuition-based

*The same scepticism about Pestalozzi can be found in the article about Leçons de choses:*

Les premiers disciples de Pestalozzi en Allemagne ne réussirent pas mieux que le maître à faire entrer d'une manière satisfaisante l'intuition dans la pratique scolaire. [...] Mais c'est justement après que la méthode pestalozzienne eut éprouvé en Allemagne cet échec dû à l'application maladroite d'un principe excellent, qu'en Amérique, en Angleterre, en France, en Belgique, en Italie, aussi bien que dans les pays du Nord, des éducateurs s'emparèrent d'une idée dont ils entrevoyaient les fécondes conséquences, et essayèrent de la réaliser dans les *leçons de choses*. [...] (Buisson 1882, 1529)<sup>20</sup>.

On the other hand, it must be mentioned that Pestalozzi's perhaps most important book, *Wie Gertrud ihre Kinder erzieht*, had been published in French translation in 1880 and that republican French educators considered him very important for their pedagogical program (Fontaine 2015; Tröhler 2016). So whatever may be the possible *nuances* due to political reasons (stressing the method's swissness), there is a minimum consensus between Curti and the French (and French-speaking Swiss) pedagogists about Pestalozzi's importance for any definition of the *méthode intuitive*. The differences are bigger about Girard: the article *Intuition et méthode intuitive* in the *Dictionnaire de pédagogie* (Buisson 1882, 1178-1182) never mentions him in relationship with the *Méthode intuitive*. So why Curti stressed so much Girard's importance for *metodo intuitivo*?

The answer may be researched in Curti's own activity as a language teacher. He published in 1873 a very modern Italian grammar, deeply influenced by Girard (Curti 1873) and, as we have already seen, in 1881 he published a handbook in which the new teaching method became *metodo naturale*, which can be easily seen as a synonyme of *metodo intuitivo*, since this is suggested by Curti himself in his book about Pestalozzi:

Perciò alcuni chiamano il pestalozziano *insegnamento sugli oggetti*, sulla realtà; noi lo diciamo *intuitivo* o *naturale*, secondo Pestalozzi. Questo modo d'insegnamento esclude l'uso che dominò troppo lungamente di cominciare l'istruzione colle astrazioni grammaticali (Curti 1876, 60)<sup>21</sup>.

Last but not least, we think it could be possible that Curti is the anonymous translator of Girard's *Enseignement régulier de la langue maternelle*, published in 1853 at

curriculum. The observation exercises about the child's body, later extended to other objects in the same way, with the goal of a bigger encyclopedical baggage of children's knowledge, became quickly a new kind of schooling routine and merely school grammar.]

<sup>20</sup> [Pestalozzi's first disciples in Germany, like himself, couldn't make enter in a satisfying way the intuition into schooling. [...] But after Pestalozzi's method had failed in Germany because of bad application, it was successful in France, in Great Britain and in the United States, in Belgium, in Italy, in the Scandinavian countries, where educators took the idea because they saw its rich potential consequences, and tried to realise it by introducing *leçons de choses*.]

<sup>21</sup> [That's why some call Pestalozzi's method *teaching about objects*, about reality; we call it intuitive or *natural teaching*, according to Pestalozzi. This way of teaching does not admit the tradition of beginning to teach by abstract grammar, as it has been in use for too many time.]

Lugano and reprinted in 1865 and 1877<sup>22</sup>.

So in Ticino there was, we think, a double resemantisation of the term *metodo intuitivo*: on one hand, it refers principally to language teaching, similarly to what we have seen in German-speaking Cantons. On the other side, it's perhaps because of this narrower definition of intuition-based teaching (as a form of language teaching) that Curti could take the "resource" Girard, useful for a more "Swiss" connotation of the pedagogic approach he tried to promote in his local reality. At the end of the cleansing process the *metodo intuitivo* became, in this way, a purely "Swiss" way of teaching, in no way suspectable to be the result of an importation from Italy.

But is the anti-Italian reflex the only explanation for Curti's resemantisation of the term? It should be remembered that Ticino, compared to Italy, had no delay in the construction of a school system, and that for example Girard had been translated in Ticino (perhaps by Curti himself) only a few years after the first edition published in the Italian States by Paravia (Girard 1846). So perhaps the resemantisation was a result of a double process: the exaltation of method's swissness, and Curti's own biography as a language teacher, both brought the Swiss author to a new, locally useful definition of the word *metodo intuitivo*. It's interesting, in fact, that Curti stresses the method's swissness but in the same time he gives a lot of importance to the method's approval by the Rome Congress of 1880, probably because this approval could be used as an authority-based argument in the local debate.

### *Italy and France: different discourses in different contexts*

What can we say about the French and Italian discourses around *méthode intuitive* we've examined? Both French and Italian pedagogists accordingly say that the method's origin is to search in the thought of Pestalozzi, and they never include Girard among the method's fathers. The Italian's understanding of *metodo intuitivo* seems to be less philosophic: in some handbooks the word's meaning is even so large that it becomes de facto a synonyme of Fröbel method, e.g. in the preface of Ravà's translation of Charlotte Delon's handbook (Delon 1890). The Italian's approach seems to be pragmatic. They needed the *metodo intuitivo* for issuing out of the tradition of grammar-based and rhetoric teaching, and for modernizing education, but without resemantisations by the change of pedagogical references because there wasn't any "shame" about being inspired by German references.

This can be seen very clearly in pedagogic handbooks and dictionaries. In the *Dizionario pedagogico* (Credaro and Martinazzoli 1890), Credaro gave a completely neutral definition of *metodo intuitivo*, without any mention of Pestalozzi, Girard or other presumed "fathers" of the method.

<sup>22</sup> When reading with attention the introduction of that translation (Girard 1852), one notices that the translator is very competent about didactic and linguistic matters, and also that he has an excellent knowledge not only of French but also of German language. Caldelari (1995) doesn't attribute an authorship to the translation. We think the unknown translator could be Giuseppe Curti.

Riepiloghiamo in breve come intuitivamente si possono insegnare i primi elementi di tutte le materie. Per mezzo delle lezioni di cose, fondate sull'intuizione esterna, si danno le cognizioni di fisica, di scienze naturali, e quelle relative alle arti ed ai mestieri: si ricorre qualche volta all'intuizione esterna, anche in materia di pura fede, quali sarebbero la storia e la geografia, quando ci serviamo d'immagini, rappresentanti i fatti che si narrano, o i vestiti e le armi di que' tempi, o facciamo sulla lavagna la pianta del paese, mostriamo carte geografiche in rilievo, mappamondi, ecc.

Le matematiche si fondano sull'intuizione interna, come pure l'insegnamento della lingua sia riguardo alla grammatica, che al comporre e alla spiegazione de' termini, come abbiamo visto (Credaro and Martinazzoli 1890, 273)<sup>23</sup>.

The definition is perfectly adherent to what we've seen in German-speaking Swiss or German syllabi. Even in the article *Pestalozzi* (Credaro and Martinazzoli 1890, 237-258) no mention is made of the Swiss educator's contribution to intuition-based teaching, and the *Dizionario* doesn't contain an article *Metodo intuitivo*. This may be partly due to not explicitly mentioned reasons we can find in a handbook (Cervetti 1881) whose author writes that

in Italia [...] anche adesso continuasi a temere che questo metodo, che ha per principio fondamentale l'intuizione sensibile e consiste nell'insegnamento per aspetto, ossia per mezzo degli occhi, abbia per iscopo od almeno per conseguenza [...] di scalzare le fondamenta della fede cattolica, educando i fanciulli a tener per vero quello soltanto di cui si può affermare l'esistenza o la realtà per mezzo dei sensi [...]. Fu anzi tenuta in ristretti confini; e basti il dire che dalla Chiesa venne denunziato come pericoloso per la religione il sistema educativo del Pestalozzi [...]<sup>24</sup>.

Pestalozzi was criticised by the Catholic Church, so it was difficult to refer in an explicit way to his pedagogy as the main model of intuition-based learning. On the other hand, it was also difficult to defend explicitly the French's discourse-construction about the alleged larger and not only perception-based idea of intuition (following Buisson's distinction between *Anschauungsunterricht* and *méthode intuitive*) since this could have been seen as an importation of ideas belonging to the French protestant Ferdinand Buisson's pedagogy and even to Jules Ferry's political program of non-clerical and non-religious *école publique et laïque*. So meanwhile Curti gave the word *metodo intuitivo* a very "Swiss" connotation for reasons that are partly political and partly autobiographic, the Italian pedagogy tried to find its own way towards a

<sup>23</sup> [Let's briefly resume how one can teach the bases of all disciplines basing the lessons on intuition. It's by object lessons, founded on the external intuition, we can give knowledge about physics, sciences and crafts ; sometimes the external intuition is also used when speaking about faith-based matters, like for example history and geography, when we use images that illustrate the facts we tell or the clothes of the historic period, or when we design plants to the blackboard, when we use maps etc. / Mathematics are based on internal intuition, as also language teaching (grammar, writing, lexical activities), as we have seen.]

<sup>24</sup> [In Italy [...] even now people continue to be afraid of using this method, based on the sensible intuition and on teaching by objects, i.e. by what the eyes can see, because they fear that it's real aim (or it's consequence) [...] could be to destroy the bases of catholic faith because it teaches children to admit as true only what they can perceive by their own senses. [...]. So the method was very limited in its use, and it may be sufficient to say that Pestalozzi's method was blamed by the Roman Church as a danger for religion.]

useful and clear definition of intuition-based teaching in a complicated battlefield of ideological and political tensions.

### *Conclusions*

Can we try an analysis of all these facts with the help of Michel Espagne's concept of cultural transfers? I think it's possible to do this. First of all, there's an evident resemantisation in the transfert from German into French area, when Buisson says that his *méthode intuitive* (based on different kinds of children's intuition) is different from the German, only view-based *Anschauungsunterricht*. As we have seen in the syllabi of Bavaria and German-speaking Switzerland, the real *Anschauungsunterricht* is less view-based than what is affirmed by the French actors of the transfer process. The construction of an alleged semantic difference between *Anschauung* and *intuition* in Buisson is even more interesting if we remember that in Switzerland the semantic value in both German and French-speaking cantonal curricula had been correctly translated. Buisson needed this false difference as a necessary ideological construction that allowed him to promote a teaching method coming from the enemy's tradition.

A second resemantisation can also be seen in Italy, where the "embarrassing" references to Pestalozzi (whose role is not stressed by many Italian authors) and Buisson (whose role is clearly censored) are avoided. Italian authors try to slalom between both references avoiding them whenever possible.

A third resemantisation can be seen in Canton Ticino, where Curti stresses the method's "swissness" by underlining Pestalozzi's role and introducing Girard as a totally new reference. So paradoxically Pestalozzi came back into (Italian-speaking) Switzerland deeply transformed by the transfer processes and became an emblem of swissness he hadn't been in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, because the rising of a strong National State south of Ticino's border made necessary, in the little Italian-speaking Canton of the Swiss Confederation, the ideological construction of a "Swiss pedagogy" under which's umbrella modern educational ideas could be imported either from Italy or from German-speaking Cantons.

Ticino was so in the interesting situation that on one hand it had direct contact with German educational culture (Curti was a language teacher and spoke perfectly German) and could import pedagogical ideas without any problems, as we have already seen in the French-speaking Cantons (where the translation of *Anschauung* into curricula and syllabi didn't create any ideological or cultural problem). On the other hand the Italian-speaking Canton was in contact with the uprising Italian Kingdom. The importation of ideas from Italy, however, was possible only by way of resemantisation because any (too) direct influence of the big neighbour had to be hidden. Switzerland's particular position in the crossway of cultures, languages, ideas and national movements (Italian Risorgimento, French Republican renaissance after the 1870 defeat, Swiss liberalism) make it a particularly interesting case for studies about the different ways how ideas about schooling and education circulated in the European Continent in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

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