



Deaf education in Italy: revisiting history¹

A educação de surdos na Itália: revisitando a história

Educación de sordos en Italia: revisitando la historia

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Abstract

Research on deaf education in other countries still potentiates studies in Brazil due to the scarcity of national research in this field. This study aimed to outline the pioneering work of the first deaf education institutions in Italy during the 18th and 19th centuries and show the changes occurred in these institutions since the establishment of Italian law no. 517 of 1977. This is a qualitative and descriptive research, which included 12 traditional Italian institutes. This study indicates the importance these institutes displayed for the development of the foundations of deaf education in Italy and the impact Law no. 517 of 1977, which deals with integrating students with disabilities into ordinary education, promoted in the institutions.

Keywords: Deaf education. Italy. Special Education.

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Resumo

Pesquisas sobre a educação de surdos em outros países ainda potencializam estudos no Brasil, em virtude da escassez de pesquisas com tal objeto. Este artigo objetiva delinear o trabalho pioneiro das primeiras instituições para a educação de surdos da Itália, nos séculos XVIII e XIX, e apresentar as mudanças ocorridas nos institutos a partir da Lei italiana nº 517 de 1977. A pesquisa possui uma abordagem qualitativa e é de natureza descritiva. Fizeram parte do estudo 12 institutos italianos tradicionais. O estudo evidenciou a importância que os institutos tiveram para a constituição das bases da educação de surdos no referido país e o impacto que a Lei nº 517 de 1977, que versa sobre a integração de alunos com deficiência no ensino comum, promoveu nas instituições.

Palavras-chave: Educação de surdos. Itália. Educação Especial.

Resumen

Investigaciones sobre la educación de sordos en otros países aún potencian estudios en Brasil, debido a la escasez de investigaciones con tal objeto. Este artículo tiene como objetivo delinear el trabajo pionero de las primeras instituciones para la educación de sordos en Italia, en los siglos XVIII y XIX, y los cambios ocurridos en los institutos desde la Ley italiana nº 517 de 1977. La investigación posee un enfoque cualitativo y es de naturaleza descriptiva. Formaron parte de este estudio 12 institutos tradicionales italianos. El estudio mostró la importancia que tuvieron los institutos para la constitución de las bases de la educación de sordos en el referido país y el impacto que la Ley nº 517 de 1977, que trata de la integración de los estudiantes con discapacidad en la educación común, promovió en las instituciones.

Palabras clave: Educación de sordos. Italia. Educación especial.

Introduction

In deaf education, to resuming the origins of its first educational initiatives, those involved with such ideals, and the projects founding schools or institutes accomplishment is always necessary so we can understand the foundations of special education and its consequences, aiming to dialogue with today's challenges.

In Brazil, some authors return to historical questions on the education of deaf people and those with disabilities, including Jannuzzi (2004), Mazzotta (2001), Rocha (2007), and Sofiato (2011, 2018), among others. However, based on these studies, we still lack national publications on international deaf education.

According to Carvalho (2007), the first educational initiatives for deaf people date back to the 16th century in European countries, e.g.: Spain, England, Switzerland, France, and Germany. In the following centuries, they advance toward other parts of the world.

In this perspective, a fact draws our attention. The few publications in which we actually find a design of a worldwide historical trajectory of deaf (CARVALHO, 2007) and special education (PESSOTTI, 1984), highlight Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576), a highly reputable Italian physician, as a “precursor in the pedagogical concern with educating cripples²” (PESSOTTI, 1984, p. 16). Thus, Girolamo Cardano, with his medical discourse still marked by a superstitious but not theological tradition, caused some to cast themselves into the challenge of educating people with disabilities (PESSOTTI, 1984). It is curious that, historically, Spain occupies the role of forerunner of deaf education worldwide. Italy began this process in the 18th century, despite Girolamo Cardano's contributions.

To understand how the first educational experiences for the deaf took place in Italy, we need to broaden our horizons and visualize the European scenario which two trends will represent from the 18th century onward. The French school, founded by Abbot Charles Michel de L'Épée in 1771, becoming a public institution in 1778 entitled the National Institute for Deaf Youth of Paris; and the German school, founded by Samuel Heinicke in 1778, centered in Leipzig.

These schools differed in the method they adopted to educate deaf people. In the French school, pedagogical practice focused on the gestural method, which Charles Michel de L'Épée elaborated and transformed into a true communication system called “methodical signs.” This system integrated dactylology and writing, enabling the deaf to communicate with their social environment. In the German school, Samuel Heinicke adopted an oral method to teach speech, acquiring notoriety and recognition from civil authorities, including Prince Frederick Augustus I of Saxony. Methodical signs guided French school didactics, influencing other schools for the deaf founded in Europe and the United States. However, we find influences of Charles Michel de L'Épée's method even in Germany, where the oralist approach predominated, as Selva (1973) points out.

It is against this background that we enter deaf education in 18th-century Italy, born of French inspiration and with strong ties to the Catholic Church. In fact, as we revisit history, we realize that the first Italian deaf educators were religious and sought to create a protected social-educational environment to meet the needs of special education in Italy.

² Here we keep the term “cripples,” because it is a direct quote. The term currently used is disabled person.

Thus, according to Sani (2008), the French school became a reference for the first Italian institutions for the deaf. They adopted the institutional French model, its method, itinerary, and organization. Italian schools adopted the French model for two reasons: their founders were men of the Church and, thus, either in direct contact with Abbot L'Épée or were trained by his writings and successors; and the Napoleonic domination over Italy contributed in a way to the consolidation of these first experiences, legally recognizing them and financially assisting their development.

This is a qualitative and descriptive study. According to Gil (2002, p. 42), descriptive studies “[...] have as their primary objective, the description of the characteristics of a particular population or phenomenon or the establishment of relations between variables.” We aimed to outline the pioneering work of the first institutions for deaf education in Italy in the 18th and 19th centuries and to show how Law No. 517 of August 4, 1977 (ITALY, 1977) changed these institutes.

According to Sani (2008), more than 27 deaf education institutes were founded in Italy. In this study, we highlight 12 of them, establishing as selection criteria: i) the expression they had in Italy; (ii) geographical location (to represent different regions); and iii) the distinction they receive in the international literature.

Due to the scarce research in Portuguese addressing deaf education in Italy, this study sought to elucidate the founding process of some of its important deaf education institutes in the 18th and 19th centuries and how Law No. 517 of 1977 impacted them to contribute to the historiography of deaf education and the possibility for other investigations.

Deaf education institutes in Italy: genesis and educational proposals

In this section, we describe the genesis of some institutes for deaf education in Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Campania, Lazio, Genoa, Trentino-Alto Adige, Sardinia, Veneto, Liguria, Piedmont, and Tuscany to geographically cover the country from North to South, in addition to the aforementioned criteria.

The foundation of the first Italian deaf education institutions dates back to the 18th and 19th centuries, which grew in the country from the experiences of the forerunners in this type of work. In 1784, the State Institute for the Deaf in Rome was founded³. From this initiative, others began to emerge in Italy in the 18th century. According to Rusciano (2010), Abbot Tommaso Silvestri, founder of the school, spent six months in Paris studying Charles Michel de l'Épée's teaching methodology. This first Italian institute operated in the Di Pietro brothers' house, which at first welcomed eight deaf students of all genders and with whom Tommaso Silvestri began to practice the knowledge acquired during his training in France.

Tommaso Silvestri's pedagogical practice, according to Dovetto (2010), developed three progressive stages: the use of natural sign language; the teaching of writing, thanks to the manual alphabet; and the teaching of lip reading and oral articulation, thus giving a personal mark to the developed work and differentiating it from L'Épée's. Maragna and Vasta (2015) state that Abbot Tommaso Silvestri (as Charles Michel de L'Épée) had no contact with deaf people before he began his work, giving his body and soul to the project the moment he decided to devote himself to it, perhaps due to the observed result, which broke the communication barrier between deaf and hearing people.

Selva (1973) claims that, like L'Épée, Tommaso Silvestri's school was open to those who wanted to devote themselves to deaf education, founding schools in other regions of Italy and countries. Thus, Silvestri trained many educators, including Lorenzo Hervás y Panduro (a Spanish Jesuit priest) and the Italian Abbot Benedetto Cozzolino.

³ Our translation of *Istituto Statale per Sordi di Roma*.

The latter, a native of Naples, lacked experience and thus spent a period in Rome to learn Tommaso Silvestri's method for educating the deaf. According to Rusciano (2010), by 1788 Naples already had a private school, founded by Abbot Benedetto Cozzolino. King Ferdinand I of the Two Sicilies transformed, via a deliberation, the school Cozzolino founded into a public school recognized by the government in 1788. Selva (1973) points out that this was the second school for the deaf in Italy and the first to obtain official government recognition. It educated deaf people of all genders and teaching involved speech development and the mimetic-gestural method. We can infer that this pedagogical work also resembled Tommaso Silvestri's, its inspiration. Moreover, Abbot Benedetto's sensibility to the difficult situation in which deaf people were, such as mendicancy and lack of educational possibilities (as in other regions of the world) motivated him to establish a Neapolitan institute, thus more explicitly highlighting the benevolence of the Catholic Church.

Rusciano (2010) states that, in 1819, the school became known as Institute for deaf-mutes. Despite the status it gained, it would no longer be the only school for the deaf in Naples in the mid-19th century since the Salesian Father Luigi Aiello would found another.

In the 19th century, other institutes were founded in Italy, and, as Sani (2008) points out, the French system inspired the institutions that emerged in Italy in the first 50 years of that century. In addition to Tommaso Silvestri, other Italian religious figures had access to Abbot L'Épée and his successor Roch-Ambroise Sicard's work. This was the case of Ottavio Giovanni Battista Assarotti, Tommaso Pendola, and the Modenese Father Severino Fabriani.

Ottavio Giovanni Battista Assarotti, from Genoa, as Selva points out (1973, p. 111), received the title of "father of the Italian deaf," due to the zeal and influence he exerted on the educational institutions for the deaf opened in Italy at the beginning of the 19th century. From 1777 to 1804, Ottavio Giovanni Battista Assarotti had a brilliant career devoting himself to teaching grammar, logic, physics, and theology in seminaries and convents linked to his religious order until he met Antonio Daneri, a deaf young man of exceptional intelligence and vivacity. Selva (1973) states that, from this meeting, Assarotti elaborated a personal method combining dactylology, sign language, and writing to educate the deaf.

The progress made in Antonio Daneri's education spurred Ottavio Giovanni Battista Assarotti to conduct the experience with five other deaf students in a room of the Sant'Andrea delle Dame, which became the nucleus of what would later be the private school he founded, which gained visibility since it was considered a novelty in the local educational scene. According to Morandini (2008), despite Assarotti's educational program success and notoriety, his institute did not immediately receive the required resources from the political authorities to develop itself. Thus, in 1805, under the influence of Napoleon Bonaparte, a decree destined the former Sisters of St. Bridget Convent to house the institute and be used by the Genoese priest. However, this decree effectively came into force in November 21, 1811. We should highlight Ottavio Giovanni Battista Assarotti's political leadership in his relations with the authorities to defend and give sustainability to his educational project.

According to Morandini (2008), we can situate his educational experience from 1801 to 1828 as a trajectory marked by a search for a methodological and curricular renewal which showed the pedagogical and didactic thinking implanted in his school.

The Assarotti educational program offers interesting ideas for reflections on the criteria underlying its method. In fact, the desire to prepare educational interventions in close correlation with students'

attitudes, intelligence, and knowledge also included universally valid principles: first, the idea of gradual experience-based learning via children's intuition to reality data, in accordance with natural development laws. The study of grammatical rules was therefore preceded, in the teaching of languages, by the translation of simple propositions: the words learned were then used to make up new, more complex sentences (MORANDINI, 2008, p.323-324, our translation).

The organization of the institute, the deaf education experience, and the reorganization of education gave effectiveness to Ottavio Giovanni Battista Assarotti's educational system, whose pedagogical thinking was strongly marked by originality since, in addition to specialized care, he was concerned with training teachers to work in deaf schools. His work guided the foundation of other institutes, such as that of Milan.

The State Institute for the Deaf-Mute of Milan⁴ was the fourth Italian deaf education institute. It was founded within the perspectives opened by the Italian government and its commitment to extend popular education to its entire territory. According to Gecchele (2008), the government sought new and effective projects which should be analyzed by a committee linked to the Ministry of the Interior. In 1805, Antonio Eyraud de Lion founded, in this context, a private deaf education school in Milan (SELVA, 1973), financed by Louis-Napoléon, Prince Imperial. We stress that this was a private school protected by the government. Zatini (2005a) indicates that the school was entrusted to Abbot Giuseppe Bagutti of Rovio, student of Abbot Ottavio Giovanni Battista Assarotti of Genoa.

According to Gecchele (2008), the commission created by the government to analyze educational projects disapproved Antonio Eyraud de Lion's educational program, which, despite the attested effectiveness of its didactic itinerary, met institutional barriers for personal and political reasons. Despite these controversies, de Lion's teaching project for the deaf was financed until 1816, when his school was transformed into the Imperial Royal Institute for Deaf-Mutes, intended to welcome deaf people from all parts of Italy.

Zatini (2005a) states that, from 1821 onward, its educational work encompassed dactylogy, writing, and the "mimetic-gestural method." According to the author, it underwent, in 1869, another guidance toward this. Via a Royal Minister decree, the oralist method of Fathers Tommaso Pendola and Giulio Tarra came to prevail in the institute. Debè (2014) comments that Pendola, Balestra, and Tarra emphasized the adoption of the "word" as the exclusive communication channel with the deaf — Tarra even led a *corrective* pedagogy for the deaf, reforming teaching. We find, depending on the institute, the influence of either Abbot Charles Michel de L'Épée's or Samuel Heinicke's work, and, in some cases, an eventual method hybridization.

Severino Fabriani was another priest who studied the French method and founded, in 1821, an institution in Modena. According to Selva (1970), Modena's deaf school was among the first to be recognized as a public institution in Italy.

Sani (2008), in a study conducted on institutes for the deaf founded in the 19th century, highlights Severino Fabriani's importance to deaf education at the time. In fact, his experiences and educational responsibilities on Schools of Charity activities led him to research, contact, and visit schools for the deaf both in Italy and France, aiming to assess aspects and challenges of special education and the methods and techniques for teaching language to deaf students. Fabriani observed the efficacy of Assarotti's method in teaching language to deaf students, developing them and standardizing the linguistic instrument adopted at the Genoa Institute.

⁴ Our translation of *Istituto Statale per i Sordomuti di Milano*.

It was within the school initiatives in favor of the deaf that Severino Fabriani, in 1826, founded the Institute of the Daughters of Providence for the Deaf & Dumb in Modena⁵, whose educational project consisted of teaching deaf girls, providing them with a cultural preparation which would allow them to live and act in any kind of social environment. As a scholar of pedagogical phenomena, Fabriani's educational proposal had originality and innovation, according to Sani (2008). For this, he required a personalized didactic method which, based on the French school, used the gestural method but was adapted to deaf girls' specificities.

Zatini (2005b) states that Fabriani's institute program valued the full development of people by developing their moral, religious, intellectual, and professional education. Thus, it had religious sisters dedicated to this. The program also included theater, especially on sacred representations. This was Severino Fabriani's uniqueness, whose work extended up to Brazil in the 20th century.

According to Selva (1973), Tommaso Pendola, prominent for his high culture, scientific, pedagogical, and specialized didactic activity, founded, in 1828, the Pendola Institute, Siena⁶, a school for the deaf of all genders. As Sani (2008) states, like other founders of schools for the deaf in Italy, Tommaso Pendola was also trained under the influence of Charles Michel de L'Épée and Abbot Sicard's French school, whose didactic procedure favored methodical signing and writing.

In 1831, the institute bought the former Santa Margherita convent in Castelvecchio and organized itself to serve students of all genders. It was recognized in 1843 as the Royal Tuscany Institute for the Deaf via a Grand Duke of Tuscany decree.

Tommaso Pendola traveled to Germany and became convinced of the effectiveness of the oral method introduced by Heinicke and its widespread dissemination in that country. As a result, in 1870, he began applying the oral method in his institute. According to him, the oral method could complete the sign-gestural method (SELVA, 1973). In 1872, Pendola founded, together with Giulio Tarra of Milan and Giovanni Anfossi of Turin, the magazine *L'educazione dei Sordi in Italia* (Deaf Education in Italy).

Although most institutes based their work on the method L'Épée developed in 1832, one prioritized the oral method. Its founder was Father Antonio Provolo, who opened a school for the deaf in Verona⁷ which used this method. Provolo's first propositions for the educational care of deaf students were marked by a phase sensitizing rulers and authorities. Like L'Épée, he held public classes with deaf students to show the public his educational results and receive funding toward his pedagogical and institutional objectives.

According to Gecchele (2008), these presentations began in 1838, when Provolo showed that the method used by Abbot Sicard, Abbot Charles Michel de L'Épée's successor, was no longer sufficient to educate the deaf, thus dissatisfying him. It was in this context that Provolo, in one of his public demonstrations, introduced the importance of singing and music to deaf education. He presented his method in his fourth demonstration, stressing that deaf education should be organized from the language of gestures, the articulated word, and singing. He started from a practical experiment to slowly promote change and expand knowledge to validate his experiment. From his experience, Antonio Provolo found that:

⁵ Our translation of *Istituto delle Figlie della Provvidenza per le Sordomute di Modena*.

⁶ Our translation of *Istituto Tommaso Pendola per i Sordomuti di Siena*.

⁷ The *Istituto Antonio Provolo per i Sordomuti di Verona* (Antonio Provolo Institute for the Deaf-Mute of Verona, our translation).

It takes time, effort, and patience since they learn with great difficulty and forget the things learned with the same ease. For it is necessary to do a very thorough analysis of all they learn: they must teach them a vocabulary, a grammar, to make them able to learn the science of Religion. (GECHELE, 2008, p. 363, our translation).

We find Provolo's pedagogical thought in his 1840 *Manuale per la scuola de' sordomuti di Verona* (Handbook for the School of the Deaf of Verona, our translation), in which he presents his didactic action, basing the importance of articulation, spoken language, and lip reading in deaf education. According to Gecchele (2008, p. 362, our translation):

Provolo emerged among all Italian and foreigner educators of the deaf. The principles on which he based his method, given in the introduction of his 1840 Manual, remained the basis for the evolution which later came, and he was acclaimed the introducer and father of the oral method in Italy.

We must recognize Antonio Provolo's pedagogical thought and its organicity around language learning and the way it instructs deaf students from abstract to spiritual ideas and from words to singing aiming at a socially and religiously inclusive education, due to the context of marginalization and abandonment of the deaf at the time.

In 1835, a disciple of Abbot Assarotti founded another institute. This time, in Turin⁸. King Charles Albert of Sardinia appointed Father Francesco Bracco to found a school for the deaf. Bracco also dedicated himself to training teachers (SELVA, 1973).

Morandini (2014) raises some of the aspects of the origins, discipline, and methods used in the institute for deaf students in Turin. The author organized its historical elements to enable us to understand the trajectory of this institute from its first experiences as a private initiative, its transformation into a public institution, its methodological change, and its adoption of oralism before the 1880 Milan Congress. Moreover, its pedagogical experience sought to support Giovanni Battista Scagliotti's heredity, whose deaf educational action was endorsed with positive and satisfactory results. According to Morandini (2014, p. 79, our translation):

Didactic organization was the subject of a later regulation, which, on February 18, 1839, focused on the method and content of the instruction given to the deaf, in addition to dealing with the profile of aspiring tutors, who were obliged to possess, in addition to the necessary knowledge, specific personal attitudes and a rigorous moral sense. The teaching program included disciplines aimed at developing students' intelligence (arithmetic), communication with their surrounding reality (grammar and calligraphy), and inner life (religion and the study of sacred history): another fostered component refers to the practice of an education aimed at women, directing women's work, and the possibility of boys learning the basic elements of a profession.

⁸ The *Istituto per i Sordomuti di Torino* (Institute for the Deaf-Mute of Turin, our translation).

This excerpt enable us to see the curriculum prescribed for educating deaf people with specific training itineraries for children and aiming at professionally train students. The curriculum resembled the one outlined at the National Institute for Deaf Youth of Paris and in some other European countries. The importance of training which encompassed learning a profession was part of the educational proposal so that the deaf, when leaving the institute, would not burden the State with their non-productive presence (QUEIROZ; RIZZINI, 2012).

Following the trajectory of the foundation of schools for the deaf in Italy, we find that of the Private and Episcopal Institute for the Deaf-Mute of Trento⁹ relevant and noteworthy which, in turn, was also strongly influenced by the Parisian gestural method, founded by Charles Michel de L'Épée in 1771. According to Gecchele (2008), Father Pietro Tambosi founded that school for the deaf in 1843. Using the inheritance received after his mother's death, he rented a house which he organized, in the early stages of the institute, to accommodate 12 students.

In 13 years, the diocesan school had several headquarters until its transfer to the building in Via S. Giovanni Bosco, surrounded by patios, a vegetable garden in which fruits and vegetables were cultivated, and firewood, laundry, and storage spaces for. In this trajectory, we should mention that there were five basic requirements for attending the institute.

According to Gecchele (2008), conditions of admission were: coming from a legitimate catholic family; being deaf (admission ignored the degree of deafness); recognizably teachable; being healthy and without physical *defects* incompatible with community life; and having an age between 10 and 14 years old. We must highlight that such admission requirements were compatible with those of other European institutes, thus suggesting a uniform student selection process.

In this foray into the foundation of institutes, we must highlight the Bologna experience led by Father Giuseppe Gualandi, a young priest graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts and in Theology and Law, who devoted himself to assisting the deaf, with the missionary intention of making the word of God known to those who could not naturally hear and understand. In 1849, he began searching for deaf boys and housing them in his family's home and, on July 8, began his educational work.

Father Giuseppe Gualandi aimed to found a family nucleus, rather than a boarding school, so the deaf could live together, communicate, play, learn, and know the foundations of Catholicism. However, he did not believe that working with the deaf should only be a work of assistance Christian charity. He knew of the need for pedagogy and appropriate methods to carry out such an intention. Giuseppe had a brother, Cesare Gualandi, who, for 36 years, was immensely committed to helping him work with the deaf until his death at the age of 57.

Selva (1973) notes that, in addition to the contact with the literature on deaf education, the brothers visited the various institutes for the deaf in Italy to acquaint themselves with their pedagogical activities and specialized methods. In 1855, the Gualandi opened a school in the former monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli and, in 1858, the Papal State recognized the Gualandi Institute as a philanthropic institution. In 1872, Cardinal Morichini recognized the Association which became a religious congregation named *Little Mission for the Deaf-Mute*¹⁰.

In 1874, with the arrival of Orsola Mezzini, the women's wing for the education of deaf girls was founded. The Gualandi activity included promoting unity among institutes for the deaf throughout Italy via visits and contacts with teachers and schools, among which we can highlight that of Fabriani, Pendola, Balestri, Borsari, Aiello, Tarra, Verona, Venice, Vicenza,

⁹ Our translation of *Istituto privato e vescovile per i Sordomuti di Trento*.

¹⁰ Our translation of *Piccola Miissione per i Sordomuti*.

Bergamo, Trento, and Turin (SELVA, 1973). An 1896 Victor Emmanuel II decree recognized the Gualandi Institute as a public assistance and charity institution of and, two years later, had the approval of its Organic Statute signed by King Umberto I of Italy, under the name Gualandi Institute for the Deaf-Mute of Bologna¹¹.

The Gualandi brothers' legacy, supported by many benefactors, led to the foundation of the Gualandi Institute for the Deaf in Rome in 1884, in Florence in 1885, in Giulianova (Teramo) in 1903 and, in 1910, of an initial shelter for the deaf in Le Roveri, near Bologna. The congregations worked in education, speech rehabilitation, and Christian spiritual formation, conducting training experiences and methods and comparing teaching among each other (SELVA, 1973).

According to Zatini (2005c), an institute for the deaf was also established in Cagliari¹², Sardinia, in 1867, after a statistical survey undertaken by its mayor, Domenico Elena, and the Cagliari studies superintendent, Agostino Piga. After a public collection, the institute was reformed in 1872 and thus began to better meet its objective: specialized education.

The institute enlisted Antioco Vincenzo Canè as a teacher and school essays or public presentations were widely used resources by its founders to show the progress made in deaf education. According to Serra (2008), school rehearsals contributed to disseminate the educational work carried out at the Cagliari school.

In a few years, the notoriety of the educational work carried out in Cagliari by Antioco Vincenzo Canè crossed the borders of Sardinia and spread throughout the peninsula and abroad. In February 1875, Leon Vaïsse, director of the prestigious National Institute for Deaf Youth in Paris, expressed satisfaction with the progress made in special education in Cagliari, especially because of the centrality it gave to teaching the oral method, which, in those same years, was established in the main educational institutions for the deaf in the continent. (SERRA, 2008, p. 489, our translation).

The institute, recognized as a public institution in 1881, offered well-organized and good-level education centered on the purely oral method and an effective formative activity which aimed to favor the socialization and development of the professional skills of young deaf people. In 1893, it became a large educational institution able to welcome and educate a larger number of students.

It was in this context that the institute went through a process of didactic-pedagogical modernization, implementing actions which contributed to its notoriety, as Serra (2008, p. 502, our translation) points out:

Between 1893 and 1897, its director organically reviewed study programs, reorganized and completed school exercises, devoted himself to completing the appropriate textbooks, and further increased the provision of didactic material for students' use, which included a rich collection of maps drawn on the wall for nomenclature and geography, and special posters for the study of the decimal system. Instrumentation and teaching grants for language teaching were also renewed and expanded to enable a constant improvement of pedagogical activities.

¹¹ Our translation of *Istituto Gualandi per i Sordomuti di Bologna*.

¹² The *Istituto per i Sordomuti di Cagliari* (Institute for the Deaf-Mute of Cagliari, our translation).

The search to raise didactic quality and teaching have always been part of the trajectory of the institute.

Filippo Smaldone was an Italian priest who dedicated his life to the marginalized in society, including the deaf, leading him to found the Congregation of the Salesian Sisters of the Sacred Hearts in 1885, in the city of Lecce, having as charism the education, training, and Christian and cultural training of the deaf. To develop its activities with deaf students, it endeavored to know the valid means and methods for education, beginning what can be called *the pedagogy of love*, which continues today via the work of his religious congregation.

By observing the silence of the State, the poverty of the southern Italian center, and the conditions of abandonment of the deaf, Filippo Smaldone matured, in his *pedagogical awareness*, the conviction of the need to organically program the didactic method to assist deaf students in receiving specific and professional training, founding the first Institute for the Deaf of Lecce, in 1885. Thus, we should consider that:

Father Filippo Smaldone's learning period as an educator of the deaf began around 1869, when the young clergyman came into contact with the priests of Casa Pia in Naples. Animated by the desire to further develop the many aspects and problems of his apostolate, Father Smaldone dedicated himself to learning the methods and techniques of deaf education. (SALADINI, 2008, p. 468, our translation).

According to Saladini (2008), the 1893 Statute of the Pious Institute Filippo Smaldone of Lecce¹³ argued that its study program should include the teaching of writing, reading, the national language, catechism, sacred history, arithmetic, geography, national history, as well as natural, moral, and civil knowledge. According to the author, the Lecce Institute for the Deaf and the other institutions that were part of its foundation nucleus adopted the oral method approved at the 1880 Second International Congress on Deaf education in Milan.

Its study plan differentiated students' gender and social class, according to Saladini (2008). For poor deaf students, education focused on industry work according to students' skills. For deaf girls, intellectual training joined activities focused on crafts and domestic care, aiming to provide them with training which would lead them to assume a position in society when they completed their studies and left the institute. The author adds that "in the Educational system adopted at the Lecce Institute for the Deaf, we find training traits and the foundations of an educational perspective essentially centered on prevention" (SALADINI, 2008, p. 479, our translation). This was the central nucleus of Filippo Smaldone's formative proposal, agreeing with other contemporary Italian educators' reflections and pedagogical practices.

We should highlight that, in 1880, the controversial Congress held in Milan changed the direction of deaf education in Italy and triggered the worldwide prioritization of the oral method for deaf education. According to Carvalho (2012), it mandated that oral language be taught to the deaf and the use of sign language in their education be extinguished. Thus, according to the author, some schools tried to resist but the imposition had a broad impact. Consequently, Italian institutes, as others around the world, also took this decision (some before the Congress) as we observed in this study.

¹³ Our translation of *Pio Istituto Filippo Smaldone di Lecce*.

The enactment of Law no. 517 of August 4, 1977

One aspect which influenced the direction of several of the analyzed secular institutes that reached the 20th century was the enactment of law no. 517 of 1977, which modified the school organization, closed specialized schools and classes, and inserted students with disabilities into regular schools (ITALY, 1977); thus, very incisively changing education. Meirelles, Dainese, and Friso (2017, p. 191) highlight that this important change in Italian educational policy mobilized some fundamental actions for its implementation: “Specialized support teachers, maximum of 20 students per class, and the provision of specialized services under the responsibility of the government and local schools (States and Municipalities).”

The law valued the central role of the school for students’ evolution and emphasized the development of an integrated system, which included local health and social services to support the process of school integration. It aimed to overcome the ghettoization logic of specialized schools in the 1960s and 1970s (MONTANARI, 2018).

Thus, the law forced the deaf education institutes which continued their activities from these decades onward to resignify their work. Some institutes, faced with the new demands, succumbed to change. This is the case with the Cagliari Institute for Deaf-Mutes, which ended its teaching activities in 1983. Moreover, some institutions escaped such changes since they ended their activities before the enactment of the law. This was the case of the National Institute for the Deaf of Genoa, which declined after its founder’s death and ended its activities.

The functioning of the State Institute for the Deaf in Rome changed due to a decrease in its number of students. Currently, the institution is a reference center on deafness in Rome, maintaining its Department of Neuropsychology of Language and Deafness and its Department of Psychology of the National Research Council.

The Institute for deaf-mutes in Naples, according to Rusciano (2010), also saw a fall in the number of registrations, which, combined with the problems caused by a 1980 earthquake, led the Institute to shut down its activities. Students were transferred to the Father Luigi Aiello Salesian Institute. Student losses also occurred at the State Institute for the Deaf-Mute of Milan. Its facilities, according to Zatini (2005a), were used for students from other education levels to audit classes.

The Institute of the Daughters of Providence for the Deaf-Mute of Modena experienced something else from law no. 517 of 1977. The school has worked since 1978 with projects to integrate deaf and hearing students, aiming to create a school community in which they could grow together, based on collaboration. Zatini (2005b, n.p., our translation) adds that currently

the Daughters of Providence are present in Italy and Brazil. Remaining faithful to the inspiration of their founder, they dedicate themselves, with a special vow, to educate the deaf, remove them from marginalization, open them to the knowledge of God, and assign them an autonomous and active place in society.

A similar experience occurred at the Antonio Provolo Institute for the Deaf in Verona, as a result of the same law. These new initiatives shaped this institution, opening regular and integrated classes to favor an adequate insertion of deaf students in these classes. Moreover, a partnership was established between the Antonio Provolo Institute, which had a modern audiological center, and the Verona Otorhinolaryngology Clinic to continue services. The Antonio Provolo Institute also organizes a two-year course for the specialization of support teachers, authorized by the Ministry of Public Education since 1987. The Turin Institute for the Deaf joins the previous two since it adapted to the changes provided for in the law, offering an innovative educational service for deaf students inserted in Piedmont public schools and it is still open today.

Other institutes had to reinvent their spaces, such as the Pendola Institute, Siena. The law no. 517 implied in the suspension of school activities due to the progressive decrease in students after their integration into regular education. However, the work of Tommaso Pendola was not extinguished thanks to the intervention of the Administrative Court, their lawyers, and the collaboration of Professor Marino Bennati and his assistants, as well as the associations of deaf people and their families who fought the extinction of the institution. This intervention was deliberated by the Tuscany government. Currently, the institute headquarters houses a museum dedicated to the school for the deaf, a pedagogical library, and a documentation and research center, as Macchietti (2004) points out. The need to reinvent itself to continue to exist was also the case of the Gualandi Institute for the Deaf in Bologna, which faced a crisis from 1998 onward. To continue its commitment to new needs and tasks, the Gualandi Institute was transformed into a private institution, taking the name Gualandi School for the Hearing Impaired.

The Private and Episcopalian Institute for the Deaf-Mute in Trento, after a long and qualified trajectory at the service of the deaf and their families, at the height of the social and educational transformations of the 1970s, also modified the services it offered. This initiative aimed to ensure effective care via educational support and rehabilitation, school integration, and student learning in regular education, in accordance with the Autonomous Province of Trento and the Department of Education. This initiative lasted until 2003, when the educational activities of the institute definitively ended.

The Pious Institute Filippo Smaldone of Lecce fully integrated deaf students in the 1980s, collaborating with other schools in the city in network projects to train teachers and coordinate various educational initiatives.

Law No. 517 of 1977 notoriously impacted all institutes studied and other educational spaces. Due to the many changes it required, we noticed that some institutions took initiatives to *frame* and continue serving the target audience. However, such changes are complex, and the proposed educational objectives are not always achieved, at least in the short term. The case of Italy, in this period, enabled us to see a process marked by the need for change due to legal imposition and to urgently rethink school designs (which went beyond pedagogy) and to elaborate new ones to care for the public covered by the law, which included deaf students.

Final remarks

At the end of this historical incursion, we can claim that deaf education in Italy was marked by initiatives that culminated in the foundation of specialized institutes as a response to the needs of special education, whose initial reference was the tradition of the French school founded by Charles Michel de L'Épée and, later, in some cases, Samuel Heinicke's German school.

In this study, we detailed the trajectory of different institutes in Northern and Southern Italy, which allowed us to know, in the established period, their initial pedagogical proposals, methodologies, and deaf education principles. As we analyzed these initiatives and crossed their paths, we observed that they mostly emerge from the socio-educational disposition of the church to serve a portion of people marginalized by society and government.

Another relevant element to be highlighted from the undertaken research is that Law no. 517 of 1977, whose essence advocated integration into common education, changed the direction of specialized institutes and required a resignification process at the core of each institute to act in accordance with this new context. As we could attest, due to the lack of strategic planning and innovative actions to deal with the process of integrating deaf students into regular education, institutions were extinguished and only a few managed to reinvent themselves and deal with contemporary challenges.

This study also enabled us to understand that some actions undertaken in Italian institutes also impacted deaf education in Brazil from the 19th century onward. As the French tradition also inspired its beginning, shaping it accordingly, their organization, curriculum structure, division of teaching by gender, oralist approach, and didactic materials show similarities. Moreover, some forerunners of deaf education in Italy served as inspiration for Brazilian specialized schools, such as Severino Fabriani, Tommaso Silvestri, the Gualandi brothers, among others.

Before 1977, the path of deaf education in Italy shows us a work characterized by a tradition which was initiated by Tommaso Silvestri and disseminated to other regions of the country by other men who sometimes became disciples and multipliers of pedagogical ideas they considered successful. The Gualandi brothers' advocacy of an effort to unite these institutes shows us an attempt to create a national identity for deaf education, which did not occur massively, but concerned *combining methods*. We found that the presence of women in this trajectory was much more restricted, timid, and marked by activities in a space which, in addition to education, brought together a religious character.

Another aspect that definitively marked Italy on the world stage was the 1880 Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf in Milan, which set out to discuss deaf education. Adherence to its determinations cemented the idea that pure oralism would be the most effective method to educate and rehabilitate the deaf. And it has been so for almost 100 years!

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