

INTERVIEW

SCHOOL MATERIAL CULTURE AND EDUCATION HERITAGE: DIALOGUES WITH FRANCESCA PIZZIGONI¹

Gecia Aline Garcia* 

I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Francesca Pizzigoni for kindly accepting the invitation to give this interview for the History of Education Journal. Her participation is of particular importance both to our research group and to this editorial initiative, as it makes a significant contribution to the advancement of studies on the history of education and on school material culture.

It seems relevant to mention that the interview was conducted in two distinct moments and through different, yet complementary, methods. Initially, using a written script, Professor Pizzigoni was able to systematize and reflect on the proposed questions. Subsequently, we had the opportunity to meet in person² to discuss the theme, experiences, and memories evoked by the interview process. Therefore, it was possible to give greater dynamism and vibrancy to this exercise of research and shared reflection.

¹ Interviewer's note (I.N). This interview was originally conducted in Italian, it was translated by into Portuguese Gecia Aline Garcia. The technical review was carried out by Gizele de Souza, from UFPR.

² The meeting occurred in the city of Curitiba, state of Paraná, in the 2025 spring, during the School Material Culture International Seminar: research, experiences and dialogues with Teaching Objects History – TOH (Brazil, Argentina, Italy and Spain), held at the Education Sector of the Federal University of Paraná, coordinated by Gizele de Souza. (N.E).

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Gecia Aline Garcia (GAG): In the poem “Biografia” [Biography], by the Brazilian poet Cecília Meireles, she states:

*Somos uma difícil unidade, [we are a hard unit,
de muitos instantes mínimos, [...], [of many minimum instants,
Mil fragmentos somos, em jogo misterioso, [we are a thousand fragments, in a misterious
game]
aproximamo-nos e afastamo-nos, eternamente. (Meireles, 1993) [we get closer and move
away, eternally]*

Inspired by this idea of multiple fragments and units that make up the biography of each life, we would like, in an introductory manner, offer the reader some paths and passages of your trajectory. Can you tell us a little about yourself?

Francesca Pizzigoni (FP): Good morning, everyone and, first of all, I would like to thank you for this significant opportunity, which greatly honors me, to be here in this journal and discuss with you the topic of school heritage.

I graduated with Professor Ester De Fort in School History from the University of Turin, specifically with a thesis dedicated to school textbooks from the late 19th century and the differences between those textbooks in the versions intended for female students and those intended for male students.

Soon after graduation, Professor De Fort told me that an acquaintance of hers was starting a project to create a school museum in Turin: that is how I was fortunate enough to meet Pompeo Vagliani (president of the Tancredi di Barolo Foundation and MUSLI – Museo della Scuola e Pop-App Museum [Museum of the School and Children’s Book] in Turin) and I was able to follow all the phases of the construction of the museum itself and the beginning of its educational and cultural activities.

I worked in the museum for almost ten years, a period during which I had several opportunities to take part in projects and collaborate with other institutions, such as the University of Turin and the municipality of Turin. With the latter, for example, the first census of historical school materials found in the city’s schools was carried out.

Later, I had the opportunity to obtain a research grant from the Bologna University and, after that, I became a researcher for INDIRE - Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa [National Institute of Education Documentation, Innovation and Research], which is the main research agency of the Italian Ministry of Education, created in 1925 as a result of an exhibition promoted by Giuseppe Lombardo Radice to value active didactics and schools’ work. Meanwhile, I concluded my Doctorate course in France, with Professor Mariella Colin, from the University of Caen – Lower Normandy.

The possibility of developing simultaneous study and research activities alongside the practical application of such studies in actions developed with schools and projects carried

out in partnership with several institutions, ended up contributing to something I consider my specific identity.

(GAG): Professor Francesca, your intellectual trajectory is marked by relevant research in the History of Education field, especially studies on the school material culture, particularly focusing on commercial catalogs used by companies that produce school material and on school museums. Could you revisit your academic and professional trajectory, recounting how you became involved in this field of study and what paths and experiences contributed to consolidating your engagement with these themes?

(FP): The opportunity of participating in the creation and development of such a significant reality as the Museum of the School and Children's Book in Turin allowed me to be in daily contact with historical teaching objects and the school materiality as a whole.

The Museum and the Tancredi di Barolo Foundation, which supports it, also shelter an invaluable archive, rich in relevant primary sources, indispensable to understand deeply, not only the museum collections, but also the school universe. Thus, for feeling the need to know more deeply the collections that I saw every day in the museum and that I tried to explain to countless students that came to visit it, I deepened by reflection linked to the importance of profound contextualization of the school historical object, so that it is understood not only at its descriptive level, but also regarding the deep and multidisciplinary meanings it conveys.

An object is certainly a didactic support to a specific school subject, but it is also the expression of a productive industry of certain time, artistic sensitivity, economic conditions of a territory, or of a school that acquired it, among other factors.

I started to conceive the individual didactic object as a converging point for multiple research paths. For this reason, I felt the need to identify which sources could provide me with information capable of feeding this vision. I identified the commercial catalogs of companies that produce teaching objects as one of the most suitable sources to provide data capable of satisfying a large number of these investigative paths.

Catalogs allow the study of, for example, changes occurred in a didactic object over time; its authors or inventors; the teaching needs it caters for; the rationale behind it; the technical-productive sensitivity of the moment; the aesthetic taste; the cost of the object, and so on and so forth.

The collection of commercial catalogs preserved at the MUSLI of Turin certainly guided and facilitated this choice. For living so close to a historical-educational collection designed to be an exhibition for the public, I felt the need to study the history and identity of these museums dedicated to education and pedagogy to deeply understand their nature, their initial purposes, and their original objectives.

The deeper I addressed this aspect that allowed me to travel through Italy and abroad to closely observe different types of education museums, the more interested I became in

the nineteenth-century concept of the school museum, born as a collection of natural and artificial samples that enabled a teaching method based on the five senses, which is precisely the expression of positivist pedagogical thought.

It is widely known that from a collection initially self-produced by the school and composed of samples, the school museum soon grew as a veritable collection of didactic resources produced by the industrial market to support the teaching of all school subjects. Thus, the intertwining between the theme of the school museum and that of the companies producing didactic materials, as well as their commercial catalogs that present these resources becomes strong and intrinsic. This intertwining characterizes my research identity.

(GAG): Francesca, your academic production has been characterized as an intense international dialogue and the interlocution with diverse historiographic traditions. Considering this fact, what were the theoretical references and perspectives that most influenced your research trajectory?

(FP): Firstly, my studies on the history of education were guided by two scholars who worked at the University of Turin and who gave a great contribution to the Italian research addressing the field of history of education and textbooks, namely, Ester De Fort and Giorgio Chiosso. At an international level, a fundamental reference were researchers linked to the French INRP – Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique [National Institute of Pedagogical Research]. Their studies were essential for me, both Alain Choppin's thought and the collections of the Musée national de l'Éducation of Rouen [National Museum of Education], where my exchanges with Yves Gaulupeau and Myriam Boyer opened new perspectives for the school museum study.

From that moment onwards, my reflections started to be guided by two types of references. On the one side, deepening the theme of new material sources for the history of education study could not fail to include the studies of Marc Depaepe and Frank Simon, Ian Grosvenor and Martin Lawn, Agustín Escolano, Antonio Viñao Frago, and Julio Ruiz Berrio. On the other hand, a conception of school historical heritage developed as a material trace of a common memory, belonging to all citizens and their communities and, therefore, as a possible instrument to be used actively to stimulate projects of community participation and active teaching (such as, for example, the construction, today, of the school museum with the students).

In the latter, my references were George Henry Rivière and Hugues de Varine, with the concept of the ecomuseum, and Daniele Jalla. Naturally, the research of Juri Meda, Pedro Luis Moreno Martínez, Maria José Martínez Ruiz-Funes, Marta Brunelli, Renaud D'Enfert, and many other international researchers whom I have been fortunate to meet, made a great contribution to the development of these reflections.

In the last few years, the concept of "school industry", and I also think the works by Moeglin, Lawn, Grosvenor, and Meda, have been particularly stimulating, as well as the studies about International Exhibitions as spaces of circulation of ideas and innovation engines (Dussel, Dittrich, Del Pozo). In this context, my fundamental meeting with the Brazilian

scientific community occurred. Sources and methodological approaches presented by Gizele de Souza, Diana Vidal, Rosa Fátima de Souza Chaloba, among others, added fundamental elements to my education and broadened by research view.

(GAG): Maria Helena Câmara Bastos (2016), when reflecting upon the History of Education in Brazil, observed that the field, even if strengthened in graduate courses and in research, with greater thematic diversity, interdisciplinarity and internationalization, also suffered a progressive depletion in the curricula of undergraduate courses in Education, creating a distance between research and teaching. However, that author also affirms that these two areas are inseparable and that both nourish the vitality of the field. Based on your experience, I would like to know how you interpret this tension between research and teaching in the History of Education. What paths do you envision to guarantee the continuity and strengthening of the discipline, both in the field of teaching and in academic production, especially considering the challenges posed by internationalization and the hegemonic narratives that still persist?

(FP): I see historical-educational research and its unfolding in teaching as an inseparable circle, in a hypothetical rotation movement, in which the action of one directly impacts the other. They are neither dissociated nor distant. Everything that is studied as academic research in education history, in my view, must contain a dimension that impacts teacher education and the teaching routine in the classroom.

I say that considering, on the one hand, the contents of the research on the history of education, which might involve directly teachers' and students' interests by approaching themes that fuel broad and diverse interdisciplinary classes, as well as in-depth study paths able to capture the school community's attention; and, on the other hand, the historiographic research method, which can teach teachers and students by using sources, contextualize them, correlate them and extract meanings from them.

Let's consider how educational museums were originally constituted: they were centers of research and innovation and, at the same time, centers of education. The concept of innovation should still be at the center of our reflections today, and it is necessary to understand how the study of the history of education can certainly act as an engine of innovation. It is not, of course, a matter of investigating the past for its own sake, but of studying and understanding it in depth to extract elements that help us understand education and schools today and to assess whether examples from the past, properly contextualized, can offer new contributions to the contemporary school; including as resources for the development of active teaching practices.

One of the methods I use involves transforming teachers and students into researchers of the history of education. I place them "in the situation": I supply primary sources, formats and instruments that can accompany the discovery of historical-educational information

and enable them to realize the amount of data that can be extracted from a historical school material source. Understanding the role of the historian of education and the method with which they work, and the broad repercussions that their studies can have on the current school is fundamental. This is exactly the method I have used in my classes and in my research space at the university as well as in my education actions in schools.

(GAG): Historian Natalie Zemon Davis (1986) states that, when reexamining historical sources, the historian does not find proof of what past was like, but rather identifies historical possibilities, filled in with imaginative and investigative ability. Inspired by this perspective, at what point in your trajectory did you identify school museums as fertile objects of historical research? More specifically, when did you start to see them not only as memory preservation spaces, but more as living, dynamic and interdisciplinary environments, with formative potential and able to integrate past, present, research and teaching practice?

(FP): Between 2009 and 2011 I had the privilege of coordinating, on behalf of the Italian group, a European project between the cities of Turin and Lyon, in France. The project was called “the school is our heritage” and involved schools from both countries in learning about their own cultural heritage. I realized then how involved students and teachers felt when the theme worked was their own school. At the same time, in my studies, I encountered the concept of the 19th century school museum, in its nature, as a collection of natural and artificial objects that made students the protagonists of their own learning and that dynamized the teaching of all subjects. I thought that it would be possible to try to reconstruct the school museum in schools, not only using the natural and artificial samples mentioned by Ferdinand Buisson, but rather all the historical didactic objects that each school preserved, that is, vestiges of the past didactics of that institution and its history. I also envisaged the possibility of involving directly students and teachers to positively leverage the engagement I had observed while working with the school’s own heritage.

Thus, when the project with France was concluded in 2011, the idea arose to attempt a dissemination initiative by inviting schools from Turin that wished to take part to develop an autonomous, yet guided, path that would lead to a full rediscovery of their own historical teaching materials. In this way, the materials could be used both as objects that originally taught a subject in an active way and as vestiges of the history and identity of that school. This gave rise to the path “Do you want to build your school museum?”, conceived by me together with Franca Treccarichi, who was working for the Museiscuol@ service in Turin. Schools that showed interest were accompanied in a trajectory of instruction, support to the rediscovery of their own heritage and throughout the seven phases of construction of their school museum. Over a school year, the program allowed each school to move from a complete lack of awareness of their heritage to an active and comprehensive use of it, transforming it into a tool in everyday teaching and also opening the school to the surrounding community. It

is precisely in this sense, as the question suggests, that in the Turin project I conceived school museums as living, dynamic, and interdisciplinary environments, with formative potential and capable of integrating past, present, research, and pedagogical practice.

(GAG): Francesca, in 2011, the project “Do you want to build your school museum?” was developed in Italy. Its central proposal, as you explained (Pizzigoni, 2022), was the conservation and appreciation of schools’ historical heritage by promoting the direct involvement of students and teachers in the process. Can you tell us more about that project and your participation in it? What were, in your opinion, the main results achieved and how the active participation of the school community contributed to redefining the relationship between memory, education heritage, and pedagogical practices?

(FP): In conceiving this project, which this year commemorates its 15th anniversary and which led to the creation of a network of schools that, throughout this period, have created their own school museums, I started from a few considerations: historical-educational heritage is largely found precisely in those places where it was used when, instead of being considered heritage, it was simply seen as an object of daily teaching: the school. However, the school, on the one hand, is neither a museum nor an institution whose primary objective is the conservation of heritage (and, therefore, should be supported in this function of conservation and appreciation of the cultural heritage it holds) and, on the other hand, is today facing broad and complex challenges, such as: inclusion, active citizenship, conscious use of information, etc.).

At the same time, a second reflection regarded the scientific community standpoint since it increasingly utilizes material sources preserved in schools as primary research sources, but if such resources remain hidden in the basements of institutions (often without the school itself being aware of it) and are not known, communicated, and cataloged, it is as if they do not exist and, therefore, are not truly available to researchers.

It was evident that multiple needs converged on the theme of school material culture. The question I asked myself was: can there be a solution that simultaneously attempts to cater for all these different needs? Is there a way to use this cultural heritage so that it becomes a resource for everyone and capable of offering answers to the demands of contemporary schools, both from an educational and a research perspective?

The act of accompanying schools in the rediscovery of their heritage, bringing it back to light through direct involvement of students and using it in the teaching practice, combined with an effort to communicate it and make it available to the community, allowed me to find the answer. Students could become the protagonists of this action, becoming active and acquiring knowledge and competencies, the school could rediscover its own history and identity, citizens could enjoy a heritage that accompanies everyone’s lives (the school), and research had access to new previously hidden sources. Simultaneously, not only does working with heritage provide an element able to create cohesion within the school community, but it

also provides in-service teacher development. Thus, memory becomes generative. It becomes a new teaching tool that is multidisciplinary and inclusive. It is also an opportunity for active citizenship. Education, then, is expressed in all aspects and levels, while the historical educational heritage becomes an instrument of concrete expression of such education.

Following these principles, for over 15 years, the project “Do you want to build your school museum?” rediscovered and sheltered several objects of the historical educational heritage, led many schools to rediscover their own material history, and through it, part of their identity, allowed teachers to get qualified in the use of heritage applying active and interdisciplinary teaching methodologies; raised institutions’ and communities’ awareness, offered citizens a new cultural opportunity and, finally, enabled many students to become real protagonists of their own learning.

(GAG): Within the scope of your research on education heritage and school material culture, you coordinated and took part in the project “Heritage is us!”, whose proposal was to create school museums using the material remains belonging to local schools, involving students, teachers and families of the school community. Which aspects of this project do you consider the most innovative or relevant for those studying or intending to carry out similar experiences of school museums and valorization of education heritage? Which practical and methodological challenges would you highlight in this process?

(FP): *“The heritage is us!”* was a project widespread throughout the territory that aimed to offer a large number of schools the chance of working on their own heritage. The central point of my entire vision regarding schools working with their heritage is to transform students and teachers into researchers. In other words, provide them with the sources and the same method that we, researchers, use in our academic research. It is evident that not all documents are easily accessible and that the scientific repertoire is not the same, but each of them becomes someone capable of “questioning” heritage material to extract the vast network of (multidisciplinary) information it can reveal. Each piece of information must then be contextualized and correlated, so that it becomes a piece of a deep knowledge framework that provides information about the history education of that specific school and schools in general, about education, school policy, micro and macro history, school industry, economic industry, history of patents and many other aspects. Students work in groups and each one contributes with their specific skills. Experience shows that, over a school year, each school (regardless of their founding date or educational level) can follow the path from its first discovery of heritage to the creation of its own school museum. In the following years, the action continues with ongoing in-depth studies, developed according to thematic lines that meet the demands of each institution. Therefore, in addition to actions related to heritage, it also aims at providing a method of work and study on the theme. Another aim is to support a proactive role of citizen participation in which schools take care of the common asset and

become producers of new knowledge. This is a kind of “public role” of the history of education, in which school heritage is the key to reveal the active role that generates historical-educational research and its presence in everyday life and in the life of an entire community.

(GAG): Francesca, considering your research trajectory characterized by international academic collaborations with France and Spain, for example, how did you start and develop scientific dialogue with Brazil? How did this interaction influence your professional activity and contributed to the advancement of your scientific investigations and research? Which projects are you currently conducting or coordinating in this context?

(FP): My first contact with the Brazilian scientific community, started thanks to the fundamental contribution of Professor Gizele de Souza, from the Federal University of Paraná, was deep and transforming. It was exactly from this meeting that the international research group called TOH – Teaching Object History originated. It gathers Brazilian, Italian, French and Spanish scholars and dedicates to the specific study of historical education objects. And it was Professor Gizele de Souza who, at the end of a panel that I had organized at ISCHE 2022 in Milan, invited me not to consider the collaborative experience initiated on that occasion concluded, but to transform it into something stable and continuous. From there, international workshops and publications were born, which we carried out jointly with the Brazilian scientific community (Looking for the First “Educational Technologies”: Commercial Catalogues as Sources for the Study of the Birth of School Materialities; Objects that travel in time. The commercial circulation of educational objects between the 19th and 20th centuries, just to mention some examples).

Recently, in October 2025, I had the privilege and pleasure of being in Brazil to participate in important international congresses dedicated to material culture, organized in Curitiba by Gizele de Souza, from the Federal University of Paraná; in Brasília by Etienne Baldez, from the University of Brasília; and in Aracaju by João Paulo Gama, from the Federal University of Sergipe. These significant opportunities allowed me to personally meet many Brazilian scholars whose works I consider a source of inspiration and in-depth learning. I owe a great deal to the Brazilian scientific community. I value the opportunity of being today in this journal and dialoguing with you, the chance of taking part, with the school museum experience and the “patrimoniere” student, in the monographic dossier “Patrimônio, acervos e a pesquisa em História da Educação” [Heritage, Collections and Research in the History of Education], organized by Claudia Panizzolo and Terciane Ângela Luchese for the *RIDPHE_R – Revista Iberoamericana do Patrimônio Histórico-Educativo* [RIDPHE_R Journal – Ibero-American Journal of Historical-Educational Heritage]; or even the opportunity to participate in an international research project promoted by Rosa Fátima de Souza. Having had the opportunity

to be part of the “Cultura Material Escolar” [School Material Culture] Network³ or to see my “Patrimoniére” method (that is, the student who becomes a specialist in the heritage of their own school) adopted by the students of the Colégio da Imaculada Conceição [Immaculate Conception School] in Curitiba, was a true privilege for me. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Andréa Cordeiro, from the Federal University of Paraná, and to Gecia Aline Garcia for this great opportunity I mentioned last.

In short, the fortunate encounter with the Brazilian scientific community offers me great research experiences and allows me to consolidate a precious relationship between Brazil and Italy regarding material culture, which creates the possibility of investigating jointly new research lines. One example is to follow traces of relationships between companies that produce teaching materials in both countries, which met in the past at the great Universal Exhibitions.

(GAG): When considering the trajectory of studies on school material culture, we observe that several researchers have contributed both to the consolidation and to the problematization of this field. Rosa Fátima de Souza (2007), for example, highlights how attention to the materiality of educational practices has led to research focused both on the history of school institutions, privileging aspects such as space, architecture, curriculum and practices; and on the history of reading and writing, with special attention to manuals, primers, notebooks, periodicals and other material supports that mediated the dissemination of knowledge.

Agustín Escolano (2000), in turn, emphasizes the empirical-practical dimension and the professional memory constructed by teachers through the pedagogical artifacts created in the school routine, revealing a teaching culture that materializes in objects. Authors such as Gizele de Souza (2019, 2024) and Diana Vidal (2017) have highlighted the importance of understanding school material culture in its historicity and material diversity, emphasizing that objects not only reflect educational practices but constitute a set of artifacts that circulate in political, economic, and cultural spaces, being the result of relationships of knowledge exchange and dynamics of production and commercialization, which turns them into revealers of multiple social dimensions.

In dialogue with these interpretative perspectives, how do you understand the concept of school material culture and how does it favor the investigation of your research questions? To what extent does this conception approach or differ from the notion of historical educational heritage, frequently used in Italy to designate practices of conservation and valorization of educational memory?

³ Project that lasted from 2020 to 2024 and was coordinated by professors Gizele de Souza, Marcus Levy Bencostta and Andréa Bezerra Cordeiro, from the Federal University of Paraná. (N.E)

(FP): I see an object belonging to the school material culture as a type of multi-layered, poly-significant reality that allows for the revelation of multiple levels of information ranging from those more within the field of pedagogical theory to those showing didactic repercussions and the practices of different historical periods, encompassing aspects more closely linked to materiality. For this reason, without intending to merely celebrate material culture without considering the material sources as self-sufficient to understand the whole complexity of the history of education, I have great confidence in the material culture capacity to broaden interpretative levels and provide significant (and often new) information on diverse research topics. Therefore, I would not separate the various work plans to which material culture can contribute, but I would rather emphasize its ability to adapt to the research and the researcher's needs: when "questioned" with methodologies appropriate to the study context, it can provide relevant contributions. I also consider that material culture, in its multi-faceted form (school architectures, archive documents, artifacts, vestiges of use, etc.) can dialogue with other types of research sources, with which it does not contradict, but rather complements.

The concept of school material culture and historical educational heritage, in my view, still deserves some effort from the international scientific community to achieve a specific identity to each one, to set limits, categories, subjects and objects. In other words, an effort for definition. The historical educational heritage includes materials that also belong to life outside the school and, therefore, linked to the private sphere, family, merely educational, supporting growth or recreational activity, or even related to the first years of life. Thus, an Education Museum is different from a School Museum. However, if we had to discuss and list exactly what belongs to one or another and which categories of materials identify them, we would still face difficulties reaching a consensus. I believe that now, thirty years after Julia's and Chervel's studies on material culture, this might be an opportune moment for us all to work together towards internationally shared criteria, allowing us to speak a "common language", able to strengthen even more reciprocal references and joint projects. In this regard, I greatly appreciated the scientific initiative related to the "Carta de Natal sobre o Patrimônio Educacional" [Natal Charter on Educational Heritage], which is dedicated to defining Cultural Educational Heritage, and I will follow with great interest the development of research by the Brazilian scientific community.

(GAG): In academic life, many paths open up before us, but not all can be followed: some projects remain unfinished, others remain only as ideas that never materialize, whether due to lack of time, resources, or favorable conditions. With this in mind, we would like to know: what are the current directions of your research intentions? And, if you wish to share, is there a topic that has always sparked your interest but that you have not yet had the opportunity to explore in depth?

(FP): In this specific moment in my work, I am dedicated to the investigation of potentialities that might derive from the application of Artificial Intelligence to historical-educational document sources. In particular, I am experimenting with the use of AI to read the content of historical catalogs of companies that produce teaching materials, aiming to extract and organize information on those objects. This project is called Cata-LOH and provides accurate data about didactic objects (manufacturing company, author, material, cost, participation in Exhibitions, prizes received, etc.) mentioned on the pages of a corpus of one hundred catalogs from different companies, creating the possibility of developing studies on the “life” of a single object, an author’s production, objects available for different subjects, and so on. So far, we have extracted information about 55 thousand teaching objects, but this is a work in progress: when we broaden the corpus of catalogs, we will be able to broaden the data available. Our intention is to transform it into an international system, with catalogs of companies from several countries, in order to allow tracking connections and recurrences between didactic objects used around the world. The availability of so much new research data showed me, on the one hand, the possibility of reflecting on how such a system could automatically locate the presence of the same word in different documentary sources (pedagogical journals, advertisements, reports, catalogs, etc.) and highlight for the researcher all the information found in the primary sources associated with their research interest. The Cata-LOH system, by design choice, does not interpret the data (it is not an artificial intelligence that replaces the researcher), but simply makes it available in a few seconds, significantly reducing research time and exponentially increasing the results that each researcher can produce thanks to their intellectual capacity.

This is a project aspiration for the future. Currently, a second research area I am dedicated to concerns my role on a working committee of SIPSE - Società Italiana per lo Studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo [Italian Scientific Society for the Study of Historical Educational Heritage]. My committee focuses on the cataloging of historical school assets. Without cataloging that allows for the identification of the asset, both in terms of its location and its identification and description, the object will always remain at risk of dispersal or, in any case, will not be a recognized, traceable, and available source for the research community. For this reason, we signed an agreement with the institute responsible for cataloging cultural heritage in Italy, linked to the Ministry of Culture, to experiment with cataloging historical school assets.

(GAG): To conclude, I would like to ask a more personal question. In 1974, Nereo Rapetti directed a documentary about the daily life of Italo Calvino, and at one point, Rapetti recounts that his encounter with Calvino in Paris occurred on two levels: on the one hand, as a writer who reads the city as if it were a book; on the other, as a man who sees in the city’s past a reflection of his own past. Inspired by this reflection, when recalling your childhood in Turin, is there a particular school object that comes to mind? Could you tell us why it remains so present in

your memories and how this memory connects to your journey as a researcher of school material culture?

(FP): I attended a Christian Brethren school where the hallways leading to my classroom were almost entirely covered by display cases of stuffed animals. Even then, they impressed me. I did not know that one day they would be part of my research subject! The idea that those and other materials allowed so many students to see up close “things” that they would otherwise only have to imagine or study abstractly has always greatly interested me. I see school museums and educational collections as a tool for accessing learning: each student, with their personal history and cognitive style, can understand what they are studying. Didactics based on the five senses, active learning, and the objective method have always impacted me, since I was young. And when, during my university studies, I studied the pedagogical thought of Aristide Gabelli, who in 1880 stated that the school had the duty to foster the student’s “head instrument,” enabling each one to become “master of himself” and therefore possess the tools to reflect and understand autonomously and to face the world, I understood that Gabelli would influence my future!

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