

RECENSIONE

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Nicola S. Barbieri - Angelo Gaudio - Giuseppe Zago (a cura di), *Manuale di educazione comparata: insegnare in Europa e nel mondo*, Morcelliana-La Scuola, Brescia, 2016, pp. 224, ISBN 9788835045953.

The impact of the development of Italian primary and secondary schools in Italian history and politics together with the features and aims of Italian schools today are among the most current and richly discussed debates in modern Italy. To provide a few notable examples, in recent times the Italian media has accorded noticeable attention to issues such as the Popolo della Libertà's (PDL) proposals for *maestro unico* in primary schools; the replacement of the SSIS (*Scuola di Specializzazione all'Insegnamento Secondario*) with the TFA (*Tirocinio Formativo Attivo*) as a training course for aspiring secondary school teachers; and more broadly on Ministry of Education and MP's reforms in the field developed by the PDL and the Partito Democratico with, for instance, Gelmini's policies between 2008-2011 and the more recent Renzi reforms known as *La Buona Scuola* in 2016.

However, the Italian school system is more than just a contemporary Italian topic and has been extensively analysed from different scholarly perspectives. For instance, historical research such as *Fare gli italiani: scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea*¹ and *La scuola degli italiani*² by Adolfo Scotto di Luzio as well as academic conferences focused on Italian schools like the ASMI annual meeting in 2015 (*Educating Italy, 1796-1968: Local, national and global perspectives*, organised by Claudia Baldoli and Marcella Pellegrino), have investigated the impact of Italian schools in Italy's historical development between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. The academic debate had led to scholars outlining the contribution of Italian schools and education to important issues such as the forging and shaping of Italians' *identità nazionale* during the Risorgimento and Mussolini's attempt to create 'new Italians' under the dictatorship. Education reforms have been central to Italian government policy since the country's unification and, well before Fascism, were pursued by Liberal governments – it was Francesco Crispi's government that passed the *Legge Casati* in 1859, which for the first time divided human and technical studies. The same law introduced two interconnected elements resurrected by Gentile in 1923 – an emphasis on the 'superiority' of classical studies and the clear subdivision between these and technical studies.

Manuale di educazione comparata: insegnare in Europa e nel mondo aligns with and enriches the specific field of comparative education, providing a detailed exposition of the discipline's historical development from the early nineteenth century. The book

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¹ S. Soldani - G. Turi (1993) (a cura di), *Fare gli italiani: scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

² A. Scotto di Luzio (2007), *La scuola degli italiani*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

also offers a critical discussion of education's relevance to domestic politics in Italy and wider, especially in connection with the process of building national states in Europe and the strengthening of democracy during the post Second World War period.

In particular, the first chapter by Giuseppe Zago and Carla Callegari and the fourth and sixth chapters by Angelo Gaudio simplify these features of the volume. Indeed, Zago and Callegari's research (*L'educazione comparata: una tradizione disciplinare*, pp. 7-41) concisely focuses on the 200-year history of comparative education. Firstly, it retraces the birth of the subject in France in 1817 following the publication of the pioneering book (*Abbozzo e considerazioni preliminari su un'opera sull'educazione comparata con una serie di domande sull'educazione*) by Marc-Antoine Jullien, a Jacobean French intellectual during and after the French Revolution. Subsequently, the chapter stresses the role played by international scholarly and bureaucratic environments in the definition and reinforcement of the discipline - particularly in France, Italy and Britain - thanks to the contributions of individuals related to foreign ministries who travelled extensively in Europe and recorded their impressions about learning and teaching methods across the continent. This was the case, for example, with Pasquali Villari - the well-known Italian historian who was also senator of the Italian Kingdom during the last decade of the nineteenth century - and with Michael Ernst Sadler - a member of the London Office of Special Inquiries and Reports in the early 1900s. The chapter also offers illuminating reflections on modifications to comparative education between 1817 and today by investigating the importance of the 1970s shift from the centrality of historical investigation - the exploration of education within the context of the culture, religion and society of the country that has produced it - to interdisciplinary contamination, especially a widening of the field to social sciences, from anthropology and politics to sociology and economics. A discussion of the newest trends in comparative education can be found in Nicola S. Barbieri's chapter (*Dai sistemi educativi formali alla galassia del non-formale e dell'informale*, pp. 79-128).

Alongside offering an original contribution to the field of comparative education, *Manuale di educazione comparata* also discusses the impact of the education system on politics in Italy and elsewhere, with a particular emphasis on governments' use of primary schools during nationalisation processes in Italy, Germany and France between the 1780s and the early twentieth century; their uses in Italy and Germany under the Nazi and Fascist totalitarian regimes in the 1930s; and education's impact in consolidating democracy in Europe and overseas between the end of the war in 1945 until the 1960s. For example, as Angelo Gaudio discusses (*I sistemi scolastici: Nazionalizzazioni*, pp. 129-151), education was an important part of the process of nation building, which was also deeply involved with social and economic evolution. Gaudio focuses in particular on the gradual creation of a modern school system as both tending toward a 'universal model' and establishing mandatory tasks for pupils. This effort reflected the model officially approved in Britain in 1918 through the Fisher Act, which aimed to establish 'a national system of public education available for all persons capable of profiting thereby'. Gaudio stresses that the model of universal primary schools was also used outside Italy, especially from the mid-1800s onwards, in a cross-functional way and helped government in 'educating masses' who were gradually increasingly involved with industrial development, and in promoting the masses' identification with the State through language and culture. The author points out that in

some countries, such as France and Germany, this latter aim was also characterised by growing State intervention and, consequently, by the marginalisation of education traditionally dispensed by clergy – in Germany, such limitation was encouraged by Bismarck's policies, for example.

No less important has been the weight that the volume accords to education under totalitarian regimes, especially those of Nazi Germany and of Fascist Italy between Gentile's reform and Bottai's intervention in 1939. In particular, the investigation of this topic is a central aspect in the final chapter by Laura Cerasi (*La scuola dei totalitarismi*, pp. 153-185). Supporting results achieved by previous research such as those by Soldani, Turi and Scotto di Luzio, Cerasi's contribution discusses Fascism's intense focus on schools and on different aspects of youth organisations as having multidimensional aims, from attempts to forge Italians' 'coscienza nazionale' and promote the militarisation of Italian society to attempts to 'educate' them in the cult of the nation. Her investigation of how school and university policies in Germany connected with the elimination of Protestant and Catholic schools in 1933 and with anti-Jewish discrimination against from 1935 onwards is particularly interesting. Framing the discussion of education in Germany under the Nazis in a comparative framework with Fascist Italy, Cerasi points to attempts to develop a coherent German-Italian 'cultural politics' and the failure of the two dictatorships in achieving it. Indeed, from one year earlier German-Italian agreement in 1939 a programme known as 'Scuola dell'Asse' was elaborated by the two governments. This aimed to strengthen exchanges for students and teachers between Italy and Germany and to revise school books to forge a common German-Italy political-cultural perspective. However, 'Scuola dell'Asse' remained a purely theoretical agreement and was never put in to practice. In this respect, its failure must be seen as a further manifestation of the cultural and political contradictions of German-Italian alignment and an additional manifestation of the ill-fated dream to dominate the world under the common sign of tyranny and oppression.