

SCHOOL RENAISSANCE THROUGH SCHOOL EXHIBITIONS. THE CASE OF THE 9TH ITALIAN PEDAGOGICAL CONGRESS AND THE 1874 SCHOOL EXHIBITION

*El renacimiento escolar a través de las exposiciones escolares.
El caso del IX Congreso Pedagógico Italiano y la Exposición Escolar de 1874*

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Keywords

Italian Pedagogical
Congresses
School Exhibitions
Material Culture
of School
Italy
9th Italian Pedagogical
Congress

ABSTRACT: As part of an international reflection on the circulation of pedagogical ideas and teaching practices in 19th-century exhibitions, this study focuses on the pedagogical congresses held in post-unification Italy to stimulate debate on schooling. Based on printed and previously unexplored archival sources, it examines the 9th Italian Pedagogical Congress, held in Bologna in 1874 alongside a school exhibition, to explore the educational themes discussed and the material culture of school on display, between continuity and innovation.

Palabras clave

Congresos Pedagógicos
Italianos
Exposiciones Escolares
Cultura Material Escolar
Italia
IX Congreso Pedagógico
Italiano

RESUMEN: Este estudio se enmarca en una reflexión internacional sobre la circulación de ideas pedagógicas y prácticas didácticas en las exposiciones del siglo XIX. Se analiza el papel de los Congresos Pedagógicos en Italia tras la Unificación, con especial atención al IX Congreso celebrado en Bolonia en 1874, acompañado de una Exposición Escolar. A partir de fuentes impresas y archivísticas inéditas, se examinan los temas tratados y la cultura material escolar expuesta, entre continuidad e innovación educativa.

1. INTRODUCTION

The international development of school systems in the 19th century was marked by a progressive pedagogic renaissance, seeking more effective solutions for fighting illiteracy, ensuring access to schools

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How to cite: D'Ascenzo, Mirella (2025). «School renaissance through school exhibitions. The case of the 9th Italian Pedagogical Congress and the 1874 School Exhibition», *Cabás*, 34, 56-69. (<https://doi.org/10.35072/27668>).

Received: 30 June, 2025; Final version: 15 October, 2025.

ISSN 1989-5909 / © UPV/EHU Press



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and reviewing obsolete educational instruments, which led to a new definition of the material culture of school. The universal, national and local exhibitions promoted by various institutions and on which historiography has focused (Barausse, 2020; Brunelli, 2020; Del Pozo, 1983; Dittrich, 2011; Dussel, 2007; Escolano Benito, 2011-2012; Lawn & Grosvenor, 2005 and 2009 and 2021; Pizzigoni, 2022 and 2024; Trigueros-Gordillo & Rubio-Mayoral, 2018; Viola, 2018) were the opportunity for disseminating new pedagogic ideas and a material culture of schools promoted both from the 'grass roots' of the educational culture and by the growing number of new school book publishers (Meda, 2016).

In Italy, an important role in the debates of the time was played by the pedagogical congresses held in various Italian cities which, from 1861, aimed to discuss the purpose of educational institutions and schools following the Unification of Italy and the educational tools required to assure Nation Building. The material culture of schools included text books and educational museums which, from 1868, were also offered to a broader audience in the form of school exhibitions, contributing to the debate on and circulation of educational materials in schools in Italy and beyond (Barausse, 2020; D'Ascenzo & Vignoli, 2008; Durán Rodríguez, 2012; Meda, 2016; Pizzigoni, 2022 and 2024; Rico Mansard, 2004). As indicated by the Italian scholar Santamaria Formiggini in 1931

an in-depth study of the Pedagogical Congress proceedings would be useful for the history of pedagogy, as the exchanges of opinions, the discussions recorded—usually with the participation of both educational theorists, teachers and professors, therefore people who 'lived' the school and saw its needs and problems with that day-to-day experience—demonstrate the most urgent matters of a period and remind us of certain correct educational viewpoints that perhaps today do not come to the minds of scholars. (Formiggini Santamaria, 1931, p. 117)

Research on the Italian Pedagogical Congresses is still to be fully discovered by historiography (Bertoni Jovine, 1958; Bucci, 1989; Belluzzi, 1872; Buratti, 1877; Formiggini Santamaria, 1931; D'Ascenzo, 1997; Linaker, 1880; Pizzigoni, 2022) as these were truly central to the construction of a national educational community and the role played by educators, teachers and professors in promoting schools and education.

This contribution examines one of these Pedagogical Congresses, the 9th Italian Pedagogical Congress held in Bologna in 1874, along with a School Exhibition that saw the participation of schools, book authors and inventors of educational materials and school furniture from all over Italy. We strive to reconstruct the context of this Congress and the related School Exhibition, along with the promoters, issues discussed, leading figures, as well as the exhibitors, the objects on display, the members of the judging panels, the prizes and the final reports and reasons for the final choices made for the prize-giving.

2. THE ITALIAN PEDAGOGICAL CONGRESSES

The origins of the Pedagogical Congresses lie in the 'Risorgimento', the renaissance process following the Unification of Italy. These congresses were organised by the Primary School Teachers' Association of Milan in 1860, bringing together illustrious figures as well as 'all those who devote themselves to instruction and education' (Buratti, 1877, p. 9) and chaired by Giuseppe Sacchi, a protagonist of the post-unification educational battles and issues in Milan (Polenghi, 2013). The Association published the periodical *Patria e Famiglia* ("Countries and Family") which reported on the debates and resolutions taken, initially limited to the Milan area but also referring to international education studies, whether theoretical, methodological or educational. From 1861 it promoted the first Italian Pedagogical Congress precisely in Milan, the main

topic of which was pre-school education and particularly the debate on the introduction of Froebelian methods, educational methods for the deaf-mute, the need for evening and weekend schools to fight illiteracy, the difficult condition of primary school teachers working for the municipalities, literacy teaching methods and the related text books. These topics were returned to also in later Congresses, with an accent on practical and vocational education in the Siena Congress (1862) as part of the 'Pedagogy' section of the Congress of Italian scientists. In the third Pedagogical Congress, also held in Milan (1863), the year in which the Association became the Italian Pedagogical Association (Buratti, 1877, p. 37), the exclusion of dialects in primary schools was discussed, formulating a first idea of a common scientific foundation course for the gymnasium and the technical school, which was later developed during the Congress in Florence (1864) along with the reform of teacher training schools and the issue of scientific subjects. During the fifth Pedagogical Congress in Genoa (1868), the participants debated the reorganisation of primary schools and the legal and economic status of teachers, along with the implementation of compulsory schooling, the introduction of singing and gymnastics, traineeships and higher education for women, all topics that were developed in the following Congress in Turin (1869), during which relations between schools and family, the reform of the secondary school, popular libraries, the importance of popular singing in school and the proposal for a single middle school were debated. The following Congress in Naples (1871) was dominated by matters of social pedagogy, including adult education, child labour, the reorganisation of the schools of arts and crafts and the farming colleges for the integration of young people on the margins of society. Finally, the works at the Congress in Venice (1872) were divided into four sections, relating to primary studies, teacher training, secondary technical education, classical studies and institutions for the deaf-mute and the blind, proposing a reform of technical and grammar school studies and "for the first time the attempt to link data from experimental psychology with school, comparing the teaching procedures with the aptitudes of young people in a report. But the time was not ripe for these studies" (Formiggini Santamaria, 1931, p. 120). So many different topics were discussed in the various Congresses, always closely linked to broader debates on school policies of the time or matters of cultural, educational and pedagogic renaissance.

Starting from the fifth Congress in Genoa in 1868, the School Exhibition was incorporated into the Pedagogical Congresses. This was an exhibition of schoolbooks and teaching materials from a range of municipalities and institutions, aiming to share the material side of schools partly already experimented in the teaching practices of individual teachers or the municipalities themselves as a form of national educational innovation. All the materials on display were judged by a panel that awarded prizes and medals of merit, helping to enhance or reject a particular product.

The Teaching Exhibition in Turin in 1869 was particularly significant. With 400 exhibitors, almost a million educational works arranged in 18 rooms with a "very consistent number of pedagogic and educational works presented by thirty publishers or typographers" (Bucci, p. 3094), testifying to Turin's role in educational innovation through school publishing and the ties with the international pedagogic culture (Pizzigoni, 2022).

3. THE 9TH ITALIAN PEDAGOGICAL CONGRESS OF 1874

At the end of the Congress held in Venice in 1872, the city of Bologna was designated at the site of the 9th Italian Pedagogical Congress, held in 1874. Locally, the matter was discussed in the council meetings from 1873 (D'Ascenzo, 1997), coming up against many doubts voiced by the councillors, concerned with the excessive expenditure envisaged and the actual scientific relevance of the event. In fact, for the Municipality of Bologna the organisation required significant funding but was also an opportunity for placing the city

in the broader national pedagogic debate and showing the school system being built in the municipality. From the Unification of Italy, the various municipal administrations had introduced the new school system, parts of which reflected, and others differed from the pre-Unification period. From 1869 the progressist municipal council had approved a new primary education regulation which, in addition to excluding religious education, had worked to modernise the teaching methods in the city's primary schools. The Municipality worked closely with the provincial Society of Teachers of Bologna, a 'grass-roots' teaching association that fostered educational innovation by introducing new textbooks and overseeing the birth of the travelling positivist educational museum (D'Ascenzo & Vignoli, 2008) and continuing to guide municipal school policies in the following years.

The preparatory works for the Congress were overseen by a promoter committee, chaired by Cesare Albicini and then by the new mayor Gaetano Tacconi, along with the municipal councillors and key figures from the local educational scene, including heads of the department of education (Ernesto Masi), school inspectors (Gaspere Armandi), heads of teacher training schools (Adelfo Grosso and Antonio Quirico), municipal school inspectors (Raffaele Belluzzi, Aristide Ravà and Giuseppe Bignami), along with the head of the Education Office Medardo Burzi, the municipal councillors working in education and professors from universities (Francesco Bertolini, Francesco D'Ovidio) and several private schools, as listed in the detailed minutes of the various meetings¹.

The Congress was held in Palazzo dell'Archiginnasio, the old university headquarters, at the same time hosting the 5th School Exhibition as well as the 6th National Gymnasium Congress, from 8 September (Proceedings of the 9th Italian Pedagogical Congress and the 5th School Exhibition, 1875). The impressive organisation overseen by the Education Office included economic benefits for the participants, such as a discounted travel card, free visits to museums and other key places in the city, also ensuring the success of the initiative with 1,214 participating teachers, university professors from Bologna, provincial school inspectors, as well as private teachers and heads of schools from all over Italy. The Promoter Committee set up two internal commissions for primary and secondary studies, each with 15 members, tasked with examining the proposed interventions at the Congress. At the end of the works, five topics for discussion were presented for primary education and another five for secondary education. This first was politically the "hottest" topic of that historical time, which had already been discussed at the previous Congress but without any conclusions. In Bologna, the Report was delivered by Enrico Panzacchi, former councillor for education in the Municipality, who precisely in 1870 had religious education eliminated from primary schools; he obviously defended the council's decision and, with the support of Sacchi and with a role call and recorded vote, had the motion that the responsibility for dogmatic religious teaching did not lie with the state but with the municipalities approved, at the request of the families, causing fierce debate.

The second topic of the Congress was delivered by Sacchi on the preferred educational orientations for nursery and primary schools. He discussed the need for a greater coordination among the various educational levels, with a view to assuring continuity among the ages of infancy, childhood and adolescence. He praised the nursery schools and the more recent Froebelian Gardens, however claiming the need for trained, educated teachers and a general methodological renewal, in full continuity with primary schools. He banished the doctrinal, mnemonic teachings of infant school, deeming that the purpose of education, i.e., the knowledge of the good, beautiful and true, was better achieved through heuristic

¹ Historical Archive of the Municipality of Bologna, Administrative file of the municipality of Bologna, Title XIV Education, Section 9 Special provisions, 1874 (hereinafter, ASCBO, Education), envelope 957, 9th Pedagogical Congress, *Record of the proceedings of the Promoter Committee of the 9th Pedagogical Congress and the 5th School Exhibition*.

processes that engaged the child's intelligence and intuition. To this end, he deemed that infant schools should be provided

with an ordered collection of real or simulated objects that offered the children a whole range of things representing the interesting spectacle of art and nature. These kinds of educational museums must, with special teaching skill, bring together some of the main products of the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms, possibly represented by real objects or such as to represent the real with models or graphs. They must also include some textile materials in their natural and processed states; some small forms of construction materials, household objects and common manufactured devices. They shall also include a collection of images of our great men and some of the masterpieces of the Italian arts. This first teaching of children based on objective truths shall be associated with imitating manual and graphic exercises. For this, the highly geometrical use of so-called Froebelian toys is required, also teaching the children to imitate a wide range of commonly used ingenious objects. (Sacchi, 1875, pp. 94-95)

Sacchi therefore showed his familiarity with the innovative pedagogy of the time, which he defined as 'rational', meaning objective teaching, lessons of things, which came to Italy in the 1870s with the translation of the writings of Maria Pape Carpentier, who had illustrated the new method at the Paris Expo of 1867 (Brunelli, 2020; D'Ascenzo & Vignoli, 2008; Pizzigoni, 2022; Morandi, 2023). Sacchi also used the term 'educational museums' rather than teaching museums or school museums to refer to the collections of objects used for objective teaching, indicating in a note that these collections could be found in the educational section of the Industrial Museum in Turin (Pizzigoni, 2022) and "at the Educational Museum set up in Rome by the 'Commendatore' Bonghi" (Sacchi, 1875, p. 94). They could also be found in the nursery schools in Milan and all the Italian deaf-mute institutions, showing how the objective method had spread also to institutions delivering 'special' education which were also seeking effective teaching solutions for learning, all the better when linked to the 'seeing and touching' methods of deaf-mute students.

For the popular primary schools and secondary schools, Sacchi aimed to modernise literacy with nomenclature exercises already introduced into Italy by Ferrante Aporti in the nursery schools in Lombardy and Piedmont (Sideri, 1999), using posters and wall pictures that were also used to compare the names of things between the material language and the official Italian language, recalling the use of educational museums and new text books able to "offer the people's children the first notions of natural phenomena with a few practical farming skills in the countryside and technical skills in the cities" (Sacchi, 1875, pp. 96-97). Sacchi then dwelt on teaching geography, still too mnemonic but "that can be plastically taught with methods already adopted elsewhere, while national history reduced to popular tales can perspicaciously be used to spread a love of our monumental memories" (Sacchi, 1875, p. 97). For composition exercises, he hoped to overcome the grammatical and rhetoric dimension in favour of the students' more spontaneous thought, and associated gymnastics to choir singing in order to create a "strong population" (Sacchi, 1875, p. 97). He also suggested reducing the focus on teaching grammar in favour of classical literature to foster a passion for the philological aspect of words and proceed by imitation, confirming that the teaching of the Italian language was still substantially anchored to the model of classical school whose pedagogic culture and militant schooling was criticised only from the late 19th century onwards (D'Ascenzo, 2011). The excessive teaching of grammar in primary schools was also criticised in the General Report made by Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, one of the top experts of Italian Linguistics and a supporter of the importance of dialect and maternal language in primary schools. The other Reports delivered at the Congress concerned compulsory education (by the ministerial official Girolamo Buonazia, famous for an important report that had only recently been published on the matter), the low level of training assured by the teacher training schools and, for the secondary schools, the reform of vocational schools and the proposal for a middle school in preparation for the choice of classical or technical studies after primary school.

4. THE 5TH SCHOOL EXHIBITION

During the 9th Pedagogical Congress, a public exhibition of school objects was organised, and these came from schools of all levels from all over Italy. The specific rules defined the procedures for sending the material to the Promoter Committee well in advance, accompanied by a label on the package, indicating the sender (person or school), the price of the object if available for sale and a brief description of the material (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, pp. 11-13).

All the exhibitors would be assessed by a special panel for each class of materials displayed, appointed by the Promoter Committee, and the individual opinions of the special panels would then be subjected to the opinion of the Upper Council of the Congress, consisting of members of the Chairmen's Council and the Chairmen and Secretaries of each class panel. The names included members of the Bologna Education Department, local professors and noblewomen, as well as some excellent rogues, including Ignazio Cantù (Lombardi, 2013) and the famous poet Giosuè Carducci. Following the judgements, first, second and third prizes were awarded, corresponding respectively to the silver and bronze medals and an honourable mention. The Rules also specified that three silver medals would be awarded to praise-worthy municipalities among the exhibitors at the Exhibition, excluding the winners of the previous years and the Municipality of Bologna that had organised the event; however, the special commission established by the primary school panel (the secretary and speaker of which was the engineer Vittore Ravà) in assessing the primary schools of Bologna praised the conditions of the municipality, and in any case awarded it a silver medal (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, pp. 311-313).

The School Exhibition was held in the halls of the municipal library at Palazzo dell'Archiginnasio, and the material was not displayed by city or subject, as in the previous years, but by type of school and for four special classes: works by teachers, teaching materials, building models and school furnishings, educational publications.

The schools type included 15 works displayed by nursery schools from various parts of Italy and five kindergartens, three of which from Bologna. The works included knitting, crochet, woven straw, blankets, knitwear, bonnets, socks, all materials judged positively by the nursery school and Froebelian garden panel, but with no specific prizes: the opinions indicated that the works were beautiful and perfect, as if not all the work of the students but of adults. Prizes were awarded to primary schools from several Italian municipalities to male and female teacher training schools, gymnasium and grammar schools, girls' higher education schools and 44 prizes were awarded to technical schools.

The category of teachers' works was under-represented, as bemoaned by the panel and the assessor Abdon Altobelli: there were plenty of female works, including pin cushions, needlework and embroidery, fruit baskets made of wax. Other works, including handwriting and drawing, were praised but did not receive any prizes. The teaching material was also closely assessed by a specific panel, which complained of the low number of examples on display compared to the need to modernise school teaching. The opinions on the materials invented by individual teachers, considered very ingenious yet too mechanical and impractical, were very confused. Among these, ample room was given to the description of a 'mechanical counting device' invented by Augusto Pirottini from Ferrara, a "kind of abacus for teaching counting and arithmetic. The one hundred balls have four faces each, and are fitted in tens in vertical metal casings that allow unit periods up to tens of millions" (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 346). Similar perplexities were expressed over "another kind of mechanical device called presented by Mr Sander, especially for teaching syllables and continuous reading" (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 348), an equipped rectangular container used for teaching syllabic reading. The Speaker concluded that

no mechanical device can equal or imitate the work of the teacher; whose voice, gaze, gestures, whose choice of exercises, whose wit and clarity of exposition, we could

almost say becomes enchained in the minds of the children, spreading in their souls the sentiment of their own spiritual power; nor can mechanics, used for such purpose, govern the children's faculties and make them experts who learn when they have trouble *thinking* and *reasoning*. (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 349)

These mechanical teaching materials were therefore negatively assessed, accused of being too complicated and not facilitating or accelerating the teaching and learning process. This opinion condemned such devices to failure on the market: indeed, at the current state of research, none of them have been found to be patented² or in the catalogues of the main manufacturers of school materials, such as Paravia and Vallardi. They in any case constitute an important step in the history of school materials and, although forgotten, bear witness to the attempts to renew teaching tools in the late 19th century proposed by the teaching category.

The Report of the panels on the models of buildings and school furnishings also complained of the few projects received and presented for the schools in the Municipality of Milan, Fano and Imola, all considered unsuitable for several reasons. As regards the furnishings, on the other hand, the carpenter Luigi Brunetti was praised for his exhibits of six different desks, of which four for primary schools (one single desk, one joined double desk, another two-seater joined to a blackboard, one with two independent seats), one for nursery schools and one for design schools. In particular, the two-seater desk was appreciated for its solid construction, the price and the possibility to raise the upper part of the desk for easy cleaning, as well as the very hygienic grille seat and the straight, vertical backrest that guaranteed a correct sitting position, which received a bronze medal. The panel also mentioned another of Brunetti's objects, a very solid double sliding window "which already received an award at the London Exhibition" (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 361)³. The desk invented by the engineer Vittore Ravà, brother of the municipal school inspector Aristide, who both worked on the development of the Froebelian kindergarten set up by the "Lega Bolognese for popular education" in 1873 (D'Ascenzo, 1997), was also praised. This desk, made by the carpenter Vellani, was described by Ravà himself as a scientifically oriented invention, as the 'height ratios between the seat and the table are those indicated by Mantegazza and other hygienists'⁴; also for this reason it was awarded as "well designed and very comfortable" (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 362) and followed the fate of its inventor who, having moved to Rome to work at the Ministry of Public Education, also worked on the Teaching Exhibitions in Milan, Turin and Paris, and also won a prize at the Teaching Exhibition in Turin in 1898 (D'Ascenzo, 2013b).

The special class of educational publications was the richest, with 476 books on display. The work performed by the members of the responsible panel was particularly relevant, divided into five commissions for Moral, Pedagogy and Literature, Sciences, Languages, Music and Calligraphy and Drawing, coordinated by the Chairman Sacchi and the Secretary Giuseppe Mattioli. This was a particularly arduous task, as can be seen in the minutes of the Commissions and the hand-written file of longer opinions on the individual sheets in alphabetical order. Despite the many publications on display, only four were awarded a silver medal, all on different subjects. Among these were the *Metodo di calligrafia* by Fausto Saggiotti, a "work of fine educational intelligence, and highly commendable for both its written and artistic parts" (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 365) which marked the relevance of this Bologna-born author in a

² As emerges from the Trade Marks and Patents database in the Central State Archive in Rome at the link <http://dati.acs.beniculturali.it/mm/local/> (last access: 24.06.2025) currently under implementation

³ The name of Luigi Brunetti is not among the exhibitors in London, see *International Exhibition 1862. Official Catalogue of the Industrial Department. Third Edition*. London, Truscott, Son & Simmons.

⁴ ASCBO, Education, envelope 959, Hand-written report by Vittore Ravà, p. 1.

subject that was still very important and which disappeared from the *Primary school teaching programmes* from 1923, within the framework of the Gentile Reform.

Among the 13 works that won a bronze medal were texts on various subjects: French grammar, complete courses of the English language, accounting for technical schools, texts on physics and natural history, local history, periodicals for adults and for children, such as *Il nuovo educatore* and *L'albo dei fanciulli* by a successful author like Francesco Veniali) as well as the reading book *I primi anni di Alessandro Manzoni* by the abbot Antonio Stoppani (1835-1911), an author already known for his work *Il Bel Paese* used to promote scientific popularisation and knowledge of Italy among the new generations (Marescotti, 2013). Others who received awards also included Gaetano Beccari (1844-1902), a prominent primary school teacher from Bologna who promoted the simultaneous teaching of reading and writing (D'Ascenzo, 2013b) whose *Metodo della nomenclatura* was rewarded at the Congress as a "commendable work for both its concept and execution" (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 365) and in a more detailed manner by Cesare Cavara (1818-1880) the famous primary school inspector of the Kingdom (D'Ascenzo, 2013b) as

a work worthy of greater praise, the variety and at the same time the parsimony used in the choice of subjects, the truly artistic and elegant arrangement of the symmetrical boxes that make up the folders of this work; the exactness and precision used in the nomenclature taken from pure sources, and the several uses of Tuscan, make these posters highly commendable, and that every municipality should provide for its schools. It is proposed to award a bronze medal.⁵

A total of 54 educational publications received a mention of honour. Among these, the text by the primary school teacher from Bologna Luciano Andrioli, *Scuola a officina, secondo libro per gli alunni delle scuole serali e festive* considered "a useful and commendable work for moral and scientific knowledge, suited to children's intelligence" (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 367) and the book *Prime letture dei fanciulletti* which was briefly praised at the Congress as a "useful work for the simplicity of its dictations and good order" (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 367) but was more richly described and flattered in the hand-written Report:

these readings educate and entertain at the same time, containing moral concepts that are very well suited to virtuously informing the gentle souls of young children; and all expressed with that light and bright spontaneity that is best suited to children's understanding. This work also assists the learning of language, listing graduated nomenclatures in order to dispose the soul to welcoming all teachings: and for teaching to read it is beyond praise, because, as this work is the continuation of a spelling book, everything in it is ordered into reasonable levels; and the characters vary throughout the edition, to successfully achieve the purpose proposed by the authors, which is to lead the children to read fluently and over time acquire useful knowledge. This work deserves the second prize!⁶

Andrioli's *Prime letture* was written with his fellow teacher Alessandro Graziani (1849-1933), later a successful author of history books for primary schools and school inspector for the Municipality of Bologna towards the end of the century (D'Ascenzo, 2013b).

Salvatore Muzzi (1807-1884), a prolific writer who was already famous prior to Unification and very well known in Bologna (Andreassi, 2013), also won several awards, with six honourable mentions for some

⁵ ASCBO, Education, envelope 957, File of educational publications subjected to assessment, Opinion of Mascioli.

⁶ ASCBO, Education, envelope 958, Prizes and Opinions of some printed educational works.

of his educational works considered “highly useful and practical books that have produced excellent results thus far” (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 371). Muzzi was also mentioned in an important on spelling books and Latin grammar books written by Gaetano Atti (1806-1876), a key figure in the Bologna school world during the transition before and after Unification, and author of many books for training teachers in the city (D'Ascenzo, 2013b). With great precision, Atti described 13 spelling books in Italian and two Latin grammar books, specifying the analytical criteria for the spelling books, divided into analytical method and phonic method “that I praise more because the process is shorter, because you can learn to read in a few months, as I myself have already experimented in three public schools, and because it is the only suitable means for rapidly eliminating the shameful plague of 18 million illiterates we still have”⁷. Atti claimed that the phonic method was invented by the famous Luigi Muzzi in Bologna in 1814, “then followed by Figlinesi, Gazzetti, Parra[vi]cini, Lambruschini, Carbonati, Vandelli, Taverna, and by me, as a *Sillabario fonico* (phonic spelling book) printed in Bologna in 1869 by Zanichelli”⁸ and was later adopted and spread by him. Gaetano Atti's laudable analysis bears witness to the slow and difficult historical passage of instrumental reading learning, and particularly phonic and syllabic learning, before and after the Unification of Italy, ignoring the French works and above all Pestalozzi.

Among the authors most frequently listed in the class of educational works, there were 10 by Pasquale Fornari (1837-1923), who was already active in Milan prior to Unification, specialised in the education of the dead-mute and in the production of books for teachers of dead-mute students, promoter of the oral method and author of school manuals also inspired by Samuel Smiles's self-help and scientific popularisation (Sani, 2013). ‘Only’ five of his works received awards, running from the reading book *Cento raccontini, favolette e poesie* to the applied chemistry book for the people, to educational dialogues on the homeland, to the protagonist *Tommaso, o il galantuomo istruito* “a work worthy of standing side by side with the best works of this genre, praiseworthy for its form and its concepts, useful for popular knowledge of which it is rich” (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 369). The number of awards received by Fornari's works bears witness to the fact that he was already a successful and ‘fashionable’ author in the material culture of schools showcased by the 1874 Pedagogical Congress.

Giuseppe Borgogno (1820-1892) was also one of the most recurrent authors in the class of educational works presented at the School Exhibition of 1874. The literature professor who was already well known before Unification as a prolific author of school books on Italian, arithmetic, geography and history (Chiosso, 2013) presented nine texts⁹ that met with only modest opinions, and only his *Esercizi graduati e pratici di grammatica e lingua italiana* were deemed “very useful, like those that can facilitate good writing” (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 367) received an honourable mention. In contrast to the texts by Fornari, Borgogno's lack of success at the Congress seems to underline a certain intolerance of an author and his books, now considered ‘old’ and to be replaced with new solutions with more innovative contents.

Honourable mentions were also given to scientific texts such as *Aritmetica regionata e principi di geometria ad uso delle scuole elementari* written by Lorenzo Garbieri, primary school teacher from Bologna judged as a “precious book for its practical utility” (Atti del IX Congresso pedagogico italiano, 1875, p. 370).

Two works on Pedagogy were among the educational publications receiving an honourable mention. The first was a positivist book by Salvatore Colonna (1842-1919), *Corso completo di pedagogia elementare*,

⁷ ASCBO, Education, envelope 957, File ‘Panel reports’, G. Atti, *Detailed Report by Prof. Gaetano Atti presented on 7 September 1874 the Promoter Committee of the 9th Pedagogical Congress on 13 Spelling Books and 2 Latin Grammar books*.

⁸ *Ivi*.

⁹ ASCBO, Education, envelope 957, File of educational publications subjected to assessment, Borgogno Giuseppe.

sviluppato in 40 lezioni which was a “successful pedagogy manual used in teacher training schools, which appeared for the first time in 1872 and was reprinted for at least two more decades” (Montecchi, 2013, p. 376), prized as a “very worthy work for the abundance of materials, its intelligent distribution, its parts and the correct language used therein”¹⁰. The second was the manual *La scienza dell’educazione* by Cesare Rosa, judged by Gualberta Alaide Beccari (1843-1906), a leading figure in the battle for female emancipation, director of the periodical ‘La donna’, writer and journalist known not only in Bologna but throughout Italy (Gazzetta, 2013). Beccari’s interpretation was clearly attentive to the female issue. According to Beccari, the author felt women’s education to be necessary but did not consider them as citizens

there is no doubt, he demands better education for women, aspiring to her place as queen of the home, minister of peace and love. But he is not concerned with her condition, which is far from joyous. Indeed, it would appear that he wants to stop progress [and] the revendication of the age-old injustice that weighs on her. And yet if education as was concocted in Rosa’s mind brings its fruits, the first to benefit will be women. But how many preconceived ideas obscure the light of intellect, how to escape this error? [...] Estranged from prejudice, he dared recommend that women should not be guided by reason in investigating all things human¹¹

argumentatively commenting that

and if women, the mothers of humanity, must incarnate in their children that science whose dogmas Mr Rosa is disembowelling, shall they not fully develop their intelligence and all that knowledge that makes them worthy of such high office? The greater an expert she becomes in the hazards of life, the more aware her children will be.¹²

The author in any case proposed an honourable mention, but such a polemic position on the female question enshrined the lively debate on the issue of the duties and rights of women in post-unitary Italy, present at the Pedagogical Congress of 1874, in which Beccari played such a major role. The only foreign author to receive an award was Adolf Pick, the famous populariser of the works of Fröbel in Italy who, with his *Opuscolo sui giardini d’infanzia* judged as a precious work by the municipal school inspector Aristide Ravà, obtained an honourable mention, marking the spread of Froebelism in Italy and in Bologna.

The works of the Pedagogical Congress ended on 20 September 1874 at 12.30, with the entrance of the municipal band and the Prefect of Bologna in Palazzo dell’Archiginnasio, among the general applause and the prize-givings, in a climate of gravitas. In the session of 15 October 1874, the municipal council of Bologna informed that it had received the prize as one of the three deserving municipalities for schools, and that it had received an award also from the Italian pedagogic society with a silver medal awarded by the chairman Sacchi at the closing meeting of the Congress. The School Exhibition left a rich heritage of textbooks on display, and many local authors destined for great success in the publishing world and beyond. The following year, the Education Department of Bologna proposed the adoption of texts for 1875-76 based on the data from the Pedagogical Congress of 1874¹³, which revealed how the complex work

¹⁰ ASCBO, Education, envelope 957, File of educational publications subjected to assessment, Opinion of Babini (?) and Cavara.

¹¹ ASCBO, Education, envelope 957, File ‘Pedagogy’, Cesare Rosa, *Scienza dell’Educazione*, Hand-written report by Gualberta Alaide Beccari, pp. 4-5.

¹² *Ivi*, p. 5.

¹³ State Archive, Bologna, Education Department of Bologna, I series Years 1860-1934, envelope 56, Provincial School Board 1860-1884, 18 October 1875.

performed by the assessors of school manuals at the Congress had been appreciated and the choices maintained in the schools in and around Bologna.

CONCLUSION

The Italian Pedagogical Congresses and related School Exhibitions were the ideal venues for discussing important issues for school policy, the pedagogic culture and the modernisation of teaching following Unification, within the broader nation-building project. During the 9th Italian Pedagogical Congress held in Bologna, the topics debated had partly been discussed in the previous years, but some decisions were taken only on that occasion, such as the exclusion of dogmatic religious teaching and the final seal of approval of the Froebelian Kindergartens. These topics returned to the fore also in later Pedagogical Congresses, which were interrupted and resumed in 1898 in Turin with the new name of the National Pedagogical Congresses. The organisation was particularly complex for the host municipality and the Pedagogical Association, and even in Bologna along with the attention to the central focus of the reports proposed, produced by the top authorities of the national school administration and the secular pedagogy of the time, which explained that the choice was also ideological, aiming to reduce the power of spiritualist pedagogy that dominated until that time, and to introduce secularism and pedagogic positivism.

The School Exhibition linked to the 9th Italian Pedagogical Congress in Bologna also underlined some interesting aspects, with different choices made for the displays compared to previous Exhibitions. On one hand, it was undeniably an opportunity for highlighting the best educational experience of the schools and teachers of the Municipality of Bologna, a showcase for the city, as had already happened in the previous Pedagogical Congresses and the previous Universal Exhibitions, where the host country enhanced its own schools and goods as a form of cultural and political power, as already underlined in historiography (Lawn, 2009). On the other, in the preparation for the School Exhibition we can understand the professionalism of the Commissions and the panels chosen for the task —free of charge— of analysing the many samples on display, testified by the accurate opinions, at times enthusiastic and at others scathing, yet all marked by respect along with scientific attention, underlining a strong sense of moral responsibility in the construction of the nation and the new generations through these Pedagogical Congresses.

From the reading of the Proceedings of the Pedagogical Congress and the related School Exhibition, the emerging debate is substantially anchored to purely national topics and references, as is the production of books, educational periodicals, school models and furnishings and references to different local and national school levels. Some exceptions certainly appear interesting. On one hand, the references to the educational museums in Turin and Rome in Sacchi's , which describes the introduction of objective teaching and the collections required; on the other, the accent on the award given to Luigi Brunetti's special window that was presented at the London Exhibition in 1862, but for which no historiographical records were found; in addition, the presentation of English and French language texts, deemed necessary for secondary schools; finally, Adolf Pick's book that bears witness to the spread of Froebelism in the early 1870s in Italy and also in Bologna. In the overall economy of things, these are not particularly consistent references to the international context of either pedagogy or the material culture of schools. This would precisely confirm the delay of Italian pedagogy and the production of teaching aids that the ministerial official Aristide Gabelli had complained of a year earlier, in 1873, on his return from the Vienna Exhibition and widely discussed in historiography (Brunelli, 2018; Meda, 2016; Pizzigoni, 2024; Sani, 2022; Targhetta, 2010).

Despite this, there were many exhibitors at the School Exhibition from many different Italian municipalities, with a huge quantity of books, periodicals, models of buildings and furnishings offered to the public, and

this in any case demonstrates a certain national pedagogic and educational liveliness, between tradition (the books of Muzzi and Borgogno) and innovation (the desks of Brunetti and Ravà), developed by already famous names (such as Stoppani) and unknown primary school teachers who, precisely for the Congress and the Exhibition, came out of obscurity as authors of texts that were not only written and published but certainly adopted in schools (D'Ascenzo, 2013a), thus becoming tools concretely used in teaching practices. This underlines the research for 'grass roots' innovation in schools and in teaching by the school world, with instruments produced by individual teachers, at times without success on the market (like Pirottini's mechanical device or Sander's *'erdosillabo'*), at others destined for success and actual use. In any case they testify to an effervescence of ideas and a strong collective pedagogic tension that fed off the collective enthusiasm for the construction of schools for a new Italian nation, seeking a compromise (and a shift) between pre-Unity tradition and innovation worthy, in my opinion, of great respect and new historiographical attention, as often created by 'grass-roots' teachers and producers interested in exhibiting their goods for the renaissance of the schools of the time. From this point of view, the alarm raised by Gabelli in 1873, underlining the delay in Italian pedagogic and educational modernisation, certainly offered significant impetus to the renewal of schools through pedagogic and educational positivism. This contributed to the birth of new and more modern 'means of mass education' (Meda, 2016), however often passively linked to international models that, while certainly offering new teaching tools, also risked appearing as the remedy for all evils, as they always demanded the specific —not ideological but, in any case, critical— training and educational mediation of teachers. From this point of view, the study of the Italian Pedagogical Congresses and related School Exhibitions can help to enrich the historiographic knowledge of pedagogic debate, as well as the material culture of schools at that historical time, between tradition and innovation, both within Italy and in the more open and perhaps better studied international dimension.

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