Pensar históricamente. La enseñanza de la Historia en Italia entre la investigación y la docencia

Thinking historically. The teaching of history in Italy between research and teaching

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Abstract

The aim of these pages is to offer some reflections on the centrality that the teaching of history should once again have today, in order to educate young people to live the challenges posed to them by the complexity of their times, and to help them to think historically, that is, to apply the rules of the historical method to the analysis of the present. In this context, the new historiographical paths that the globalized world has brought to the attention of historians and the teaching methods that are necessary to teach them in schools will be considered. In particular, it will be pointed out that Italy is lagging behind in its reflection on the teaching of history.

Key Words: Italy; History Teaching; Historiography; Methodologies; historical Research.

Resumen

Estas breves páginas pretenden elaborar algunas reflexiones sobre la centralidad que debería volver a tener hoy la enseñanza de la historia para educar a los jóvenes a vivir los retos que les plantea la complejidad de su tiempo, ayudándoles a pensar históricamente, es decir, a aplicar las reglas del método histórico al análisis del presente. El razonamiento considerará las nuevas vías historiográficas que el mundo globalizado ha puesto en conocimiento de los historiadores y las metodologías didácticas necesarias para enseñarlas en las escuelas, haciendo hincapié en el gran retraso que sufre Italia en la reflexión sobre la enseñanza de la historia.

Palabras clave: Italia; enseñanza de la historia; historiografía; metodologías; investigación histórica.

Introduction

The purpose of this brief is to highlight the central role that history teaching should play in contemporary education. This is with a view to equipping young people with the requisite skills to face the multifaceted challenges of the present era by fostering the capacity for historical thinking. Lévesque, Case and Denos (2013) argue that the rules of the historical method should be applied to the analysis of the present and of historical becoming, which is constituted by a complex set of interrelated factors. These factors include both permanence and change, as well as long-term cultural contaminations. Italy, with its rich cultural heritage expressed not only in art and music but also in fashion and cuisine, is a microcosm of this complexity. It is the result of the interaction of different peoples (migrants and/or invaders) and cultures that have settled in the country over the centuries, giving rise to an extraordinary country in cultural terms.

In this context, it is important to highlight some general issues. In the light of the above, it is clear that a comprehensive study of historical method, historiography and the teaching of history

cannot ignore the complex nuances that can only be briefly touched upon due to the limitations of this discourse. These include the analysis of the competitive admissions process to educational institutions, which often require a degree in history for those wishing to teach it, as well as the intricacies of recruitment and hiring practices for educators. The methodology of historical research and the disciplinary areas that characterise it differ according to the order and grade in question. It is important to be aware of the significant differences in methods and approaches to the teaching of history according to the different levels of the Italian school system (primary, secondary, university) and the different types of schools (high schools, technical and professional institutes). In this article, I will refrain from discussing the subject of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is currently a major challenge for researchers and educators. In fact, it is a subject of considerable complexity, with implications that are largely unknown and that could soon have serious consequences for research and teaching in all disciplines.

The impact of the web on the humanities

It is a challenge for teachers to keep abreast of the rapid advances in scientific research that are revitalising historical knowledge, and the innovations introduced by the periodic school reforms that each new government in the country introduces into its school system. However, the main challenge facing scholars and teachers of all disciplines over the past two decades has been technology and the Internet. Not only have they forced those in educational institutions of all kinds and at all levels to rethink their approach to research, methodology, content and disciplinary teaching, but they have also had a profound impact on people's lives.

In order to understand the profound impact that technologies and the web have on people's lives, the information philosopher Luciano Floridi (2017) has developed the concept of 'onlife', a neologism that uses the image of the mangrove, a plant that thrives in the brackish water where the sea and the river meet, to illustrate how the online and offline realms are not two separate entities, but two dimensions that interpenetrate with constant cross-references. Onlife can thus be defined as a daily way of life through which individuals connect, study, work and experience their relationship with information (Pasta 2023). It is a reality that is now ubiquitous and is becoming, for better or for worse, a way of being capable of generating cultural and economic models with a very strong impact (Pasta 2021; Raviolo, Pasta 2022). The multiplicity of devices that surround us has become an integral part of our lives, often determining the rhythm of our days and influencing our modes of communication. The network, as postulated by Pierre Lévy (1999), has become a "potentially infinite computer whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere", a concept that has been compared to the nature of God. This assertion should convince researchers and educators of the need to address the potential of these tools, which often claim to be able to provide comprehensive knowledge on their own.

It is clear that the convergence of traditional knowledge and information technology, in all their fields of application, has taken on the character of a "paradigmatic" transition, which is manifested both in the modalities of humanistic research and in those of didactics. On the one hand, there is the 'scientific' imperative of understanding how to respect the epistemological status of the various disciplines that make up the humanities. The interdisciplinary field of the humanities has increasingly come to the fore in its engagement with technology and the digital realm. At the same time, a didactic imperative has emerged to approach the evolving linguistic landscape of the digital age in a constructive and participatory manner, while acknowledging the potential challenges and implications that the use of new languages and tools may have for the epistemological foundations of various disciplines.

It is clear that at a historical juncture such as the one we are in, characterised by rapid socio-historical changes, it is the disciplines based on historical methodologies that are most affected and consequently undermined, particularly in their role as interpreters of reality. History is undoubtedly such a subject. The fundamental issue in dealing with the crisis of humanistic knowledge is not to perpetuate the traditional diatribe between scientists and humanists, which has been characterised as "humanistic fundamentalism" or "instrumental technicalism" (Bernardini, De Mauro 2003, 9). Instead, it is necessary to recognise that an extraordinary change is taking place in the way culture is disseminated. This poses significant challenges for those involved in historical interpretation, including historians and others who seek to understand the past in the context of the present. It also poses difficulties for educators tasked with transmitting historical knowledge, given the rapid evolution of skills due to technological advances (Toschi, 2011).

Indeed, how can a discipline concerned with narrating the past find a place in a society that seems to live in an eternal present? How can the rigour of the scientific method, as applied by the historian, be useful in interpreting the complexities of the present? And how can a teacher of history, at any level, effectively navigate the complexities of these evolving changes? The answers to these questions are not straightforward, not least because the international debate about the impact of technology and the Web on knowledge and its teaching is now fueled by a vast literature that has become difficult to navigate. Nevertheless, there is a consensus among scholars that there is an urgent need for those involved in the humanities at all levels of education, but especially at the university level, to assess the impact of information technology on the various disciplines, including history. This is not to regret the past, as it is clear that the advent of computers and the Internet has greatly facilitated the research work of scholars, including historians. However, it is also important to be cautious and to refrain from unquestioningly embracing the "new world", which continues to present unknowns, some of which may be dangerous. Furthermore, it is essential to recognise the significant economic and financial interests, especially those of high-tech multinationals, that are influencing the development of this new digital landscape. Historians and humanists more generally should engage with the digital realm and related technologies in order to continue to fulfil the traditional humanities function of researching, evaluating, critiquing, questioning, verifying and interpreting. This should be done in a way that enables them to own the tools at their disposal, rather than being owned by the technology. It is important to understand the advantages and disadvantages of this approach and, above all, to reaffirm the role of scholars and teachers that can emerge from this confrontation, renewed. In conclusion, historians must become protagonists and founders of a new tradition of historical knowledge in order to overcome their crisis and the weakening of their function in the general sphere of knowledge.

Within the Italian university system, historians and humanists in a broader sense have not yet fully taken into account the implications of the Internet as a cultural producer, with the capacity to shape and inform important points of reference. This is a cultural and social issue of particular concern to us as scholars and educators in the humanities, not least because, with few exceptions, humanists are no longer at the centre of the processes of cultural dissemination as they were in the past. There are many reasons for this, many of which predate the advent of the Internet. But this does not detract from the fact that a crisis of role can be turned into an opportunity for renewal, without regretting a past that will not return. The rapid pace of technological progress is a constant in contemporary life. Whether electronic devices are regarded with affection or disdain, they are destined to become an integral part of the skill set required of those engaged in the field of humanistic culture, both as tools of production and, more importantly, as media of communication. All of this is communication, precisely because information technology is not only a tool, but also a language, and an interdisciplinary one at that. Moreover, the space of the web is not neutral; it is owned by those who manage search engines and their algorithms (Toschi, 2011).

The question of whether the Internet is an appropriate means of disseminating knowledge is no longer relevant, as its potential to become a dominant force in the dissemination of culture has

already been realised. Instead, it is necessary to consider the role that humanists, who have historically been at the centre of the dissemination of culture, can play in this paradigmatic process of cultural revolution. In order to assess the future role of humanists in this context of rapid change, it is necessary to consider not only their position as users of new technologies, but also their potential as content creators and educators of future generations of humanists. This question is of considerable importance, as it forces us to consider the future of many professions related to the humanities and the role of the training institutions par excellence, namely educational institutions of all kinds and at all levels, and in particular universities. In the current era, the proliferation of information, which is difficult to regulate, has resulted from the advent of digitalisation and the World Wide Web. Over time, humanists have developed methodological tools, constantly evolving and refined, to identify the scientific rigour of a given work, including non-academic sources (e.g. bibliographies, apparatuses, etc.). The Web is still far from providing the above-mentioned resources, which are instead provided by journals, series, etc. It is therefore essential to "train" researchers who are increasingly able to control the content of the Net according to the categories proper to the humanities. Indeed, the mismatch between research and teaching opportunities is the greatest threat to the humanities. Without a generation of digital humanists, we risk being subsumed by computer scientists, engineers or other technical figures. Moreover, in a relatively short time, we may no longer be able to understand the mechanisms of knowledge production from the inside (Fiormonte, Numerico, Tomasi 2015).

In the case of historians, the issues become even more complex when one considers the nature of the sources available. The vast amount of information that appears on search engines turns search results into sources themselves. This, combined with the ease of access to materials and the instant verification of knowledge, leads many to believe that they can produce historical self-education without developing critical thinking skills. They are unable to evaluate sources, understand the risks involved or grasp the nature of the content. Furthermore, the nature of texts on the web is such that they can be updated, corrected and edited, resulting in a variable corpus that is subject to change. This has implications for the way in which they are preserved and therefore for their future accessibility as a source of information.

One of the most obvious consequences of this phenomenon can be seen in the field of academic education, particularly in the breakdown of the conventional relationship between research and teaching. Traditionally, this relationship was characterised by the gradual accumulation of knowledge, followed by its controlled dissemination. The traditional relationship between researching and teaching history has now broken down, rendering the former obsolete for interpreting society. Obviously, it is students and young people in general who suffer from this lack of confidence in history as a discipline. But they are also the ones most at risk in terms of their education. While the new generations undoubtedly have greater technical skills than adults, this is not always accompanied by an adequate level of critical competence in terms of content. The concept of "do-it-yourself" is implicit in the operation of the Internet, and this raises a number of questions concerning the control and, above all, the responsibility of the content offered by this vast repository of knowledge. In the specific case of historical knowledge, this is becoming a significant problem due to the enormous amount of information and misinterpretations with undeclared sources on the Web, which have become uncontrollable but are used by everyone, especially students when preparing their dissertations. This is becoming problematic in terms of historical knowledge, due to the vast amount of information and misinterpretations with undeclared sources on the Internet, which are difficult to control. However, they are used by a wide range of people, especially students when preparing their dissertations.

What measures could historians and history teachers take to address a situation that also calls into question their role as scholars and educators? I believe that those in a position to do so must accept the reality of the changes brought about by technology and the Internet. These changes are now irreversible and the online environment affects all age groups. In order not to be left behind by these changes, it is necessary to address them from within society, rather than simply observing them

from the outside. It is therefore imperative that educational institutions at all levels facilitate the formation of new historical knowledge and reclaim their role as centres of intellectual production and a space for the cultivation of the mind. While technology can undoubtedly assist in the didactics of various disciplines, allowing for a reduction in the traditional gap between teacher and learner, this should be done in a way that maintains a healthy balance and benefits all parties. The interpenetration of knowledge and skills is essential, as the absence of one renders the other meaningless. It is clear that technology and the Internet, if used intelligently and critically, have the potential to become an exceptional methodological tool. However, it is essential to recognise that they cannot replace the role of the teacher. The teacher is not only a transmitter of knowledge, but also a personality and a capacity for dialogue with his or her students. In this context, media literacy is of great importance and must concern both students and, in many cases, especially teachers (Rivoltella 2001, 2005, 2006, 2010).

The ability to navigate such a complex reality thus requires a nuanced and multifaceted approach, encompassing a range of interrelated domains, including study topics, didactics, scientific communication methods, the implications of open access, the relationship between paper and digital publications, the evaluation of research mandated by ministries, and the creation of a collaborative scientific dimension in the digital realm. The advent of digital technologies has made the traditional model of scientific work, characterised by autonomy and solitude, obsolete. This has significant implications for the very concept of knowledge, which is no longer conceived as a unified entity, but rather as a complex and fragmented phenomenon. The increasingly interdisciplinary nature of research, enabled by information technology, facilitates the exchange of methodologies and content, challenging the boundaries between different fields of study. The digital dimension of knowledge is now eroding the almost insurmountable boundaries that emerged in the 19th century between the "hard sciences", based on the experimental method, and the more traditionally speculative humanistic disciplines. It is clear that information technology and the Internet have introduced a new paradigm in the field of scientific practices. However, as has always been the case, the emergence of any new methodology requires a theoretical reflection not only on the methodology itself, but also on its genesis and the possible consequences of its implementation. In this respect, the role of the humanities can, or perhaps should, once again become central.

For this to happen, however, humanists, and in this case historians, must learn to master the tools offered by technology and be able to use them to shape the discipline not only from a scientific but also a pedagogical perspective. This is particularly important in the context of the Internet and social networks, which have become the primary source of information for young people and students. In particular, the Internet has become the main source of information for young people and students, often without any critical evaluation (Ciotti, Roncaglia 2008; Criscione 2006; Bordini 2008; Bandini, Bianchini 2007).

However, in addition to the above-mentioned problems, the Internet and social networks have also opened up new avenues for research and comparison, particularly with regard to the historian's primary tool, narrative. Indeed, the effective communication strategy that has enabled the success of Web 2.0 and 3.0, and of tools and environments such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Tik Tok and YouTube, is the use of narrative. This is not only because users post content there, but also because they have the opportunity to tell their stories in virtual spaces, giving rise to the narrative turn of so-called postmodern society (Salomon 2008). Indeed, in a world as chaotic as the Web, narrative is the only tool capable of governing and structuring the fragmented individualities of the Web. In this sense, historians could make a significant contribution by using the historical method to reconstruct those collective narratives that until recently constructed identity and citizenship, but in which individuals still need to recognise themselves. It is clear that this approach represents a public use of History 3.0, with the main difference being that the number of centres producing narratives has increased exponentially, to the extent that they are no longer under the control of educational institutions. The presentation of narratives and the ability to disseminate them according to the rules

set by each community has proven to be an effective strategy for promoting shared memories on digital platforms.

Before the advent of the Internet, cultural institutions (schools, universities, museums, archives, etc.) were responsible for the control and production of collective narrative sources, which also shaped the management of Italy's rich cultural heritage. Today, these institutions are competing with many other agencies for the production of narratives. However, there have been few attempts by cultural institutions in Italy to narrate cultural heritage online. Instead, they have generally limited themselves to digitising their heritage and displaying it in a showcase format (Capaldi, Ilardi, Ragone 2011). The concept of the passive viewer is no longer applicable in the context of online communication. Instead, there is a clear preference for participation, sharing and intervention. This shift in attitude has significant implications for the way cultural institutions engage with their cultural heritage and a country's history. However, in the historical communication produced by the Web, where it is difficult to identify privileged points of view, historians can once again play a fundamental role by renewing their narrative methods. This can facilitate greater engagement with history among younger audiences and allow for a more nuanced examination of historical narratives, including their problematic aspects. While it is important to teach students to think historically, it is also important to avoid the pitfall of web history being overly focused on the present. This is because the sources used in web history are more suited to the contemporary period, but a short-term view does not fully capture the complexity of historical events over time.

What form should history take in the contemporary era?

The modern world presents historians with a number of challenges that they must address. The first of these challenges is undoubtedly the need to adopt a perspective that is no longer Eurocentric, both as regards the objects of historical study and as regards how to tell them. The teaching of national history, even if it cannot rightly be excluded from school curricula, no longer reflects the reality of classrooms where pupils of different ethnic and geographical origins, with their different histories and cultures, now coexist. To meet the need for history that no longer focuses solely on nation-building processes, historians have developed new historiographical orientations, such as world history and global history. These new approaches aim to conduct research that is sensitive to the problems of today's multi-ethnic and multicultural societies. These two historiographical orientations, which originated in the English-speaking academic world, have been adopted in Asia, particularly in Japan and China, but have not achieved the same level of acceptance in southern Europe. In the Italian context, there are historians who have begun to practice world and global history (e.g. Laura Di Fiore and Marco Meriggi 2011), despite the perplexity of the academic world. However, there has been no real discussion of the implications of such historiographical paths for the profession of history. Research centres have also been set up, such as the World History Research Centre at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. However, a comprehensive reflection on the development of new historiographical approaches is still lacking.

In addition to a spatial dimension that extends beyond Europe, historiography has had to take into account other protagonists in the historical narrative who were overlooked for a long time and who have now been able to secure their rightful place in the narrative, including women, ethnic minorities and slaves. In addition, new historiographical approaches have emerged in response to the pressing issues of our time. These focus on areas such as environmental history, epidemiology, public health and emotions. In conclusion, history is a constantly evolving field of study, offering insights that can be used to understand the present and influence the future. It is a discipline that can facilitate the development of a multifaceted narrative capable of addressing the complexities of modern society.

This openness to new spaces and protagonists can be seen in historical research and in the new lines of research undertaken by Italian scholars in recent years. However, it has not yet had a significant impact on classroom teaching, mainly due to the limitations imposed by the ministerial school curricula, which do not facilitate the ability of teachers to adopt a broader perspective. As noted above, there is a clear need to move beyond the confines of national history. However, it is important to recognise that public schools, not only in Italy but throughout Europe, have their roots in the French Revolution and the subsequent formation of the nation state. These institutions have played a central role in the development of national citizenship. The current school curricula, and in particular the history curricula, can be seen as a legacy of the nineteenth-century need for the newly formed Italian state to foster the development of a national citizenry and an elite ruling class. Consequently, they are not impartial in terms of their intended purpose, despite the efforts of certain ill-conceived educational reforms (such as the Moratti reform, Law No. 53 of 28 March 2003) to distot them. The inevitable result is a significant decline in the level of knowledge. It is a challenge to move away from this entrenched culture, which serves as a cornerstone for all nation-states, and to embrace alternative, more expansive perspectives that may not be inherently Eurocentric. Moreover, in the contemporary European context, moving beyond this nationalised approach to history is particularly challenging given the current crisis in the civic function of history itself. The continental economic crisis, the traumatic experience of the Corona pandemic and intense migratory flows have generated uncontrolled fears and a sense of siege and cultural disintegration in many EU countries. This phenomenon is particularly strong in European countries with a colonial legacy, such as France and the Netherlands. In recent years, there have been efforts in these countries to codify an official national canon, driven by concerns that students lack a sense of shared identity and a common historical and discursive framework. This is exemplified by the case of Italy, which has not been immune to these challenges. Conversely, in many European countries in the Balkans and the Baltics, the national narrative has experienced a resurgence after the interlude of communist rule, during which the dominant approach was to strengthen national culture in order to overcome the significant ideological divisions resulting from communism (Colla 2023).

This is obviously a complex situation in which a balance must be struck between the educational demands of a diverse society and the teaching of history, which cannot be self-serving. Indeed, the notion that the teaching of history should be adapted to the educational needs of the 21st century, where the conventional wisdom that human civilisation is inevitably shaped by the formation of nation states, including our own, is increasingly being challenged, particularly in the light of the need to promote global awareness and understanding. It is imperative not to lose sight of history itself, namely that the nation-state form is currently the most prevalent in the world, largely due to the fact that European states, for better or worse, spread it across almost the entire globe during their colonial and imperialist eras. Therefore, while it is important to acknowledge the interconnectedness of historical narratives across geographical and geopolitical spaces, including the Atlantic region, beyond the European continent, it is crucial to ensure that the content of historical knowledge is not distorted in the process of adapting it to educational needs. The study of historical events and personalities from a variety of perspectives does not imply the negation or erasure of those considered unpalatable because of their incompatibility with prevailing demands, including those related to education. From this point of view, it may be useful to reflect on the phenomena of cancellation culture and political correctness. Indeed, such phenomena tend to target their preferred victims within the context of historical narratives. The term 'cancellation culture', which has been the subject of intense and pertinent debate in the Anglo-Saxon world, especially in academic circles, has also appeared in Italian television, newspaper and university discourse in recent years. However, there has been a certain confusion surrounding the concept, which has contributed to the emergence of frequent misunderstandings. The phenomenon concerns anything that is considered incorrect, reprehensible or politically questionable. It affects not only public figures but also entire pages of history, creating a variety of interpretative polarisations that can influence the perception of historical events. This is

achieved by taking facts out of their original context and erasing the past that does not conform to the current point of view (Piacenza, 2023).

Notable examples of this 'cultural erasure' include the removal of statues of prominent historical figures such as Winston Churchill or Christopher Columbus. These individuals are often held responsible for the exploitation of ethnic or gender minorities, and as a result their statues are removed from public spaces such as squares, or their names are erased from school textbooks. No distinction is made between different historical periods or situations, and nuances are not taken into account; instead, circumstances are seen in stark contrast. The focus is on both the present and the past, regardless of the context and circumstances that originally shaped them. These facts are then deployed in ongoing public and political discourse. In effect, the facts of the past are taken out of their historical context and applied to the present without due distinction. Despite the occasional reasonable position, over-generalisations are often made (E. Ng 2022).

This preoccupation with erasure has ramifications that extend beyond the realm of history and into the realm of literature. Notable works such as the Iliad and the Odyssey, as well as passages from both ancient and modern authors, have been indexed for reasons that are often unclear. One such reason is the use of terms or representations that would be considered racist today. However, at the time these works were written, such terms and representations were not uncommon (Bettini 2023). In such cases, what is the historian's appropriate response? The question, then, is whether the historian should give precedence to the common sense of contemporary society, which rightly no longer tolerates a certain kind of language and representation, or whether he should give precedence to historical fact, recognising that what has happened cannot be undone. The choice is not easy. Removing statues of patrons from public spaces because they were slaves does not change the tragic nature of the history of slavery. However, the act of tearing down such statues may be understandable. It is unacceptable to remove the study of the Iliad and the Odyssey from the curriculum of prestigious universities such as Oxford on the grounds that they are symbols of slave societies.

These are questions that history researchers and teachers must address today. It is possible that, despite Italy's relative backwardness in this respect, new didactic approaches could help the teacher to deal with this complex situation.

The didactics of history

For a long time, the didactic aspect of history has been overlooked in Italian universities. The reasons for this are numerous and difficult to summarise in a few sentences. As a result, there has been a considerable lack of reflection on the subject in Italy, which is particularly striking in view of the remarkable achievements in many areas of historical research.

The emergence of the coronavirus (Covid-19) and the subsequent introduction of distance learning (DAD) have also forced educators to look for new ways of promoting interaction through the use of technology. However, this shift in pedagogy also brought about a significant lag in the technological skills of many trainers, limiting their ability to fully exploit the potential of these tools. In fact, many of them simply reversed the online versions of their traditional teaching practices that they had used before the epidemic and subsequent lockdown. Teachers essentially continued with the same approach as before. One of the reasons for Italy's delay in establishing history didactics as a distinct and separate field of study is undoubtedly the lasting influence of the Italian idealism of Giovanni Gentile, the author of the only complete and epochal reform of the Italian school, implemented in 1923, and his pedagogical thought, based on the conviction that knowledge of the content of a discipline naturally entails the ability to teach it, thereby rendering teaching technique superfluous.

However, while the integration of the teaching of history with that of other humanities disciplines has taken place with a comparable delay, this has not been the case for other subjects. Mathematics, for example, has a long tradition of reflection on didactics dating back to the early 20th century, while geography has a strong academic foundation and a considerable number of members in the Italian Association of Geography Teachers, founded in 1955.

The 1990s saw a modest advance in reflection on the subject, following the reform law of 1990, which entrusted the universities with the training of secondary school teachers through the establishment of postgraduate specialisation schools. Prior to this, prospective teachers gained access to school teaching through a competition that assessed disciplinary knowledge but not didactic preparation. The 1990 law prompted some disciplines to reflect on the didactic aspects of their teaching. For example, the Italian Philosophical Society set up a special didactic commission, while the Italianists founded a scientific association in 1996 with a focus on didactic aspects. On the other hand, the Central Council for Historical Studies, which represented historians at the time, did not seize the opportunity to initiate reflection on the subject. During this period, the teaching of history did emerge in some Italian universities, but these were isolated cases that did not have a significant impact, with the exception of the courses given by Antonio Brusa at the University of Bari and Ivo Matozzi at the Alma Mater Studiorum in Bologna (Cajani L. 2019).

Furthermore, the experience of the Schools of Specialisation for Teachers (SISS), launched between 1999 and 2000, did not contribute to the development of a substantial reflection on the subject. Following the closure of these schools between 2008 and 2009, teacher training has been the subject of rather ambiguous ministerial projects, including the Active Formative Apprenticeship (TFA) and the Percorsi Abilitanti Speciali (PAS).

The recent resurgence of interest in the didactics of history and its teaching can be attributed to the introduction of university courses designed to facilitate the acquisition of the 24 CFUs (university training credits) required to become a secondary school teacher. Half of these are to be obtained through disciplinary didactics. These courses have become an obligatory part of the curriculum since the reform of the secondary teacher recruitment system. The qualification previously required for access to the competitive class (old-school or one-cycle diploma) is no longer sufficient for participation in ordinary competitions or for inclusion in provincial (GPS) and school rankings. Subsequently, the possibility of attending three-year training courses (FIT) was introduced for those who had been successful in the teaching competitions (Decree-Law 59/2017). In addition, the initial training courses for secondary school teachers in grades I and II, known as "DPC", were introduced. Decree Law No. 36 of 30 April 2022, which included 60 CFU was strongly supported by the former Minister of Education, Patrizio Bianchi, and is part of the maxi-decree of the PNRR (National Recovery and Resilience Plan).

These legislative developments have led to a significant degree of reflection on disciplinary didactics and, at the same time, on the didactics of history. This reflection was prompted by a fundamental data point: the absence of specific university courses in the field of history didactics and the lack of experimentation with innovative methodologies for teaching historical knowledge. For example, there are no doctoral programmes dedicated to this teaching discipline, despite the specific declarations of the SSDs (disciplinary scientific sectors), which refer to it as an obligation (Ministerial Decree no. 639 of 02.05.2024, Annex A). There are no real academic research centres specialising in this field. It is clear that the lack of scientific reflection and monitoring of the numerous initiatives that have contributed to the development of the teaching discipline has meant that most of the significant proposals made by the few teachers involved remain largely unknown. This situation suggests that, as far as Italy is concerned, it is not possible to speak of homogeneous experiences, but rather of attempts, some of which have been successful, to systematise a multiplicity of experiences. One such organisation is the Italian Society for the Didactics of History, founded in April 2002. Finally, a scientific society dedicated to the teaching of history has been created in Italy. This initiative, led by historians and scholars from various disciplines, has brought together people from

academic and educational institutions with a common interest in research into the teaching of history, its public applications and related training activities. This collaboration between the academic and educational communities is an important step in promoting interdisciplinary dialogue and knowledge exchange. The first public engagement will take place in the autumn of 2023.

Contrary to the situation in other countries, such as France or the Netherlands, where theoretical reflections on this topic have produced excellent results from the perspective of teaching practice (Cajani, 2019), scientific research on this topic is lacking in Italy. The crucial point, however, is not to enter into an ideological conflict with the pagan idealism that persists in the methods of teaching history in Italy. This often manifests itself in a vehement and controversial criticism of the frontal lecture method that has come to symbolise that era. Instead, it is important to recognise that a century has passed since that important school reform. The advent of technology, particularly the Internet, now makes it imperative to undertake a comprehensive reflection on the construction of teaching strategies and methodologies, taking into account the close relationship between knowledge and skills, and the fact that one cannot exist without the other. There must therefore be a balance between the two. It is not possible for 'doing' to override 'knowing' because knowledge, in order to be such, requires study, reflection and time, which is not currently available in the context of the modern school system. Furthermore, such approaches need to be student-led rather than teacher-led.

It is important to note that teaching methods are inherently subjective and can significantly influence not only academic success in the classroom, but also the perception of the discipline itself. In the present era, many individuals are involved in the act of teaching history. As a result, historians, who used to be the exclusive custodians of this function, are forced to navigate a phenomenon that Del Bo (2024, p. 13) refers to as "prêt à porter history" or "pop history", narrated by communicators who are not necessarily trained historians but who nonetheless strive to construct history that is accessible to a diverse audience. In the context of limited resources and the challenge of engaging students with limited attention spans, how can scholars and teachers effectively navigate the current educational landscape? It is imperative that they learn to use the tools of technology to their advantage, capitalising on their scholarly training and preparation, while recognising the enduring importance of books and reading. To this end, they must have a multimodal approach, integrating other forms of communication that are more in tune with the needs of their younger audiences. It is clear that this is a pivotal moment, a paradigm shift, as has been emphasised many times in this publication. However, I believe that there is no alternative at this point, not least in answer to the question 'what is history for', which is often posed to history educators in and out of the classroom. It is not enough to say that history is always new and that it provides the tools for understanding the reality of the present and influencing that of the future. It is imperative to make the compromise of speaking a common language that manages to attract the participation of all, teachers and students alike. In an information society such as ours, communication has assumed a pivotal role, which requires the acquisition of operational skills to ensure effective communication while preserving the narrative aspects that have historically characterised the dissemination of history. Without such efforts, historians risk becoming irrelevant in the construction and narration of historical processes, which have always been necessary to understand reality and defend a historical, artistic and environmental heritage as precious as that of Italy. The protection of this heritage depends to a large extent on the quality of the historical knowledge of society as a whole.

Italy would be in need of a comprehensive reform of the system, along the lines of the Gentile reform, which would include all levels of education, from pre-school to university, and which would take into account the challenges of contemporary society. Despite the limited investment in education, schooling must continue to play a central role in safeguarding democracy and the common good.

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