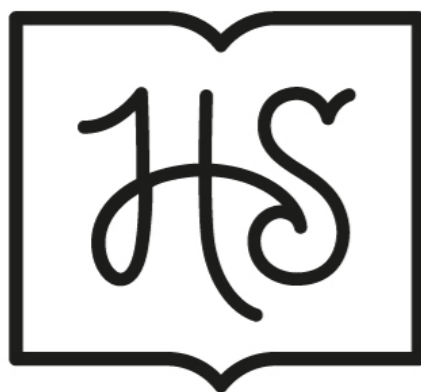


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Marta BRUNELLI

## BOOK REVIEW:

The *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione (1800-2000)* between the retrieval of community identity and memory and the restoration of the historical and educational studies.

Luigiaurelio POMANTE <sup>a</sup>

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The *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione (1800-2000)* – *Biographical Dictionary of Education (1800-2000)*, hereafter DBE, directed by Professors Giorgio Chiosso (University of Turin) and Roberto Sani (University of Macerata), and published in two volumes by the Editrice Bibliografica in Milan in 2013<sup>118</sup>, is the result of a Research Project of National Interest (PRIN) promoted by a group of Italian universities (Genoa, Macerata, Cattolica of Milan, Roma Tre and Turin)<sup>119</sup> and admitted to the co-financing of the Ministry of Education in 2010, for whose concrete realization a hundred scholars and researchers worked<sup>120</sup>. The DBE was published just before the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of Italian unification and collects 2,345 biographical sketches, the results of original and detailed bibliographic and archival research, which form a sort of collective biography of the Italian educators of the past two centuries. For the first time, along with well-known pedagogues and tutors of national and international reputation, also the numerous figures, often considered “minor”, of the new “professionals of education and school” are included: they were the products of the growing expansion of the literacy processes and of the mass schooling, since the early decades of the nineteenth century, and of the simultaneous development of a publishing industry specialized

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<sup>118</sup>CHIOSSO, G. – SANI, R. (dir.). *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione 1800-2000*. Milan: Editrice Bibliografica, 2013, 2 voll.

<sup>119</sup>On the historiographical reasons behind the project see CHIOSSO, G. – SANI, R. Conservare la memoria. Per un dizionario biografico dell'educazione. *History of Education & Children's Literature*, 2009, vol. IV, no. 2, pp. 461-464.

<sup>120</sup>The scientific board of the DBE includes, along with the directors Giorgio Chiosso and Roberto Sani, also Pino Boero (University of Genoa), Carmela Covato (University Roma Tre) and Simonetta Polenghi (University Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan). The editorial coordination of the work was entrusted to Alberto Barausse (University of Molise), Francesca Borruso (University Roma Tre), Sabrina Fava (University Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan), Juri Meda (University of Macerata), Davide Montino (University of Genoa), Maria Cristina Morandini (University of Turin).

in the education and the school field and of a book production directed primarily to children and young people. Similarly, through the biographical profiles of clergymen and religious people working in the field of education and of numerous members of the secular philanthropy active in the same field, the DBE allows us to understand the richness and variety of initiatives and experiences developed outside the strictly educational spaces, such as those devoted to the orphaned and abandoned children's care and education, the young people's entertainment in the oratories and in the secular recreation centers, the training to craftsmanship and to professional activities in the agricultural and industrial sectors through special laboratories and workshops.

Equally, the DBE, in order to pass on to the collective memory a well-structured and comprehensive image of the different educational experiences that characterized the Italian territory during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the biographies of the men and women who were their creators and protagonists, devoted a special attention also to the personality of scholars and educators belonging to the main linguistic minorities (especially German and Ladin) and to the religious ones (especially the Jews, the Waldensians and representatives of other Christian evangelical confessions) present and active in Italy. Also those areas that, over the last two centuries, have been part for a certain period of the Kingdom of Italy were taken into account, giving adequate space, such as in the case of Istria (1918-1945), to some of its most significant figures of local educators.

The catalogue of educators published by the Editrice Bibliografica shows, for the first time in an effective way, also from a quantitative point of view, the diverse and vital presence of women, too long ignored, or at least disregarded: a massive and extraordinarily important female presence, consisting of 514 profiles on a total of 2,345. As Tiziana Pironi recently pointed out, in fact, "one of the main merits of the *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione* was to have taken into account the historiographical renewal occurred in the last twenty years, remedying, in some way, to the significant removals occurred in the past for what concerns the presence of women in similar encyclopedic works"<sup>121</sup>.

Actually, the DBE presents a renewed methodological and scientific approach, not only with reference to the "new" consideration of women in education, but also under other several aspects, thus filling the important gaps determined by the few specialized catalogues and biographical dictionaries available in Italy. Works such as the *Dizionario illustrato di Pedagogia* by Martinazzoli and Credaro<sup>122</sup>, or the series *Pedagogisti ed educatori italiani* by Codignola, as part of the *Enciclopedia biografica e bibliografica italiana* of 1939<sup>123</sup>, an expression of an ancient cultural climate, careful – as the latest *Enciclopedia pedagogica*, a

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<sup>121</sup>See GHIZZONI, C. – PIRONI, T. – ASCENZI, A. The recent publication *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione (1800-2000)* and three decades of historical and pedagogical research in Italy. *History of Education & Children's Literature*, 2009, vol. XI, no. 1, pp. 367-394 (the quot. is on p. 376).

<sup>122</sup>MARTINAZZOLI, A. – CREDARO, L. *Dizionario illustrato di pedagogia*. Milano: Vallardi, 1892-1903, 3 voll.

<sup>123</sup>CODIGNOLA, E. *Pedagogisti ed educatori*. Roma-Milano: Istituto editoriale italiano Tosi, 1939.

cura di Mauro Laeng<sup>124</sup> - especially to the leading personalities inevitably appear dated and now completely insufficient or inadequate<sup>125</sup>.

The DBE overcame the traditional idealistic system of the historical pedagogical studies proposed by Gentile and adopted the new historiographical and cultural sensitivity developed during the fruitful season of research on the history of education and pedagogy, of the school and of children's literature, of the last few decades. It thus became the arrival point of a decades-long research work on the sources that, at the end of the eighties, made possible the recovery and renovation of documentary materials left on the margins of the historical reconstruction – thanks to the collaboration of a large group of scholars and researchers from different Italian universities. We refer not only to the publication of organic repertoires on pedagogical and school magazines<sup>126</sup> and on the educational publishing industry<sup>127</sup>, to the creation of a special national database of school manuals and textbooks adopted in different schools of united Italy<sup>128</sup>, but also to the start of original and comprehensive studies, strictly based on archival and printed sources, focused on legislation in the field of schoolbooks, on the curricula and school subjects, on the teacher training, on school exercise books and other teaching aids and tools that have historically constituted the «school equipment» of the Italian pupil.

As the two directors of the work highlighted in the *Presentation* to the two volumes, the DBE provides a very important, and undoubtedly more consistent with the reality, image “of the role played by the educational processes in the growth and modernization of the Italian society. Through a long gallery of biographical sketches, in fact, it provides the collective memory with the idea of the molecular presence of men and women who, though motivated by very different ideologies, religious and political beliefs, cultural and educational ideas, showed a passionate devotion to the cause of education, making possible the implementation of vital processes of education in our country, such as the mass literacy and education, the spread of increasingly higher professional skills, the conveying of a national sentiment and, in more recent times, the acquisition of a wider and shared idea of democratic citizenship”<sup>129</sup>.

In practice, therefore, the DBE presents a wide and complex reality of characters of both sexes, from different social and geographical backgrounds, and with very heterogeneous principles and purposes. In Chiosso and Sani's work it is possible to find the bi-bibliographical sketches of the founders and leaders of schools and educational institutions for

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<sup>124</sup>LAENG, M. (ed.). *Enciclopedia pedagogica*. Brescia: La Scuola, 1989-1994 e 2003, 6 voll. + Appendice A-Z.

<sup>125</sup>See in this regard DE FORT, Ester. Figure di insegnanti nel *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione. Società e storia*, 2015, no. 149, pp. 577-584.

<sup>126</sup> CHIOSSO, G. (ed.), *I periodici scolastici nell'Italia del secondo Ottocento*. Brescia: La Scuola, 1992; CHIOSSO, G. (ed.), *La stampa pedagogica e scolastica in Italia (1820-1943)*. Brescia: La Scuola, 1997.

<sup>127</sup>TESEO. *Tipografi e editori scolastico-educativi dell'Ottocento*. Milano: Editrice Bibliografica, 2003 and *TESEO '900*.

*Editori scolastico-educativi del primo Novecento*. Milano: Editrice Bibliografica, 2008.

<sup>128</sup>On «Edisco», the data base of the school and educational books published in Italy from 1800 to today see TARGHETTA, F. Verso una banca dati on line in Italia: EDISCO. In BANDINI, G. – BIANCHINI, P. (edd.). *Fare storia in rete. Fonti e modelli di scrittura digitale per la storia dell'educazione, la storia moderna e la storia contemporanea*. Roma: Carocci, 2007, pp. 79-90.

<sup>129</sup>See CHIOSSO, G. – SANI, R. (dir.). *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione 1800-2000*. Cit., p. X.

children and young people (nurseries and kindergartens, professional schools for the children of the people, orphanages, girls' schools, boarding schools and secondary education schools etc.); of the promoters of educational reforms and of the renewal of teaching methods and practices (not only educators, but also experts of disciplinary teaching, with a particular attention to the scientific and mathematical world); of the theorists of curative education responsible for the creation of special institutions and schools for disabled people (blind, deaf and dumb, feeble-minded etc.); of the directors and editors of school and teachers' newspapers, of the authors of textbooks and inventors of teaching aids; of the writers and illustrators of books and magazines for children and young people; of the theorists and promoters of physical and sports education; of the doctors involved in projects to improve the hygiene and living conditions of the working classes and engaged in educational and rehabilitative activities, as well as the leaders of youth associations.

The 2,345 biographies, drafted with accuracy, an abundance of details and a remarkable interpretive depth, take a census of the educators alive at the date of the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1800, and died within the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2000, presenting three distinct parts for each: an epigraph in which, in addition to the name and surname (married women are recorded with their nubile name), also the areas of activity and the region (or regions) in which the educators' activity is mainly carried out are shown; the real biography; and finally, the section «Sources and Bibliography» with the main references to any archival and bibliographic documentation. Thanks to the indices at the end of the volumes - of the professions, the areas, the places where educators operated- the paths for further possible investigations are traced, which, starting from the individuals, reconstruct the local context and the features of very different professional categories, for a long period so differentiated in Italy.

Finally, we have to point out that, after two years from the printed publication, the 2,345 biographical sketches of the DBE are now available online within the database: <http://dbe.editricebibliografica.it/dbe/ricerche.html>. This database has a user interface that allows a dual mode of consultation: the mode "Search" that permits to consult the work using one or more enabled fields ("Name", "Professions", "Fields of activity" and "Places of activity"); and the "Indices" that permits to see the full list of biographies, in alphabetical order. The user interface also includes a presentation of the work, a methodological note, a guide to the use, and the index of abbreviations and credits.