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CALL FOR PAPERS

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

SCHOOL MEMORIES

New Trends in Historical Research into Education: Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological Issues

(Seville –22-23 September, 2015)

Research conducted by the international community of educational historians in recent years – starting with the proposal formulated by Dominique Julia in the mid-nineties to expand the heuristic perspectives of the history of education to embrace a broader history of school culture capable of shedding new light on the internal life of schools and institutes of education – has spread increasingly further afield in search of some kind of grail, some kind of «black box» comprising a combination of sources capable providing a faithful picture of the various aspects of school life and of offering them to historians so as to allow them to produce an equally complete and faithful reconstruction of the history of schools.

In their pursuit of this end, historians began with increasing eccentricity to use an assortment of sources which had never before been taken into consideration in the history of education and yet which demanded, if they were to be used properly, that certain interpretative categories of a historiographical nature be considered obsolete and replaced by new categories, often borrowed from the field of cultural anthropology. It was then, at a time coinciding (though possibly not by coincidence) with a marked increase in interest in schools' cultural legacy and with the birth of numerous projects for the optimisation of that legacy, that the history of education began to study *school memories*.

But what exactly do we mean when we talk about school memories? There is no hard and fast definition. Today we can state that the term *school memories* is basically interpreted in two different ways: on the one hand, it can refer to individual reflection on one's own

school experience as well as to self-reconstruction; on the other, it can be interpreted as an individual, collective and/or public practice designed to evoke a shared educational past.

In actual fact, educational historians are not really interested in the first of these two interpretations, designed to break down and analyse individual experience of school in order to reduce the epistemological (and emotive) mortgage implicitly held over future teachers' educational convictions in order to then rebuild their professionalism as teachers on a solid scientific basis.

They are far more interested in the second of the two interpretations with its very strong anthropological aspect, because this kind of memory – the memory as *individual, collective and/or public practice designed to evoke a shared educational past* – is distinguished from the first kind by the fact that it is not concerned with studying the influence exercised at the psychological level by the individual's prior school experience on his or her current educational convictions, so much as with exploring:

- the school experience of individuals, whether spoken, written or mediated by objects of material culture and/or images capable of directly or indirectly providing information on the aesthetic and functional development of the classroom over time, on the real educational practices and methods pursued in the classroom, on school rituals, on the kind of disciplinary practices adopted by teachers and so forth (*individual memories*);
- the perception of school life as experienced by a given individual as part of a collective experience at the very moment when that same individual recognises any kind of memento or relic in a school museum, hears a tale of school life or identifies him or herself in an old school photograph (*real school past*);
- the way the school of the past has been depicted by the culture industry, impressing often indelible stereotypes on the collective imagination (*imagined school past*);
- the way the school of the past is depicted in public commemorations promoted by the institutions on the basis of a deliberate memory-fostering policy (*public memory*).

While individual memories can be individually studied or compared as sources, the *collective memory*, on the other hand, can only be studied as a process because it consists in a *social reconstruction of the past*, spawned by a combination of real school experience (things directly experienced by those doing the remembering) and imagined school experience (which those doing the remembering have often only heard of, read about or seen).

The collective memory of school also has a strong transgenerational side to it caused by the survival within a given school system of material culture, educational practices and teaching methods well beyond the era for which they were originally devised and in which they were originally disseminated. This, because school management's prolonged use of school furniture and fittings for economic reasons and teachers' poor perception of the natural obsolescence that inevitably strikes the educational practices and teaching methods they themselves learnt during their teacher training, has produced a fully-fledged "transgenerationality" in school memory which often allows a person born in the 'fifties to identify today with a museum depicting a school in the 'thirties. By the same token, the narrative (even if only of an incidental nature) developed by the cultural industry to recount the school of yesteryear and that image's dissemination in society through literature, television and the cinema allows the younger generations to generically identify the nature and function of items of stationery, teaching aids and other school objects from the past even though they have absolutely no practical notion of how to use them.

At the end of the day, memory can be used to study the past, but it can also be used to define the way the present looks at the past and interprets or re-interprets that past. In that sense, from the standpoint of the history of education, we do not find school memories interesting only as a tool offering us access to the *school of the past* but also as a key allowing us to understand what people today know or think they know about the *school of the past*, and the extent to which what they know reflects reality or is in fact a product of the stereotypes now strongly rooted in the common perception and thus exceedingly difficult to uproot. Thus the object of the historian's research does not consist purely and simply in exploring school as it really was but in the complex process of defining the memory of that school as developed and revisited over time at both the individual and collective levels, initially on the basis of real school experience and subsequently on the basis of the other social and cultural agents that have helped in part to reconfigure that memory.

This symposium sets out to provide the international scholarly community with an initial in-depth analysis of this aspect, defining a number of broad theoretical coordinates and offering a range of methodological criteria for a proper exegesis of sources.

WORKING SESSIONS

The symposium will be organized in three working sessions, which will serve to explore school memory in its three basic forms (individual, collective and public) from multiple points of view, basically coinciding with the wide collection of sources that can be used to define it in all its complexity (such as oral sources, ego-documents, autobiographies, objects, photographs, literature, films, etc.). The ultimate goal is to qualify school memory as an historiographical object and to define its epistemological contribution.

I – INDIVIDUAL MEMORY

In this working session we will endeavour to determine how and to what extent the school experiences of individuals reported in their oral testimonies and written memories (whether published or not) as well as didactic activities and educational and disciplinary practices indirectly attested to by objects of material culture and/or images can be used – appropriately supplemented by conventional sources – in order to explore the «black box of schooling» in ever greater depth. On the borderline between individual and collective memory, it will also be possible to study the associations of former students of a educational institution and those of former teachers and the ways in which their members recall their past school experience in the memories they narrate at their periodic meetings or publish in the pages of their bulletins, newsletters, blogs and social networks.

II – COLLECTIVE MEMORY

In this working session we will endeavour to investigate the way the protagonists of the educational process (students or teachers) perceive their experience of school as part of a collective experience through contact established with oral testimonies, diaries and ego-documents, school memorabilia and/or photographs, the latter two of which are seen as *testimonial objects* able to embody the past and to evoke its memory; in this sense, we will also attempt to determine how the school of yesteryear was depicted in school museums, what picture it handed down and what tools have been and can be used to evoke it (as

several recent studies have shown, for example, the role played by the senses of perception in recalling sensorial experiences at school is increasingly seen as a key role).

We will also be taking a look at the depiction of schools of the past which have inspired literature, films, television, periodicals or internet over the years, imprinting in the collective memory certain often indelible stereotypes (*imagined school past*) which have now entered the collective memory, overlapping with individuals' own school experiences.

III – POLITICS AND PLACES OF MEMORY

In this working session we will endeavour to determine what kind of memory of school and of the teaching profession has been promoted over the years by public, semi-public or private institutions by exploring the certificates of merit, medals awarded to teachers and the policies behind their assignment, plaques and busts dedicated to them displayed inside and outside public buildings, the naming of streets and squares after them, but also funeral orations, commemorative booklets printed by committees appointed to honour deceased educators and obituaries published in printed or electronic newspapers and teachers' magazines.

We will also seek to study and report on the existence of places associated with school memory – to cite a concept developed by Pierre Nora, *lieux de mémoire*; and also to understand how school and the basic role it has played in the civil and social progress of a national community have been commemorated, in what form and to what extent at important national celebrations, also through the issue of postage stamps and commemorative coins.

REGISTRATION

Each speaker must submit an abstract of max. 3,000 characters in one of the four official languages of the symposium and also prepare an English version by December 31, 2014. We will accept proposals of papers, panels and posters.

Registration forms can be downloaded in the section of the official website of the symposium: <http://memoriaescolar.es/inscripcion.html>; once completed, should be sent to the email address: info@memoriaescolar.es.

Participation in the symposium requires payment of a registration fee, which will cover the dissemination of materials relating to the symposium, the use of technological equipment, coffee breaks and participation in lunches on 22 and 23 September and in the final social dinner. This fee is € 175. The registration fee does not cover the cost of accommodation; participants in the symposium will be sent a list of hotels and university residences.

The speakers must pay the registration fee only after receiving the approval of their abstracts by the Scientific Committee. All abstracts will be approved within January 31, 2015; simultaneously with the approval of the abstracts, the speakers will be notified of the date of delivery of the final version of their papers for the proceedings.

Travel expenses will be charged to the speakers and will not be refunded.

LANGUAGES

The official languages of the symposium will be: Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French and English. In the event the official proceedings of the symposium are published in a special

issue of an international refereed scientific journal, the speakers shall be bound to submit the final version of their papers in English.

PUBLICATION OF PROCEEDINGS

At the end of the symposium, the organization will be in charge of the publication of the works presented with a publishing house able to ensure their international distribution or in the special issue of an international refereed scientific journal.

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