Chapter 10
Educational Memories and Public History: A Necessary Meeting

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Historical research in the educational area has been enriched, especially since the turn of the century, by new forms of inquiry, particularly within the international community, through conferences, summer schools and other initiatives involving an increasing number of national research groups. School history, perhaps the most traditional among the various areas of educational research, shrug off an insistent focus on the normative, political and institutional dimension, aimed at a reconstruction of the past which is richer in various facets and more attentive to personal experiences and collective dimensions, even in their emotional and implied implications (Burke and Grosvenor 2011; Burke et al. 2013; Braster et al. 2011; Caruso 2015). At the same time, it began to move away from the exclusive reference to the national state and its borders in order to explore a wider dimension, both in a comparative perspective and with reference to "world history" (Beattie 2002; Crossley et al. 2007; Crook and McCulloch 2002; Depaepe 2002; Sobe and Ness 2010; Stearns 2011).

In this context, I think that the use of a public history approach in education means placing our research within the framework of the renewal of studies and, at the same time, opening up some interesting possibilities of study, also emerging at the interface of different disciplinary traditions. However, to justify this working hypothesis and to demonstrate its reasonableness, it is essential to follow a process of reflection that allows us to connect some important elements, often perceived as separate rather than an integral part of a single process of change. Then we can point to the relationship between history and memory, the contribution of oral history, the rapid changes in the digital history and the birth of public history before finally focussing on a case study that verifies the usefulness of this type of methodological and thematic approach.

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10.1 Reflecting on the Past of Memory and History

Historical knowledge, in Italy and elsewhere, spoke at length with respect to the relationship between history and memory, particularly around some issues raised many questions of interpretation. Consider, for example, disputes about the Resistance, on the *Anni di Piombo* [Years of Lead] or the history of entire social classes of workers or marginal subjects such as workers of the rice fields (the so-called "pickers"). The contrast between history and memory has also had polemical moments (Contini 1997; Lussana 2000), designed to highlight the differences between the two approaches: the first, of a scientific or "objective" character, the second, of a popular and "subjective" character. The historic canon, inherited from the experience of the nineteenth century, emphasises on the purification of the study from personal inclinations, tendency to approach the physical sciences, investigation procedures, as evidenced by the quantitative historiography, involving suspicions of personal accounts and approximate descriptions, or descriptions deemed such.

The evolution of the historical debate has led to a substantial agreement that you cannot frequently choose a research methodology for its assumed and theoretical superiority over others: it is only in the application to a specific theme and specific objectives of study that you can evaluate the effectiveness of the methodological choices. From this point of view, there has been exemplary debate between the positions of quantitative and qualitative research, which resulted in greater eclecticism and tolerance for different ways of recording history.

As regards, in particular, a way to overcome and dissolve the contrast between memory and history into a more open view of the many dimensions of history, is to consider the truly unique and original contribution of the use of oral sources. When we talk about oral history, it highlights the absolute originality of this method of interrogation of the past and its significance outside of the written document and its variability (Portelli 1990; Ritchie 2002; Thomson 2006). Certainly one cannot exclusively use oral sources while still being influenced by the other traditional sources. The searches that use it are characterised by its centrality and its incredible ability to change the perception of the historian carrying out the research. In interviews, you realise the issues, which we had not previously considered or perhaps overlooked; issues whose aspects were not present in the scientific literature and therefore were not a part of the initial intentions of research.

In fact, oral history has bypassed the conflict between history and memory, thus opening a new area of research that, for educational purposes, appears to be largely unexplored and very interesting. At the centre of oral history, we find a source that has a specific and exceptional characteristic: it is a typically rational source, which, at the same time, is a recollection of interviews, through a relationship between the historian and the person who remembers or rather, who is recommended to recall. It is not a written, meditated and organised story, destined for a specific readership; nor is it a set of answers for a pre-printed questionnaire; it is, primarily, a meeting between the persons, between the historian who asks and listens and the witness

who tells his own experience and that of others. This report, consisting of recalling of emotions as well as events, which is a key attribute of the source, has the ability to take us beyond the conflict between history and memory.

This typically anthropological approach of listening to others has founded a mode of making history attentive to personal experiences and given rise to micro-history, in accordance with a research perspective that was proposed many decades ago and practised thereafter in many areas of research (Febvre 1953). We remember, in particular, methods similar to the so-called "thick description" proposed by Geertz (1973), which seeks to capture the observed (and owned) reality apart from factors, which may have been overlooked by the researcher due to them being a part of human experience and observation. The elements that emerge from this context may very well open a new, previously unforeseen way and we can even renew the more traditional and bedded themes at the end (e.g. taking the ideas of methodologically grounded theory that provides some useful tips even in the field of history) (Glaser 1999, 2001; Tarozzi 2008).

Oral history, from its beginning, has characteristics that distinguish it from other approaches and that are particularly suited to academic history. First, the primacy of experiences, both individual and collective, which do not always coincide, and based on whose discrepancies we should always ask ourselves; and later focus on the significance of events that take place for the people involved, rather than the cold analysis of what has happened. This approach brings us close to people's thoughts, what they have heard and felt and their joys, fears, expectations, disappointments and so on. In this way, the historical account appears to consist of many details, some of which may seem insignificant when taken individually, but which together outline a view from the base, with respect to those who lived it. At the origin, it should be remembered, Marxist tradition gives voice to subordinate social classes, the marginal classes of the past, those who spoke in dialects, had little or no literacy and barely knew how to sign their name.

Thanks to oral history, and other interesting approaches to local (or regional) history of large and established traditions, we can be sensitive towards the richness of the past and the great changes that constantly appear over time, even the differences among the experiences of places a few kilometres away from each other, especially when we move away from the twentieth century and we go into distinctly pre-industrial periods.

10.2   Contribution of Public History

Right after the contribution of oral history, we must consider a more recent and discussed occurrence—public history: As will be more evident at the end of the text, these are two approaches that have some interesting points in common and that can be used very effectively to build an all-round memory of educational history, going beyond the usual schemes. In a sense, we can assert that there is no public history without the involvement of the population and this involves the use of oral

history, even when what the masses recall is not a testimony of the recent past but a commentary and discussion of a distant past spanning centuries. Even though the most interesting examples relate to contemporary history, this participatory model is applicable to each historical period (Conard 2015; Frisch 1990; Noiret 2011; Willinsky 2005).

Public history already has a strong tradition, especially in North American and British contexts, which can be traced back to the eighties with the founding of the National Council on Public History (NCPH). However, here it refers to its amalgamation with the experiences of digital history, a new way to record, document and especially to communicate historical occurrences. In the early nineties, when digital history was born, a series of attempts being made to use digital technologies in historical research had begun to abandon the use of computers which had till then only been intended as an aid in the drafting of documents, calculations or as cataloguing tools. Digital public history (using the terminology that highlights a strong connection with new technologies) (Danniau 2013) is, therefore, a recent historiographical development but has had a robust and innovative tradition. Digital history also has its own unique and rich history, its evolution and dead branches, despite their appearance over the past few years (Cohen and Rosenzweig 2006). The technological world, we have become accustomed to, although perhaps not quite new, needs to carefully assess the discontinuity that it constantly produces and evaluate its global effects and short time spans of influence (Friedman 2005).

It turns out that all the communication potential of the Internet and—as per the experiences of the pioneer Edward L. Ayers in *The Valley of Shadow*[1]—there were a series of historical activities that saw an increasingly strong participation of the audience. If we take into account a more recent experiment of great significance, in *The September 11 Digital Archive* on the attack on the Twin Towers,[2] we see that the examples (1993–2002) are a tangible sign of the rapid changes in the digital history, its branches and transformation (in some cases) in public history. The birth of an international federation (IFPH—International Federation for Public History), in 2010, dedicated to this approach allows us to fully grasp the moment of change that historical research is experiencing: This happens when historical research is combined with evidence, when the historian agrees not to play the role of the disseminator of academic knowledge, but a facilitator of historical memory; when the story is spun into a web, greatly emphasizing aspects of communication and openness to various non-specialist public entities, to be the chief interlocutors of references and historical works.

This type of approach, therefore, involves major consequences on the organisation of research, which can no longer be conducted only by a specialist. The abandonment of the individualistic model is in itself a kind of genetic mutation of

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[1]The Valley of Shadow, 1993–2007. Retrieved September 15, 2015, from http://valley.lib.virginia.edu.

[2]The September 11 Digital Archive, 2002–2014. Retrieved September 15, 2015, from http://911digitalarchive.org.

historical research because it involves both a continuous exchange of ideas with other colleagues and the need to deal with subject areas far removed from those traditionally combined with history, like archival science.

Second, consider that the transformation of communication patterns in the digital environment has spawned web sites with historical content, which are not run by academics, and that public history, in fact, is generated primarily by the desire of the public to participate in the writing, documentation and discussion on the past. Professional historians, especially in Europe, often complain that online records offer an easy platform to deliver criticism: there are cases of publications that contain blunders, mistakes, lack of documentation and so on. Technological progress has definitely broken the stereotypes of traditional filtering of requests and selection of specific products. Each user can now become a publisher and this implies an enormous increase in historical content in digital form. However, despite many fears and doubts, the results of this increased (or simply passionate) participation of general public in public communication have been more positive than expected and have also attracted professional historians in giving rise to a new generation of historical content. It was discovered, for example, that Wikipedia, perhaps the best known and most widespread form of knowledge sharing among non-specialists, contained errors and inaccuracies in a volume similar to that of emblazoned printed works (Goodwin 2009; Nyirubugara 2011; Rosenzweig 2006). In terms of factual information (dates of birth and death, composition of governments, leaders in battle, etc.) one may even notice its high reliability: if its organisation of working is on a very questionable theoretical (and methodological) level, from a pragmatic point of view, the situation stands different and the diverse communities which are involved here have achieved very positive results.

From another point of view, it can be argued that getting in touch with the company cannot be considered a priority in some areas of academic knowledge, but in case of education, things are different. Those who do research in the educational methodology, following the traditional approach, have always paid a lot of attention to the wider audience of education professionals: teachers and professors (and recently also the families) who have been privileged partners of educational research and, above all, education for a long time. Public history from this point of view is an effective way of maintaining this link with the educational reality and accepting the challenge of confrontation and cooperation: supporting the social utility of historical research, for example in a training exercise of education and medical professions, designed to increase awareness of the work and its meaning.

Finally, you can see that this way of recording history is entirely consistent with the purposes of the recent Open Access Movement, which was started with the desire to differentiate culture from economic perspective without barriers or obstacles of any kind ("Budapest" 2002; Russell 2014; Simcoe 2006; Suber 2012; Yiotis 2013). The movement, which has been joined by many Italian and European universities, has its roots, in alternative technological models of the sixties and seventies: the counter-culture, which expressed the idea that the software revolution was for the common good, something to which everyone could contribute and access, following the logic of freedom and not of profit. By applying this model of

sharing the academic knowledge, the Open Access Movement supports the need to leave circuits that make editorial publications difficult, and very limited, due to expensive access to content. The possibility of dissemination, today being offered to everyone on the network, is emphasised and has become a model for effectively bringing together the world of academic research in the educational contexts.

10.3 Digital Public History and Educational Memories

The digital public history approach is particularly suited to the study of educational memories. The time is ripe, in my opinion, for this meeting, which appears imminent from many points of view, and must not be delayed. The recent historical reflection on the educational memory, in its different and still uneven meanings, has a lowest common denominator, which precisely consists of the link between academic research and life context.

Educational memories are the heritage of a particular community and research can only take into account the exchange ratio between researchers and witnesses (Erll and Nünning 2008; Gardner 2003; Gardner and Cunningham 1997). A pact of cooperation is established that is placed right in the direction of public history and its best implementation. Above all, it can make one of the cardinal principles of oral history and any research real and effective that entails the involvement of the so-called "recollection of memories". The testimony is not offered to the researcher to be put in a drawer or published in a prestigious albeit inaccessible magazine. Rather, the memory recollection meeting between researcher and witness is a valuable asset to be re-delivered to the community because it enriches the knowledge of the past, its awareness and common reflection. Public history is therefore supposed to help contextualise the micro-memoirs, to connect them to the dynamics of the company, its tensions and conflicts, to grasp the relationship between the local and the global perspective, to promote dialogue between the parties using the digital environment. A cultural mediation activity, which involves some important ethical issues, is particularly evident in educational matters. Between mental labour and social practices a lasting bond is thus established due to its online presence and is a great way to give back the memory: not just for once and permanently in the form of a paper publication, but in a form that allows you to continue to renew interpretations and testimonials over time by soliciting new ideas and new contributions. The intellectual work "about and with" the memories can turn into, as per Freud, a sort of "terminable and interminable analysis", always open to further possible meanings.

Certainly, the construction of a research model inspired by public history is not simple and cannot happen without a gradation of experiences and reflections. It primarily consists of the abandonment of an ancient and rooted academic writing and research model, where an intellectual writes for his peers, in a network where everyone is a professional writer and reader. Switching to a model of public communication, does not necessarily imply complete abandonment of the previous

model, though it can give a sense of betrayal of the fundamental mission of the historian, in favour of fulfilling a commitment to a diverse and varied audience, which do not share the same skills and knowledge as the researcher.

Secondly, it must be considered that the digital public history includes within it, as we already mentioned, many experiences and research practices, some of which are far from the usual skill set of a historian: primarily, the use of digital communication, generation and interpretation of oral sources, public involvement in the construction of historical knowledge and the connection with the logic of the Open Access movement. All this makes it very difficult to start research in this new direction if there are no (or very limited) experiences and studies in these areas. To get an idea of the current situation in Italy, we can refer to the *Archivio Diaristico Nazionale* of Pieve Santo Stefano, which, since 1984, have been one of the most interesting and pioneering sources in this field with relevant of educational and academic aspects. Well, despite the strong focus on the memory of the subjects and the emphasis of their role, the prospect of a digital form of more than 7.000 public diaries is still in its initial stages. The original objective, pursued with perseverance, is that of preservation in the library and in the publication of the winners of the annual Pieve award.

Note that this is a particularly relevant experience and highly representative of the "state of the art" research, even educational, historical and academic: the given example leads us to understand that the elements already identified as essential parts of the public history are present in Italian historiography, albeit separately and not as part of a whole. For this reason, I think it is still very useful to refer to some international models to derive the source of study and reflection: consider, for example, a large collection of memories and images of Second World War that the BBC has acquired during the 2003–2006 period; an experience that demonstrates, among other things, the difficulty in managing this type of approach and the need for a large team of experts.[3]

10.4 Memories of Teachers in Video: A Case Study (and a Proposal)

In the absence of specific Italian public history experiences in education, I think it necessary to propose a path towards this approach that takes account of its basic needs even though it is, in fact, emerging as an explorative and experimental approach. The first difficulty encountered is the requirement to learn a series of basic skills in the digital field that are necessary but that test history and its traditional liberal arts education. It is helpful, then, to appeal to the (few) experiences in education and approach scientific communities that have made many efforts in

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[3]WW2 People's War. An archive of World War Two memories—written by the public, gathered by the BBC. Retrieved September 15, 2015, from http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar.

this direction and which may provide a forum for discussion and debate (think of the studies of researchers which led to the birth of the Association for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage[4]). The second obstacle is represented by the need for funding to organise a project that involves many people.

Considering these problems, I tried to demarcate a path towards public history armed with the knowledge that one must start with simple but meaningful experiences, capable of offering a clear perception of what could become a research project. The case study that I present is, simultaneously, a field test of digital history and a core group of public history: the latter contains, in particular, the participatory willingness and desire to provide social benefit of their work. A proposal, which, in essence, is open to future collaborations and developments.

The starting point of this experience was the commitment to teaching. The needs of university teaching were confronted with the need to renovate teaching and, as we shall see in a moment, researching. I found a big gap, unbridgeable, between educational memories of students, future teachers of primary schools, and academic memories that, at least in small part, could be extracted from university textbooks and incorporated into school history literature (Whitman 2004). I set myself the goal, then, to create a study that displayed the usefulness of memories for the training of trainers, for the awareness of their role and the basic characteristics (often implicit) of their profession; a goal that could actually apply to all education professions and, in a broader sense, medical professions (as in the case of nursing).

Unfortunately, ideological and political uses, which have enslaved the story, have obscured, particularly in school curricula, his contribution to the formation of critical thinking. Following a setting that is more obvious elsewhere (think of medical humanities in the United States), I organised a collection of testimonies that favoured the clear perception of historical, social and cultural history in the current teaching profession. The intent was to counter the supposed "naturalness" of educational practices: a concept that is generally a part of the "popular" pedagogy of teachers (Bruner 1996), but does not take into account the short and long-term trends along with the internal and external pressures that are exerted on the teacher's role, which are so often implicit.

After a thorough training period, I have many students involved in the search for memories of school teachers and retired teachers, trying to outline the history of elementary teachers from sixties to today. The research proposal has been met with a lot of participation and the interviewers felt strongly involved in this form of collective documentation. This approach made it possible to get out of the political channels to try to get into the "black box" of the school, recording the history of the experiences related to the school and school culture. As per the logic of digital public history, more than 400 interviews (almost Ñ not been transcribed or preserved in solitary units, but uploaded to YouTube by each interviewer. A specific channel has combined these interviews and organised them into

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[4]Associazione per l'informatica umanistica e la cultura digitale. Retrieved September 15, 2015, from http://www.umanisticadigitale.it.

playlists.[5] Thereafter the website *School Memories* was created to provide an adequate understanding of the project and ensure better use of video.[6]

Some evidence drawn from the numerous testimonies allows us to appreciate the validity of the approach and to be able to predict a series of research developments.

The first result of this special investigation is the general meaning to be drawn from viewing more than 180 h of video interviews. The memories of the teaching profession are precise, vivid and detailed: they describe aspects considered most interesting and work perceived as more important over at least three decades. Taken together, because they are the result of daily occurrences in school life, these memories are a strong antidote to institutional and educational rhetoric (including the uninterrupted rich history of schools until date). In the foreground of the testimony, in fact, are very less rhetorical and very real aspects, which do not disrupt "the mission" of the teacher, but emphasise one aspect: the effort. The effort put into going to school, often many kilometres away from home and difficult to reach: the experience of schools in the mountains never fails to point out the ice on the roads and walks in the snow, when the venue was only reachable on foot. The effort put into sitting in the classroom all morning heated just by a stove that often had to be fed at the expense of the teacher. The effort it took to be the female teachers, looking for a difficult reconciliation of the two roles in a social context, not very suitable to combining the demands of work with those of childcare.

In short, the material, family and environmental difficulties leap into the foreground well before those teaching stories and these anecdotes, in fact, are the sign of a school in the country that shared the hard and tiring life of the peasants. It highlights the difficulty of teaching in multiple classes, but especially the after school difficulties (especially those of patronage) (Sdei 2014) for paltry sums along with a sort of compulsory internship to earn marks. The fatigue of the recruitment process and the long-term job insecurity require constant attention in terms of the bureaucracy of supplying temporary replacements and participation in competitions (even five, six to be able to attain "ordinary status") (Del Seppia 2014).

When one gets to the heart of memory, emotional aspects also come to the fore, which are related so less in the school history that they are often unjustly forgotten.[7] There are teachers who retire ahead of time so as not to leave the class in half or not lead from first to fifth; others who remember bring moved by the children that committed suicide or had bad experiences as adults (Puma 2014). Rather educational and personal relationships (though not without difficulties and misunderstandings) emerge through teachings, which tend to stay with the children. Unexpectedly, along with adult memories, some childhood memories also appear—school experienced as

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[5]Gianfranco Bandini channel on YouTube. Retrieved September 15, 2015, from https://www.youtube.com/user/profbandini.

[6]Memorie scolastiche (currently under construction). Retrieved September 15, 2015, from http://www.memoriediscuola.it/.

[7]In fact, emotional and relational aspects are the centre of all educational activities. School climate, defined as an emotional sense of belonging to a community, is the biggest factor in emotional and cognitive development (Adelman and Taylor 2005; Hattie 2009).

pupils: the sticks on the hands and other disciplinary modes, which we now call "classroom management". A series of behaviours suffered by the child who decided to become a teacher so that other children should not suffer what they had suffered, "to redeem those years of suffering" (Pace 2014); In other cases, the memory of their childhood at school refers to psychological violence, which is as strong as physical violence: "My teacher always said 'You have copied' and all the other children used to laugh" (Costagli 2014a, b).

A part of the testimonies indicate the most important formative moments, those which led to a breakthrough in the way of working with children: there are those who remember the encounter with the CIDI—Centro di Iniziativa Democratica degli Insegnanti, Teacher Centre for Democratic Initiatives—(Trallori 2014), who along with the MCE—Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa, Cooperative Education Movement—(Silvioni 2014) and individuals such as Ciari, Rodari, Preti, Agosti. Many memories recall the seventies and the reformism (not only institutional) that characterised them. The reviews are very interesting and not always favourable of the youth protest movements and the university, often seen as unrealistic and distant from reality (Moriggi 2014; Manetti 2014; Palladino 2014).

It is very interesting to note the presence of some constant elements, some real common denominators of the experiences recounted.

It is worth considering that the school as evidenced by the testimonies always placed great emphasis on marginalised and distressed children by trying in every way to involve them in educational activities of the class. In parallel, however, there are no traces of care for children who present "high cognitive potential".

A second aspect is the very obvious and constant attention given to the teaching and research methodologies appropriate to enhance learning: the research that is mediated by the school (for example through training courses) or teaching associations. Rarely, however, do teachers appear to be able to connect themselves to the scientific debate (Malvolti 2014; Biondi 2014).

A third aspect, perhaps the most distinctive and rooted in the collective recollection, was the passion for innovation—experimenting with new forms of teaching. A belief in innovation, which is linked to the positive desire to improve the lives of the class, but at the same time, does not have to be subjected to special tests unless it is contrary to the judgement of those who have experienced changes. This procedure for subsequent innovations is very reminiscent of "the experimental groping" of Celestin Freinet and, although its original setting has been mixed indistinguishably with many others, it resurfaces easily in the testimonies, strongly marking the educational choices of teachers.

All these aspects are very important and can suggest some interesting lines of interpretation. I hope that this will be verified with more in-depth research, but as of now, it shows the richness of the stories of school life and can make people understand the value of such a digital public history approach in order to promote real cultural exchange between the past and the present academic and the school community.

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