



Amelia Andreassi's professional writings: the ego-documents of an Italian teacher of the twentieth century¹

Le scritture professionali di Amelia Andreassi: gli ego-documenti di una insegnante italiana del Novecento

As escritas profissionais de Amelia Andreassi: os ego-documentos de uma professora italiana do século XX

Escritos profesionales de Amelia Andreassi: los ego-documentos de una profesora italiana del siglo XX

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Abstract

This work analyses a specific collection called “Fondo Amelia Andreassi”, preserved at the Ce.S.I.S. (Centre of Documentation and Research on the History of School, School book and Children Literature) of the University of Molise. The collection is composed of documents, books and objects belonged to Mrs. Amelia Andreassi; she was a teacher and school manager who was born in 1909 and died in 2012. The collection's variety reflects the professional figure of a teacher from the past century. The collection goes from the first pedagogical studies of Amelia up to her retirement documents. The fond includes 18 notebooks; some of them are school reports, others describe the preparation of classes and allow to analyze the methods and pedagogic theories supported by the teacher in that particular historical framework.

Keywords: Personal archives. Teacher's ego-documents. Italy.

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Riassunto

Il contributo intende prendere in esame il valore euristico dell'archivio personale di Amelia Andreassi, maestra e poi direttrice di scuole materne private e pubbliche di Bari, importante città dell'Italia meridionale, nel corso del Novecento. La collezione, composta di libri, certificazioni, lettere e materiali didattici, fra cui i quaderni sui quali annotava personali riflessioni sulle pratiche didattiche e ludiche svolte in classe, costituiscono parte del fondo archivistico personale custodito presso il Centro di documentazione e ricerca sulla storia delle istituzioni scolastiche, del libro scolastico e della letteratura per l'infanzia (Ce.S.I.S.) dell'Università del Molise, tra le cui finalità sono previsti il recupero, la conservazione e la valorizzazione degli archivi personali degli insegnanti. Tali fondi permettono una analisi dettagliata della funzione degli scritti personali (egodocumenti) di tipo professionale. Insieme all'uso delle categorie interpretative offerte dalla storia delle culture scolastiche nella analisi si intendono raccogliere le suggestioni proposte dalla storia della memoria scolastica.

Keys words: Archivi personali. Ego-documenti insegnanti. Italia.

Resumo

A contribuição pretende analisar o valor heurístico do arquivo pessoal de Amelia Andreassi, que atuou no século XX como professora e diretora de escolas infantil maternais, particulares e estaduais de Bari, importante cidade do Sul da Itália. A coleção composta por livros, atestados, cartas e material didático, entre o qual os cadernos com as suas anotações pessoais sobre as práticas didáticas desenvolvidas na sala de aula, representa parte do acervo pessoal guardado pelo *Centro di documentazione e ricerca sulla storia delle istituzioni scolastiche, del libro scolastico e della letteratura per l'infanzia* (Ce.S.I.S.) da *Università del Molise* na recuperação, na conservação e no aprimoramento de arquivos pessoais dos professores. O acervo permite uma análise detalhada da função dos escritos pessoais (ego-documentos). Juntamente com o uso das categorias interpretativas oferecidas pela história das culturas escolares na análise também pretendemos aproveitar as sugestões oferecidas pela história da memória escolar.

Palavras-chave: Arquivos pessoais. Ego-documentos professores. Itália.

Resumen

La contribución analiza el valor heurístico del archivo personal de Amelia Andreassi, quien trabajó en el siglo XX como maestra y directora de guarderías privadas y públicas en Bari, una importante ciudad del sur de Italia. La colección compuesta por libros, certificados, cartas y material didático, incluyendo cuadernos con notas personales sobre las prácticas docentes desarrolladas en el aula, representa parte de la colección personal mantenida por el *Centro di documentazione e ricerca sulla storia delle istituzioni scolastiche, del libro scolastico e della letteratura per l'infanzia* (Ce.S.I.S.) de la *Università del Molise* en la recuperación, la conservación y el mejoramiento de los archivos personales de los docentes. La colección permite un análisis detallado de la función de los escritos personales (ego-documentos). Junto con la utilización de las categorías interpretativas que ofrece la historia de las culturas escolares, también aprovechamos las sugerencias proporcionadas por la historia de la memoria escolar.

Palabras clave: Archivos personales. Ego-documentos maestros. Italia.

Introduction

This contribution presents the case study relating to the autobiographical professional writings of a teacher born at the beginning of past century who, for several years, also held the role of school manager. The research moves within a framework that, in recent years, has offered multiple suggestions coming from the historiographical renewal which also included the field of education. The research aligns with the heuristic contribution indicated by the studies aimed at enhancing the autobiographical documentation, also known as self-writing. This area of research in Italy has recently undergone a remarkable development especially with reference to those phenomena and events that during the twentieth century marked the lives of millions of people. As an example, the incidence of the two world wars, or the migratory phenomenon, which prompted an unstoppable need for writing even in people of popular extraction (Caffarena, 2005; Franzina, 1992; Gabrielli, 2007; Baioni, 2011).

Within this contemporary setting, with specific reference to school history, has emerged the need to analyze the ways in which schools, teachers and educators have dealt with the theme of memory and its relations with history (Vinão, 2005a; Vinão, 2005b; Vinão, 2010, Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Vinão 2017). At the turn of the last century and the new millennium we witnessed the development of the theme of memory and, at the same time, of the studies related to memory, so much so as to induce some historians to speak of "globalization of memory". In the wake of *Memory studies* (Assmann, 1997), the school memory, too, has been the subject of a significant attempt at conceptual clarification in order to offer scholars a new object of historical analysis, up to the point of speaking about plural memories (Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Vinão 2017). As a matter of fact, there are many forms through which memory conveys the representations of the school and teachers. The most recent investigations give us a very articulated picture of the school memory, where, alongside the forms of collective school memory conveyed by literary fiction and popular fiction (Ascenzi, 2012), theatre and cinema (Cohen, 1996, pp.395-420, May&Ramsland, 2007, pp.135-149, May 2010, pp.623-637), pictures (Del Pozo, 2006; Comas Rubi; Del Pozo, 2018; Sureda; Del Pozo, 2018) and other media, we find the forms of memory promoted by public institutions within the framework of very specific policies expressing themselves through the creation of «places of school memories», to resume a category of historiography introduced by Pierre Nora (1997). As for the school, according to the studies conducted by Connercton (1989, 2009) memory takes on different forms such as museums or memorials. The places of school memory are to be found in streets, squares and school buildings that display the names of teachers, educators and pedagogical experts; in the inauguration of plaques, busts and monuments; in the conferment of decorations and distinctions; in the printing of commemorative stamps and coins; in the celebration of funerals promoted by professional associations and public institutions according to the specific memory (Meda, Pomante, Brunelli, 2019, Sani, Ascenzi, 2016).

The forms of collective and public memory are enriched by those of subjective school memory expressed through ego-documents – following Vinão's classification - consisting of diaries, autobiographies, memories, but also by personal memories retrieved from oral testimonies (Vinão, 2005a, pp.19-33).

The case study of the autobiographical professional writings of Amelia Andreassi crosses another line of investigation recently re-evaluated by school historians, that concerns the reconstruction of the biographical profiles of educators (Chiosso, Sani, 2013, D'Alessio 2016, Zago 2016 pp.203-234). The research intends to follow the rich line of studies initiated in the 1990s by Dominique Julia who, starting from the need to make light on the school cultures embodied by the teachers, paid particular attention to the experiences of the various players of the school world (Julia, 1996). It is a field of investigation that allowed to reevaluate the reconstruction of the biographical profiles of educators, paying considerable attention to

training, pedagogical culture and the condition of teachers (Di Pol, 2016, Ghizzoni, 2003, Soldani, 1993, Covato, 1996), as well as to educational paths reinterpreted under the cultural processes that have affected teachers and more broadly the history of school, seen «as part of the more general history of social life and of the processes of civil and cultural modernization of the country» (Sani, 2011, pp.358-359).

The biographical and professional path of Amelia Andreassi, just like that of other teachers who grew up in southern Italy in the past century (D'Alessio, 2017), allows to analyze, to grasp more inferences and to highlight social dynamics, teaching materials and teaching activities that were part of the school culture embodied by the teacher.

Amelia Andreassi's life course, from the early training years to the professional practice, spans across a whole century and develops within a very broad and complex historical, cultural, social and economic framework of the country; she died on January 14, 2012, at the age of 102 (1909-2012). Amelia was born in Naples on 1 April 1909 from the lawyer Giuseppe, born in 1867 and employed in the legal office of the Banco di Napoli, and from Angelina De Mola born in 1866 in Fasano in the province of Bari. The family was wealthy and holder of the noble title of Marquis; however, they suffered a very serious economic crisis and, probably around the 1920s, Amelia was forced to move to Fasano in Puglia where she lived with some relatives of her maternal family. Her father, later on, managed to find work in Bari, where he moved with the whole family. Amelia was the fourth of six children; she did not get married and dedicated her whole life to school².

University of Molise's Ce.S.I.S. and «Amelia Andreassi» fond

The historiographical and methodological assumptions hereby outlined find application in the empirical analysis of the rich collection preserved at the University of Molise (Centre of Documentation and Research on the History of School, School book and Children Literature). Established in 2006 to promote the retrieval and collection of sources for historical-educational research, as indicated in the statute approved on May 4, 2006, the Center aims at promoting research, conservation and use, for scientific purposes, of unpublished and printed documents relating to: the history of school and educational institutions; school publishing and textbooks; the history of children's literature and publishing in Italy and in the rest of Europe. This purpose is pursued through various activities including the activation and maintenance of relationships and forms of collaboration with similar entities and institutions in Italy and abroad; the organization of conferences, seminars, exhibitions, publications; the establishment of scholarships, PhD programs and research grants (Barausse, 2020). The structure today pertains to the Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education of the University of Molise. There are many factors that explain the birth of Ce.SIS: the evolution of the scientific discipline in Italian universities, the changes in the historiography of education worldwide and the consequent internationalization of research, the issues that have arisen around places, tools and sources that are necessary for the research in the school history and educational fields. Some privileged places for the conservation and transmission of knowledge and memory, such as schools, have been showing the signs of a difficulty, or even disregard, in the conservation and promotion of their own heritage, and of a certain apathy with respect to the role and historical functions exercised by the school (Barausse, 2010; Soldani, 2006). It is therefore necessary to refer to the initiatives promoted by

² The information on her family of origin and the early childhood are drawn from private documents that the heirs gave for viewing.

specialized centers established in some universities and to identify structures dedicated to the development of documentation and research in this important, still neglected sector. The focus on the enhancement of local sources has been at the basis of the research paths activated at Ce.S.I.S., with the aim to understand the development of schooling processes at regional level and in southern Italy between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was accomplished with the promotion of new research paths and through the discovery, conservation and enhancement of new types of documentary sources that today have enlarged the documentary heritage. In this perspective, the Documentation Center has been developing a substantial collection of school materials made up of books, archives and objects kept for research purposes. The collection and conservation of the material were organized respecting the attribution of individual fonds to their owners/donors, to well-identified teachers and pupils or in any case to equally recognizable family groups. In recent years, together with these fonds, an «Archive of memories» has been set up, namely, a fond made up of two types of documents; photographs that show images of school life from the late 1800s to the 90s of the last century and video interviews with the protagonists of schools in Southern Italy. Among the fonds kept at Ce.S.I.S. there is Amelia Andreassi fond, which is made up of different types of materials. In addition to public and private documents which help to reconstruct her educational and professional biography, the collection also includes: texts used during the years of her training and professional activity, a collection of notebooks and school records, her preparation notes for public competitions, the vocal recordings of the events as a school manager, the collections of teaching materials, the photographs collected by the teacher. It is a fond that is still growing and it is therefore being inventoried in a provisional form, given the still ongoing retrieval of the teacher's documents. The materials allow us to reconstruct the teacher's personal evolution within the historical context in which she grew and lived, by providing valuable information on training courses and teaching methods, especially in the nursery school of the mid-20th century. The collection is therefore divided into an archival section and a book section. A substantial and interesting part of the collection is made up of the “precious” notebooks with school records kept carefully by the teacher herself and deposited in the Center about two years before her death. The notebooks, 18 in total, can be classified into two types: those where the teacher noted the typical lessons, poems, excerpts of stories, scripts of school plays all over the years and 6 notebooks of school chronicles relating to the professional activity carried out between 1943 and 1959. These have a fairly homogeneous structure. The initial pages indicate the contents of the program that the teacher planned to carry out monthly. The following pages report the activities and contents carried out daily and, sometimes, the description of the children that impressed the teacher the most. The activities refer to the programs' contents divided by subjects and above all to religion, moral and physical education, Italian, intellectual education, drawing and singing, arithmetic recitation, various notions, senses exercises, practical life. The only exception is the notebook that collects the chronicles of the teacher from 1943 to 1957. It is a notebook that contains a selection of the reflections or considerations reported in the other seventeen notebooks, but the teacher does not reveal the criteria that led her to that choice. This is an element to be taken into consideration for a critical analysis of the document. However, from the very subtitle that the teacher attributed to the notebook, it is clear that she wants to linger on the children's profiles, almost as if the notebook were the result of a constant professional practice.

All these notebooks can rightly be included in the forms of self-writing to which the historiography of education has drawn some attention (Vinão, 2005a).

Figure 1 – The teacher Amelia Andreassi

Source : Archive Ce.S.I.S., F. Amelia Andreassi, b. Photography collection.

The long journey of the teacher Amelia: The first professional experiences during the years of fascism.

Amelia received her training in the first years of implementation of the Gentile Reform. The idealist philosopher had brought the school back to its centralized and hierarchical structure, eliminating any form of autonomy in the school administration (Ostenc, 1981, Charnitzky, 1996).

The reform had restored the original 5 years of elementary education and added a non-compulsory preparatory grade for children aged 3 to 6; moreover, the compulsory schooling had been raised up to the age of 14. The cultural and educational primacy of classical schools was also strengthened and the access to further studies was made more selective. The reform, which was based on the idealist thinking advocated by Gentile and Codignola, confirmed the traditional conception of the teacher as a hinge between the elite and the popular classes that were to be educated, but reversed the approach according to which the teacher had to possess a rudimentary and elementary culture in favour of the acquisition of a deeper and more adequate culture (De Fort 1984, pp. 528-576); the Teaching Institute was therefore elevated to the level of humanistic studies, instead of professional studies. The Teaching Institute had the duration of seven years, with a lower grade of four years and a higher grade of three years; the study of Latin was compulsory in all seven years. Furthermore, the division between female and male schools was eliminated and Latin and philosophy were introduced as subjects of study, together with pedagogy with a historical-philosophical address. To access the Teaching Institute an admission exam had to be passed which, due to its difficulty, established a more selective criterion for the future teaching class, and that forced students to have a higher initial preparation. The study of psychology was abolished and also the professionalizing disciplines such as calligraphy, women's work, agriculture, manual work and didactic traineeship, which caused some tensions within the same group of idealists: the suppression of traineeship, as it is known, was a choice of Gentile in contrast with

Codignola who, instead, considered it crucial for learning a profession; for this reason, in the 1930s there was a rethinking on the usefulness of the traineeship for the didactic preparation of elementary teachers (Di Pol, 2003).

As is known, the reorganization of elementary education and the birth of the Teaching Institutes were accompanied by the introduction of kindergartens, called «nursery schools» (art. 1, R.D. 31 December 1923, n. 3106), as the first grade of primary education, defined as preparatory. The nursery school had a duration of three years and it was not compulsory; furthermore, the idea was to provide kindergartens with recreational custody tasks for children coming from socio-culturally disadvantaged classes. However, the fascist regime did not manage to fully incorporate the nursery school in its educational projects, leaving it relegated to a charitable-assistance role. Although there was an attempt at curricular articulation, the nursery school, in this historical phase, remained relegated to a private and confessional logic. Bottai, in 1937, promoted a reflection on the nationalization of nursery schools; the School Charter provided for the institution of a compulsory nursery school for all children aged four to six, with the aim to regulate «the first manifestations of intelligence and character». However, no concrete results were obtained due to the enormous costs that such an operation would have caused to the state (Catarsi, 1994).

Within this institutional structure determined by the Gentile Reform, Amelia received her teacher's training. Her approach to the teaching profession and her introduction to pedagogical subjects took place at the Teaching Institute of Bari, where she was taught by prominent teachers including the well-known pedagogue Giovanni Modugno (Andreassi 2013, vol 2, pp.179-180). The documents kept in the Center certify her enrollment in the second grade of the lower course at the Teaching Institute of Bari in the school year 1925-26 (for the second time) and in the fourth year in the year 1927-28³. There are no documents certifying the enrollment in the first and third grade, so we are trying to trace the reasons for this void. In July 1928, Amelia obtained the admission diploma to the upper course of the Teaching Institute. We do not have evidence about the conclusion of her studies but from the sources in our possession it appears that the future teacher also managed to complete the upper course of the teaching school.

The presence of the essays written in preparation for the competition to elementary school teaching dating back to 1931-32 (the preparation essays under the supervision of a private teacher are 30) and, in addition, an autobiographical note, reveal that she won such competition with an essay titled *È impossibile educare l'infanzia senza possederne la confidenza e l'amore* ("It is impossible to educate children without gaining their love and trust")⁴. The fond also includes undated essays referring to the preparation for the nursery school teacher competition. From the list of the qualifications presented for the competition as a school manager, it is clear that she had obtained the qualification as a preparatory teacher (with a practical traineeship test) and the qualification diploma for elementary teaching⁵.

In accordance with the Gentile Reform, the exercise of nursery school teaching required the possession of the legal qualification for preparatory school teaching to be obtained either after the three-year summer courses referred to in the article 18 of the 1913 law, or after other not better specified courses, or after the three-year «Schools of Method for maternal education» instituted by the reform (Di Pol, 2003). These schools, considered professionally and culturally inferior, and where religious education was compulsory, were definitively transformed into teaching schools in 1933.

³ Documentation kept at Ce.S.I.S., Archive F. Amelia Andreassi, b. Private correspondence and professional papers.

⁴ The essays are kept at Ce.S.I.S., Archive F. Amelia Andreassi, b. Private correspondence and professional papers.

⁵ Application form sent to the Mayor of Bari on 26 October 1959 kept at Ce.S.I.S., Archive F. Amelia Andreassi, b. Private correspondence and professional papers.

The pedagogical model that mainly inspired nursery school teacher training was that introduced by the Agazzi sisters, rather than from Montessori. After the initial support that the Montessori method received by fascism, which had appreciated its functionality for early learning in the literacy process, an incompatibility emerged between the authoritarian ideology of the regime and the Montessori model based on principles of freedom and creativity.

This allowed the Agazzi method to take over in Italy; it was defined by Lombardo Radice as the «Italian method. Genuinely modest but brilliant and clear», influenced by Froebel and by the educator Ferrante Aporti. The Agazzi method was also strongly supported by the Catholic world. Amelia Andreassi seems to be animated much more by this model of kindergarten teacher linked to the Agazzi pedagogy of a «pensive mother» (Agazzi, 1951, Agazzi, Grazzini 2006), especially in Method Schools, rather than the Montessori model of a «cultured and civilized person», «educator by profession». Amelia seems to be permeated by the educational models promoted by the Agazzi pedagogy, supported by a strong Catholic spirit: the teacher brings back in daily practice the concept of «the teacher as a good mother» by constantly studying and updating herself (this is evident from the book collection). On these basic foundations she would later implant other stimuli of Montessorian nature.

Her teaching career began in Bari in the school year 1933-34 at the "Gironda" state elementary school, where she remained until 1936. Afterwards, in 1937, she had an experience at Poggiardo in the province of Lecce, where she was assigned as temporary before being sent to Morciano di Leucaas permanent. Some private letters also report the difficulties of the young teacher in staying away from home despite being the guest of a referenced family⁶.

The defining moment of her private and professional life is linked to the inauguration in Bari of the nursery school «Vincenzo Diomede Fresa» in 1937. The building, located in the historic center of Bari in full fascist style, was erected by the Fresa spouses in memory of their son Vincenzo, whose death was premature and tragic, and was donated to the Municipality of Bari for educational purposes.

Amelia Andreassi started her career from the 1939-40 school year as a nursery school teacher but also had special functions as a "cashier" and a trusted person of the Diomede Fresa family who still maintained control of the school as stated in the Agreement of 1938:

the said teacher, in addition to the fulfillment of the educational services [...] will supervise, on behalf of the donors, the fulfillment of the conditions relating to the maintenance and conservation of the building and its furniture, will manage any funds donated to the benefit of school pupil and will exercise the functions connected to the patronage secretariat⁷.

The teacher in this period was also involved in activities for the fascism of young people. In fact, in 1934, she assumed responsibility for the local organization of the “little Italian girls” of the National Opera Balilla⁸.

⁶ Ce.S.I.S. Archive F. Amelia Andreassi, b. Private correspondence.

⁷ See for reference the Agreement act of 1938, in Ce.S.I.S. Archive, F. Amelia Andreassi, b. Private correspondence and professional papers.

⁸ See for reference the certificate issued on 1 May 1937 by the president of the female organization of Bari, in Ce.S.I.S. Archive, F. Amelia Andreassi, b. Private correspondence and professional papers.

From the end of the Second World War to the Sixties through the notebooks of the teacher

After the fall of the regime and the beginning of the occupation by the allies, Amelia is committed in resuming the teaching activities in the school where she must deal with a different climate from that of previous years, as reveal her personal writings. The first day of school recurs constantly in the teacher's annual chronicles. But that of October 1943 is striking for the representation that the teacher wants to give of herself, that of a Christian educator engaged in a real mission. A few months after the fall of the regime and the signing of the armistice that would cause Italy to accept unconditional surrender to the allied forces and the disengagement from the alliance with Nazi Germany, the words used by the teacher to express her strong personal commitment as an educator resound almost as a programme. Thus, on 2 October 1943 the teacher writes:

It is the first day of school! Even in this school year there are 65 little ones entrusted to my care; they are 65 children of the people but different between one another for education, inclinations, temperaments. Everyone has their own personality and, therefore, must be the subject of a special study. I know well that the teacher must try to conquer the soul of each pupil in order to be able to curb the too lively, encourage the shy, address the bold on the right path and obtain from everyone the confidence that is needed to succeed in the difficult art of education. With God's help I hope I'll be able to fulfill the difficult task that is required of me as a Christian educator⁹.

The many profiles of the children that the teacher, animated by a strong spirit of observation, sketches with wealth of details are striking. Her notes seem, on the one hand, to want to fix their behavior and their characteristics in order to monitor their evolution over time. The drafting of the children's profiles, however, reveals the slow change of the times which is reflected in the change of language and of the expressive forms used to explain certain behaviors. In the chronicles of '43 it is possible to identify expressive forms still directly attributable to the clichés of the regime:

Little boy Bux Gaetano really surprised me this year. He is still, yes, a lively little devil capable of even committing some mischief, but what a difference from last year's Bux! I made him sit very far ahead in the classroom, just to avoid some roguish trick of his exuberant vivacity and, overall, I see him staring at me carefully with those big eyes when I tell some story or do some lectures. I was also struck by the great desire that this child shows in wanting to be part of the honor guard down at the door when there is some visit to the school. His dream is to use the rifle. It is true then, that the child hides the potential man because in this child, who today is a child of the she-wolf, there is a new warrior of our race who already makes him feel like a little soldier capable of holding the rifle¹⁰.

⁹ Notebook of school chronicles from 1943 to 1957. 2 October, Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

¹⁰ Notebook of school chronicles from 1943 to 1957. 10 November. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

In this regard, it is interesting to notice the corrections that the teacher herself introduced - probably in a later period – to erase the most evident references to fascism by replacing them with more neutral expressions, as if to highlight her discomfort in using a language and a lexicon that had a large part of her initial experience: «this child's strong desire to be a soldier proves me more and more that in the child there is a potential man. Who knows if the wish of this little pupil of mine will not come true at the blossoming of youth!»¹¹.

In the first pages of the notebook that refers to the last months of '43, the reflections of the war are felt in the behavior of children:

Little boy Cassano is one of those children full of life, initiative and very bright intelligence but above all he is loved for the patriotic spirit that animates him. He often tells me that, when he grows up, his father will buy him a 'cannon' with which he will kill all the enemies of Italy. The child in question is part of the school's honor guard and is thrilled when he is told to take the musket¹²

The war event together with the nationalistic spirit also rekindles the patriotic one, doomed to revive the involvement of children in the forms of civil mobilization as had already happened during the First World War. The lecture on the fight against waste seemed to have aroused significant participation from the children and their families who brought "all sorts of things" to school:

Bottles, rags, papers, irons made a good show of themselves in the classroom, before being collected and brought by the children themselves to the collection point [...] What spirit of patriotism is there in our people. How many sacrifices even the little ones can make for our homeland in arms! To make children understand all the beauty of giving away not only what is superfluous but above all what costs some renunciation and requires some sacrifice, this is the dutiful and patriotic task of the educator at the present time¹³.

Even Christmas 1943 became an occasion to recall the patriotic sense expressed through the religious inspiration of the personal prayer that the teacher addressed to God, so that he could extend his «compassionate hand over humanity » and that «peace and justice that everyone desire» could be reached together with a «radiant victory for our homeland »¹⁴.

The war events led to the closure of the nursery school and only in January 1947 it was possible to start again. The teacher resumed writing her chronicles, which revealed a strong relief and personal suffering for having been away from her pupils:

The storm of war has passed! The school has reopened after years of forced abandonment by the young pupils and ours. I had left the

¹¹ Notebook of school chronicles from 1943 to 1957. 10 November. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

¹² Notebook of school chronicles from 1943 to 1957. 25 November 1943. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

¹³ Notebook of school chronicles from 1943 to 1957. 28 November 1943. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

¹⁴ Notebook of school chronicles from 1943 to 1957. 30 November 1943. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

children with the hope of seeing them again soon, and instead so many years have passed!¹⁵

There is one thing that strikes the teacher: the presence of so many mothers dressed in mourning («*in gramaglia*»): «These are the deaths caused by the immense war; so many children have been deprived of the caresses of their father». Among the pupils there are, in particular, five war orphans who particularly touch the sensitivity of the teacher: «[...] I will be with these little ones more maternal than ever, I will try to surround them with that affection and care that at home they no longer have [...]»¹⁶.

The presentation of the psychological profiles of many children is a form of reflexive writing that the teacher constantly practices also over the following years: in this type of writing we can perceive all the studies of pedagogy and philosophy that the teacher has acquired during her years of study and transferred onto her daily practice. There is often a physical description in the profiles, an attention to the look and general behavior of the child. There is also a psychological focus on different types of children. The shy, the restless, the little devil, the good, the excellent, etc. The growth and the changes that happen in the children from one year to the next are stressed several times:

Today I had the "joy" of making a great discovery, Nicola Lanave, who I thought was a lonely child only capable of making me worry for his many pranks, gave, at my request, a test of his skill. The child in question is a real incorrigible little devil, he has small eyes but of exceptional vivacity; I called him "mouse eyes". He is also incredibly restless and unable to be quiet, even for a few minutes¹⁷.

The story continues with the teacher's amazement at the child's ability to repeat for the first time by heart the poems she taught during the years. And again in March 1955 she writes:

Zaccaro Vincenzo is a rather strange kid. He has been in kindergarten for 3 years, now, and has always been a handful. He has a hundred percent fickle and unstable character. One day you see him diligent, obedient, polite, the next rebellious to every call and every exhortation. I always try to be nice to him [...]¹⁸.

In her notes, the teacher outlines the profiles of her young pupils, especially when the changes in their behavior affect her. So in the notebook of 1953-54 the teacher reports with some surprise the change of Anna Ardito, a little girl who in the previous year seemed like «an insignificant child, one of those who are almost the 'dead weight of the school'». What a surprise I had this year when I saw her again! So smart, always active and helpful, polite and kind in every occasion». Specifically, the teacher was impressed by the attention paid to a child who had recently entered the school and to whom she had expressed and revealed «a truly touching maternal spirit». Faced with the crying reactions of the child, «inconsolable for the detachment from his mother», the little girl had taken him in her lap and cradled him so sweetly, that the

¹⁵ Notebook of school chronicles from 1943 to 1957. 30 November 1947. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

¹⁶ Notebook of school chronicles from 1943 to 1957. 30 November 1947. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

¹⁷ Handwritten chronicle 1955 in Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

child calmed down, and for many days good Anna had become the loving guide and mother of little Nicola »¹⁹. The maternal attitude, therefore, was something that also characterized the behavior of girls.

Among the pupils' profiles, the teacher also notes those which, in her opinion, deserve to be reported to more specialized structures such as the Institute of Psychology of the University of Bari which, in 1950, « asked for the collaboration of the nursery school for reporting abnormal children in the character and intelligence». Thus, the teacher describes the children that she considers «abnormal» due to «restlessness, grumpiness, instability, inability to focus»; she describes abnormal-looking children with «oblong heads and born from a tuberculous mother »; there is also the case of the child with «avery pronounced speech impediment, but of very awake and very restless intelligence »; a child is also described as «super-gifted», with «very awake intelligence, absolute mastery of himself and of his own actions, very strong intuition »²⁰.

Figura 2 - The children of “Diomedede Freda” nursery school



Source: ArchiveCe.S.I.S., F. Amelia Andreassi, b. Photography collection.

The chronicles describe some of the practices used by the teacher in her mixed classes by gender and age, as was the norm for nursery schools (except in one case when the Director, in November 1949, imposed the creation of a class consisting only of 3-year-old children, with regret on the part of the teacher Amelia, who lost like this 10 small pupils already well integrated).

The teacher has a remarkable control over the numerous children that vary over the years from a minimum of 42 to a maximum of 86 enrolled. Like she describes, they are placed in little desks and in rows; often the liveliest children are moved to the front rows, and the teacher tries to involve and motivate them, or to keep them under control in their moments of intemperance. The best and most talented schoolgirls, instead, are seated in the round tables. The older girls are referred to as "little mothers" and involved in welcoming the little ones. But among the recurring themes that we encounter in the chronicles of the teacher there is the concern for the size of her class. A problem linked to the strong social imbalance between the South and other areas of Italy, which resulted in an evident shortage of early childhood

¹⁹ Notebook of school chronicles 1953-54. 30 October 1953. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

²⁰Notebook of school chronicles from 1943 to 1957. 8 June 1950. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings

education facilities in the South and the hope of seeing an increase in the supply of nursery schools. The serious post-war situation forced the government to focus more on elementary education, by leaving nursery school entirely to the initiative of local and private entities. The following passage is an example of the teacher's reflection on the emergency condition in which the nursery school of Bari lived in the mid-1950s, where the demand for nursery schools exploded and the existing nursery schools were unable to face it:

86 enrolled this year! ... the position of the nursery school in Bari is discouraging. When will this relentless need for schools in our population be satisfied? It goes without saying that such a condition affects, badly, the soul of all educators. They feel dismay in front of the enormous difficulties and responsibilities that they are forced to face every year. They say hope is the last to die and we all ardently hope, that one day not far away, the long-awaited recovery of the nursery schools of the south, so far neglected, will come, and new schools will rise to fill the many gaps²¹.

The attention to the material issues presented by the school is also accompanied by the need for a constant and strong affirmation of the school's identity, a process that accompanies the construction of the pupils' individual identities, as well. The teacher's personal writings report the annual commemorative moments of the school's foundation, as an opportunity to communicate to the children the feeling of gratitude towards the benefactor family and the value of their school through a speech of praise to the Diomedea Fresa family: «I tried to instill in the children's hearts a sense of respect for this building, which comes out of a great pain for the sake of the people's children»²². These are simple expressions which, however, reveal the rootedness of a conception of education, widely diffused among Italian teachers, aimed at making a clear distinction between the itineraries intended for popular classes, such as nursery and elementary school, and those intended for the ruling class (Sani, 2011).

There are no specific comments in the teacher's writings as to the implementation of the new programs for nursery and elementary school drafted by the Military Government's education subcommittee, one of whose members was Carleton Washburne (a student of John Dewey), as well, and which became effective in 1945-46. As it is known, the new programs were inspired by American pedagogical activism and were aimed at creating a school that was not based on notions and passive listening to teachers, but rather on the attention to the psychology of the pupil more than the teacher's. The didactic practices were intended to enhance the critical skills of the pupils through the direct experience, other than being based on the mere transmission of notions, considered an end in itself for the changeable nature of those. The programs inspired by this new pedagogy were aimed not only at continuing to fight illiteracy but also - and above all - at making the ethical-civil culture more solid, in their attempt to build a model of responsible and democratic citizenship. The teaching practices enacted by the teacher partially reflect the new democratic spirit and revolve around two fundamental axes. On the one hand, activities of a playful nature were mainly exercised and, on the other, the teacher carried out short "lessons" whose contents tended to develop some knowledge relating to: religion, moral and physical education, Italian, intellectual education, arithmetic, to various notions making extensive use of fairy tales, short stories, drawing and singing or acting. The development of the activities provided for a large space for games and small jobs. The nursery

²¹ Notebook of school chronicles from 1943 to 1957. Beginning of school year 1951-52 in Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

²² Notebook of school chronicles 1957-58. 26 October 1957. in Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

school included playful moments, which could be either in total freedom or imitate early forms of “mild” employment, either individually or collectively, through the use of «sticks and tokens». Through these educational moments, the teacher not only intended to get to know the children and promote their sociability, but also to encourage the learning of certain behaviors such as the respect for tidiness and cleanliness, and the promotion of observation, concentration and reflection skills. Amelia Andreassi's activity as an educator aimed at reflecting the behavior of a mother who knew the educational tasks, starting from the very games:

Knowing well [...] how great is the importance of play for a nursery school teacher in her profession, especially in the first days of school, I have many games played between old and new pupils through which I study the character, trends and activities of each, especially the latter, Like a good mother, I too intend to follow very closely each student entrusted to my care²³.

Frequent narrations of short stories and fairy tales sometimes accompanied Amelia's lessons, in a combination of play and didactics.

In the teacher's diaries we find frequent references to the narration of moralizing fairy tales, such as that of *The Crow and the Fox* (Chronicle of November 16, 1953) - on which the teacher wrote "moral of the tale for the pupils: punishing vanity" - or *Little Red Riding Hood* (Chronicle of November 15, 1955) or *Snow White* (Chronicle of November 30, 1955) or *Pinocchio* (Chronicle of November 1955). Amelia drew from her personal collection of books, from both the nineteenth and twentieth century, characters such as *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Good Fair* by the Grimm brothers (Bologna, C.E.L.I.), the readings of Pietro Thouar, the *Little world. Tales of a friend of children*, (Milan, Treves Brothers, 1881) or the *Libro Cuore* by De Amicis, the novels of Giuseppe Fanciulli (*Fiore, a novel for children*, Florence, Bemporad, 1930) and the collection of texts by Anna Foce, author of a series of volumes widely distributed and used in the second half of the twentieth century by nursery school teachers²⁴. Other readings were Ginevra Pellizzari's *Fatina Gocciadoro*, (Milano: Piccoli), *Tredicino*, (Milano: Boschi), *Alice in Wonderland* (Milano: Boschi), *Fanciullezza in marcia* by M.R. Berardi, (S.A.S., Torino) *Nino and Ghita*, *The secret of Carolina*, *The adventure of Carolina*, published by Risi, Milan.

Singing, drawing and acting were, additionally, occasions for expressing the spontaneity of children.

A constant practice was dedicated to Italian teaching, as witnessed by the diaries which reveal the attention paid by the teacher to the comparison between dialect and standard language in order to favor the replacement of dialectal terms with Italian ones: the correction of speech defects, conversations on different subjects, even not present in the classroom, and the exact pronunciation of one's name and surname. The teacher's practices also intended to focus the

²³ Notebook of school chronicles from 1943 to 1957. 28 November 1958. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

²⁴ Among the volumes published after the II world war and kept in the teacher's library : Foce, A. **Giochiamo. Duecento e più ricreazioni per i bimbi della scuola materna**. Brescia: La Scuola, 1940; Ead. **Gli animali e i bimbi. Racconti di animali per i bambini della scuola materna e delle prime classi elementari**. Brescia: La Scuola, 1949; Ead. **Con Gesù. Raccolta di racconti per l'educazione religiosa dei bambini di scuola materna e delle prime classi elementari**. Brescia: La Scuola, 1949; Ead., **Lavorare con gioia. Raccolta di raccontini che si riferiscono alla vita pratica dei bambini di scuola materna e delle prime classi elementari**. Brescia: La scuola, 1949; Ead., **VI. Gli animali e i bimbi**. Brescia: La Scuola, 1949; Ead. **VII. C'era una volta. Raccolta di fiabe, novelle, racconti diversi per i bambini di scuola materna e delle prime classi elementari**. Brescia: La Scuola, 1949; Ead., **Piccolo mondo. Raccolta di racconti in riferimento agli esercizi per l'educazione linguistica e sensoriale dei bambini di scuola materna e delle prime classi elementari**. Brescia: La Scuola, 1949; Ead., **La voce del cuore. Raccolta di racconti per l'educazione morale e patriottica dei bambini di scuola materna e delle prime classi elementari**. Brescia: La Scuola, 1949.

attention on the use of names and articles, by playing games associated with the identity (the name of the children, the name of the school, the name of the headmistress, etc.) or on spoken language exercises; as an example, she used to show to children various objects and drawings and made them pronounce the appropriate word. «I notice that this exercise is very useful for making children talk. Even the shy can make their little voice heard»²⁵.

Religious education plays a significant role in the teaching and educational practices of the teacher, almost on a daily basis. Religious themes treated in different ways permeate all of Amelia's teaching. Her personal adherence to the Christian faith, and in particular to Catholicism, becomes a constant source of inspiration in the promotion of educational initiatives and practices of a religious nature. Holidays and commemorations are the starting point for introducing religious topics. So it is the celebration of All Saints to explain «how and why they became saints», together with the «names of the saints best known by children. Our effort to imitate them in this life, and then join them in Heaven ». ²⁶On November 4, after the Day of the dead, upon their return to school, the children are encouraged by the teacher to tell how they spent the holiday, but it is an opportunity for praying and to explain the behavior to observe in the church. So it is for the celebration of the Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation of the Virgin and, in the month of May, for all the celebrations connected to the Virgin Mary. These religious moments would accompany the more important ones such as Christmas, with the live representation of the nativity scene, and Easter. In January, the three Magi and the epiphany were the occasion to teach the Lord's prayer. Alongside the festivities of the birth and death of Jesus, the teacher commemorated «with simple words» the reconciliation between church and state in February. Another important occasion for religious education was celebrating the local Saint. In particular, for the children of Bari, the celebration of St. Nicola was an opportunity to tell the story of the saint. That of presenting the history of the saints was a quite old tradition. The winter days, especially the colder and rainy ones, were also an opportunity to explain to children the «feelings of love and pity towards the poorest, the old and the sick» trying to make them understand «what could be done to soothe their pains and make Jesus happy»²⁷.

Within this context, however, some of the teacher's notes are significant because they tell about the signs of an ongoing secularization in Bari society, as a reflection of what had been happening generally in Italian cities since the 1950s, and which also increasingly affect the behavior of children from the very preschool age. An element in particular recurs at the beginning of each school year: the need to teach the sign of the cross. In all her notebooks the teacher reports, practically with the same words over again, the following concern:

At every beginning of the school year, I have to make the usual sad observation: almost none of the new children can make the sign of the Cross. Here I am then, with great patience, calling the little ones to me one at a time, guiding them with the movements of my hand and let them learn the words of the "Sign of the Christian"²⁸.

²⁵ Notebook of school chronicles 1957. 26 November 1953. in Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

²⁶ Notebook of school chronicles 1953- 1954. 29 October 1953. in Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

²⁷ Notebook of school chronicles 1953- 1954. 11 January 1954. in Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

²⁸ Notebook of school chronicles 1953- 1954. 14October 1953. in Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

At this regard, see also what is reported in the notebook of 1958, when the teacher wrote: "It is a bitter observation that repeats every year; it is when I call the 'new recruits' close to me with great patience and I replace their mother by teaching everyone the 'Sign of the Christian' ».²⁹

Activities aimed at instilling moral and ethical-civil values were also recurrent during the 1950s. These ones translate into references and moments, above all of a patriotic nature. The diaries tell, for example, how the teacher collects the dates of civil commemorations to explain to children the meaning of civil holidays such as that of 4 November "to talk about the homeland and the Italian flag" and teach them the song "Alla Bandiera".³⁰

Alongside these moments, then, the teacher drew inspiration from some events related specifically to the political context of the 1950s to illustrate other topics, such as geography. For example, the little lesson to make the names of the cities known was an opportunity to enter into the events of the Trieste issue and the consequent dispute between Italy and Yugoslavia:

What is the name of the city we live in? So we are ... What is the name of our homeland? So we are ... What shape does Italy have? What is that blue that surrounds it? What is the capital of Italy? What other names of cities and countries do you remember? What is the city dearest to our heart? Trieste- Why? Because other bad men want to take it off and take it on them. How many colors does our flag have? What are their names? And how many colors does the Pope's flag have? What's its name? What is the Pope's name? Who is he? Where is he?³¹.

Again, in the notebook of 1958 on 10 December, she writes:

Starting from the name of our city, this morning I gave my pupils the idea of a homeland. Teaching the sacred name of Italy, I showed its "portrait" and told which is its capital and its flag³².

The teacher's considerations are often interspersed with other references to the actual situation of Italy that, having emerged from the world conflict, was about to experience the transition phase towards the great transformation that will be more evident during the 1960s. The teacher's chronicles, then, refer to some events shared with children, such as news stories or natural disasters (like the flooding of the Po in November '51) and epidemics. The flooding of the Polesine, a large area in northern Italy, was greeted with trepidation by the teacher who directly involved the families of the children in the collection of funds and clothing for populations in difficulty:

A huge disaster struck northern Italy. The Po has overflowed for kilometers and kilometers and swept everything off. Thriving cities and fertile countryside are submerged by the waters; Rovigo and Adria among the major centers are the most affected by the disaster. How many

²⁹ Notebook of school chronicles 1957- 1959. 22 November 1958. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

³⁰ Notebook of school chronicles 1953- 1954. 6 November 1953. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

³¹ Notebook of school chronicles 1953- 1954. S.d.. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

³² Notebook of school chronicles 1957- 1959. 10 December 1958. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

people have had to abandon homes and belongings, how many mothers have been deprived of their children and how many children are left without their mother's caresses! Today I spoke to my pupils about the great misfortune in northern Italy and I invited them to bring some clothing to offer to the victims. In the astonished little faces I read all the understanding for the brothers so tried by this misfortune, and I am sure that at home their innocent voices will be able to touch the heart of the mother, who I am sure will be very generous in giving³³.

Another moment which was to remain impressed in the collective memory was the last severe polio epidemic that hit Italy in the twentieth century, which determined a general postponement of the beginning of the school year; in Bari school began forty days later: «In this period of forced inactivity I have suffered so much for so many mothers anxious about the fate of their babies!»³⁴.

The notebooks collection stops at the 1958-59 school year, but does not present specific comments as to the changes in the programs that took place precisely in 1958, when the *Guidelines for the educational activities of nursery schools* were issued. However, it was probably easy for the teacher to accept the requests oriented towards a greater flexibility in schedules and towards the priority given to games and manual skills above reading, writing and calculus. The same fate had the reaffirmation of the religious inspiration of the programs and the moral and social education of the child, with particular attention to «love for the family, the neighbor and the country». Themes that the teacher had probably already incorporated thanks to the participation in association and the use of tools that expressed the presence of Catholics in nursery education, such as the local section of the Italian Educational Association and reading magazines such as "*Scuolamaterna*", or through the participation in the initiatives promoted in Italy by the National Educational Center for nursery school (Cdnsm). In the teacher's chronicles we perceive the adherence to this cultural climate through the commitment to the civil education of children, the fight against the permanence of dialectal forms and the attempts to encourage forms of pedagogical activism, although the Agazzian model on which the teacher was formed remained strong in her.

The teacher held the position at the nursery school until 1960, when she won the internal competition held at Bari for the qualification of school manager. On 1 June 1960 she was first in the ranking and took service on 1 October at the "Regina Margherita" Municipal Nursery School of Bari³⁵. In 1964 she asked to be transferred to the "Giuseppe Dalfino" Nursery School in order to get closer to her place of residence.

Conclusions

The events and the subjective professional writings of the teacher Amelia Andreassi reveal the heuristic potential of sources which are generally little considered in the historical-educational context, those that refer to writings and self-referential literature. These sources express the need for subjectivity and reveal the very personal and introspective way through which the teaching class measured itself with the professional challenges in a particularly

³³ Notebook of school chronicles 1943 to 1957. 13 November 1951. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

³⁴ Notebook of school chronicles 1958- 1959. 20 November 1958. Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

³⁵ Ranking of the winners in 1960 competition in Ce.S.I.S Archive, F. A. Andreassi, b. Collection of professional writings.

complex context such as that represented by the schools of Bari, a significant urban context in Southern Italy affected by social tensions and injustice.

The encounter between the needs expressed in recent decades by the history of education, understood as the history of school cultures and of the daily school practices, and the history of autobiographical writings have also allowed us to give value to subjective forms of writing related to the professional field, whose authors were both male and female teachers. The texts examined made it possible to discover that moving eye ("l'ojomovil") that Vinão identified as the personal point of view of the individual on reality. The professional writings, in this case, express a female subjectivity, that of the teacher on the school reality experienced daily. The micro-historical perspective from which we started has allowed, moreover, to verify and identify the specific working context of the teacher and her personal way of interpreting its prescriptions and regulations, by adapting them to her mentality and teaching culture, in «a game of mutual relations between the realm of freedom and that of necessity» (Vinão, 2000, p. 11).

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