

## University of Groningen

### The Rise of Normal Schools in The Kingdom of Italy

Westberg, Johannes; Denaro, Giusy

*Published in:*  
Annali della facoltà di Scienze della formazione Università degli studi di Catania

*DOI:*  
[10.58035/unict-asdf.22.2023.7](https://doi.org/10.58035/unict-asdf.22.2023.7)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2023

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Westberg, J., & Denaro, G. (2023). The Rise of Normal Schools in The Kingdom of Italy: Mass Schooling, Teacher Training and the Feminization of the Teaching Profession, 1859-1911. *Annali della facoltà di Scienze della formazione Università degli studi di Catania*, 22, 123-150. <https://doi.org/10.58035/unict-asdf.22.2023.7>

#### Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

#### Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

*Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.*



THE RISE OF NORMAL SCHOOLS IN THE KINGDOM OF ITALY:  
MASS SCHOOLING, TEACHER TRAINING AND THE FEMINIZATION  
OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION, 1859-1911

of  
*Johannes Westberg, Giusy Denaro*

*Introduction*

The expansion of mass schooling during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has, rightfully, been described as an educational revolution. From being a reality for merely a privileged few, schooling became everyday life for large parts of the school aged population in Europe and North America. As such, it has transformed not only childhood and adolescence in becoming its main formal institution, but also had major impacts on economic development, the functioning of the labour market, and the health, fertility, mortality and identity of individuals<sup>1</sup>.

Concerning gender, this educational revolution had a wide range of consequences that historians of education have continued to explore. One of these concerned two entangled processes: the rise of the teacher profession, and its feminization. In this article, we will explore these processes, deeply intertwined with the expansion of mass schooling, starting from the first fifty years of teacher training in Italy following the Casati Law of 1859. Why was the first so-called normal schools created? How did they develop over time, and how did normal schools for women develop in alignment with normal schools for men? By answering these questions, we will thereby provide further insights into not only the history of normal schools in Italy, but also the dynamics of this 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century educational revolution.

*The expansion of mass schooling*

The nineteenth century expansion of mass schooling can be described using a range of indicators. In quantitative terms, it consisted of an increase in enrolments, attendance and educational attainment. That is, during the 19<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> D. Baker, *The Schooled Society: The Educational Transformation of Global Culture*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2014, p. 7.

century, the share of school aged children formally registered at a primary school increased, along with their attendance rates at school, and the average number of years that children attended school<sup>2</sup>. While the education provided was basic, focusing on reading, writing, math and not the least religious knowledge, this nevertheless meant that school became part of growing up, and that schools and teachers became a self-evident part of society.

This development was guided by the creation of national school acts, and other attempts from central government to promote primary schooling. These included the Batavian school act of 1806, the school acts of 1814 in Denmark, the French Guizot law of 1833, The Somerielos Act of 1838 in Spain, and the Casati Law of 1859 in the Kingdom of Italy. Along with these, state school inspectors, national curricula and central government grants were introduced. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, primary schooling, however, generally remained a decentralized. That is, while national frameworks existed, the organization and funding of primary schooling was mainly the responsibility of local municipalities, parishes, villages, townships or voluntary associations<sup>3</sup>. As a result, 19<sup>th</sup> century schooling featured not only significant national differences, but also striking regional variations. In the race towards schooling for all, North Europe led the way, with relatively high levels of enrolments from Southern Sweden in the North, via Western Prussia, Eastern France, to the Southwest of France and the Northwest of Italy in the South<sup>4</sup>.

Schooling in the Kingdom of Italy provides an excellent illustration of these developments. The Casati Law of 1859 provided the first national regulations by, in essence, extending the primary school system of the Kingdom of Sardinia to the rest of Italy. Similar to other school acts in Europe, it stated that all children should attend school, and that the costs of this new primary school system should be mainly covered by the local government. More specifically, it stated that all children should attend two years of primary school supplied by the municipalities free of charge<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> For educational statistics, see, e.g., R.J. Barro, Chong-hwa Yi, *Education Matters: Global Schooling Gains from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> P. Lindert, *Growing Public: Social Spending and Economic Growth since the Eighteenth Century*, I: *The Story*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004. For an overview over school acts and the history of primary schooling, see: *School Acts and the Rise of Mass Schooling. Education Policy in the Long Nineteenth Century*, cur. J. Westberg, L. Boser, I. Brühwiler, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> G. Cappelli *et al.*, *Human Capital in Europe, 1830s-1930s: A General Survey*, in «Journal of economic surveys» (2023) (ahead of print).

<sup>5</sup> G. Cappelli, *A Struggling Nation since Its Founding? Liberal Italy and the Cost of Neglecting Primary Education*, in *School Acts and the Rise of Mass Schooling cit.*, cur. J. Westberg, L. Boser, I. Brühwiler, 2019.

In comparison to Northern parts of Europe, Italy's primary school system developed in a slower pace. While the regional differences between the South and the North remained striking, the average picture was bleak. The Coppino Law of 1877 was an attempt to promote enrolment and attendance. It increased the required attendance from two to three years, and also provided opportunities for local government to receive central government funding. The levels of central government funding would, however, remain low, at less than two percent of the total municipal expenditure on education<sup>6</sup>. As a result, the enrolment continued to increase in a slow pace. In 1860, 24.7 percent of the school-aged children were enrolled in schools, and in 1890 that share had only increased to 37 percent<sup>7</sup>. This obviously raises questions concerning the development of teacher training in Italy during this period. To what degree was this relatively slow expansion of mass schooling reflected in the expansion of Italian normal schools?

### *Normal schools - for male and female teachers*

Regardless of the speed of expansion, the creation of mass schooling required teachers. Teachers were, obviously, not a new phenomenon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the early modern era, so-called schoolmasters were a well-known trade in Europe. Anthony LaVopa has described Prussian school masters as teachers who served local educational demands in exchange for a small fee, having little or no connection neither to the central government nor other colleagues<sup>8</sup>. In the case of Prussia and Imperial Austria, James Van Horn Melton has similarly described early modern schoolmasters as teachers with little or no training, that did teaching tasks along with other chores in the local community. The result was a position that neither provided the schoolmaster with riches nor with prestige<sup>9</sup>.

While the new teachers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century mass education systems shared the social and economic challenges that faced their predecessors, their position was nevertheless affected by the massive investments

---

<sup>6</sup> G. Cappelli, *A Struggling Nation* cit., p. 237.

<sup>7</sup> J. Westberg, *What Were the Main Features of Nineteenth Century School Acts? Local School Organization, Basic Schooling, a Diversity of Revenues and the Institutional Framework of an Educational Revolution*, in «Rivista di Storia Economica», XXXVI, 2 (2020), p. 147.

<sup>8</sup> A.J. LaVopa, *Prussian Schoolteachers: Profession and Office, 1763-1848*, Chapel Hill, N.C., University of North Carolina Press, 1980, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> J.V.H. Melton, *Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 13-22.

made into this new educational system. Often, this process has been described in terms of professionalization whereby the autonomy, prestige and practices of teachers to, at least some extent, have been recognized by society<sup>10</sup>.

In these changes of mass education and the teaching profession, teacher training was key. Concerning the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Maurits de Vroede has made a distinction between two kinds of teacher training: the German *Lehrerseminar* and the Austrian *Normalschule*. The former typically consisted of three years of theoretical and practical studies, with a practice school attached to the school, and a boarding school system for its teacher students, allowing the students to live at the school. The Austrian *Normalschule* was, on the contrary, not an independent educational institution. Instead, it consisted of a shorter course of a few weeks or a few months at a primary school, which provided the model practices for teacher students to emulate<sup>11</sup>.

The teacher training institutions that followed the expansion of mass schooling varied in organization and content. Here, it is important to note that the term used to denote the school, did not necessarily correlate to the 18<sup>th</sup> century models of teacher training. A good example of this is the French *écoles normales* of the 1830s, which bore clear similarities with the German seminar. These provided a two-year training program that required tuition and boarding fees, even though most teacher students funded their training via scholarships requiring them to work ten years as primary school teachers. As their German counterparts, they were boarding schools, requiring the students to both study and live at the school: consequently, contemporaries often likened women's normal schools to catholic convents, denoting the normal schools as *couvents laïques*<sup>12</sup>. While the curriculum certainly prepared teachers for their future work as teachers, including gardening, singing and administration, it was first during the last six month when students were expected to train their practical teaching skills at a local primary school<sup>13</sup>.

The Swedish *folkskollärarseminarium* was, according to the first national regulations of 1862, organized in a similar way. Based, in part, on a survey

---

<sup>10</sup> For a classic account of the professionalization of teachers, see, e.g., C. Florin, *Kampen Om Katedern: Feminiserings- Och Professionaliseringsprocessen Inom Den Svenska Folkskolans Lärarkår 1860-1906*, Umeå, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987.

<sup>11</sup> M. de Vroede, *The History of Teacher Training: Opening Address of the International Standing Conference on the History of Education (Louvain, 24-27 September 1979)*, in «History of Education», 10, 1 (1981), p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> C.R. Day, *The Rustic Man: The Rural Schoolmaster in Nineteenth-Century France*, in «Comparative Studies in Society and History», 25, 1 (1983), p. 28; L.L. Clark, *Women and the Politics of Education in Third Republic France*, New York (NY), Oxford University Press, 2023, pp. 43-44.

<sup>13</sup> G. Cappelli, *A Struggling Nation* cit., p. 231.

of the study programs of teacher seminars in Prussia, Saxony, Bavaria, Württemberg, a teacher training of three years was instituted. The first two years were theoretical, and the third year included practical teacher training in a primary school<sup>14</sup>. The requirements for a teacher certificate included complete ability in reading, writing, and the ability to teach the catechism, biblical history, geography, history, natural history. A primary school teacher was also expected to have knowledge of monitorial education, to teach basic physical education and church singing<sup>15</sup>. Unlike their French and German counterparts, however, these teacher training schools were not boarding schools.

A key development affecting these teacher training institutions, was the feminization of the teaching profession during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The drivers behind this development varied, and included the lower wages of female teachers, and the restricted occupational opportunities for women<sup>16</sup>. The results were, however, striking. In England and Wales, 60 percent of the teachers were women in 1877, and around 1900, 75 percent of primary school teachers were women in the USA, while corresponding figures were 66 percent in Sweden and 68 percent in Italy<sup>17</sup>.

An important driver in this development, was normal schools for women. In Prussia, the first women's normal school was introduced in 1832, which became the model for such institutions in Massachusetts in 1838. That year also saw the creation of women's normal schools in France, and the following decades such normal schools were created across Europe. In England, the first teacher training college for women was established in 1841, and in 1857, female teacher training institutions were set-up by municipalities and private organizations in the Netherlands<sup>18</sup>. The normal schools for women,

---

<sup>14</sup> C.O. Arcadius, C. Gustafsson, *Folkundervisningskommitténs Betänkande 1 Folkskoleseminarierna, Bd 3 Bilagor: Historik Och Statistiska Utredningar*, Stockholm, Nordiska bokhandeln, 1912, p. 67; A. Linné, *Moralen, Barnet Eller Vetenskapen? En Studie Av Tradition Och Förändring I Lärarutbildningen*, Stockholm, HLS förlag, 1996, pp. 80-81.

<sup>15</sup> J. Westberg, *Basic Schools in Each and Every Parish: The School Act of 1842 and the Rise of Mass Schooling in Sweden*, in *School Acts and the Rise of Mass Schooling* cit., cur. L. Boser, I. Brühwiler, J. Westberg, p. 206.

<sup>16</sup> G. Cappelli, G. Quiroga Valle, *Female Teachers and the Rise of Primary Education in Italy and Spain, 1861-1921. Evidence from a New Dataset*, in «The Economic History Review», 74, 3 (2021), pp. 756-757.

<sup>17</sup> J.C. Albisetti, *The Feminization of Teaching in the Nineteenth Century. A Comparative Perspective*, in «History of Education», 22, 3 (1993), p. 255.

<sup>18</sup> J.C. Albisetti, *The Feminization of Teaching in the Nineteenth Century* cit., pp. 256-57; M. van Essen, *Strategies of Women Teachers 1860-1920. Feminization in Dutch Elementary and Secondary Schools from a Comparative Perspective*, in «History of Education», 28, 4 (1999), p. 421.

created in post-unification Italy after the extension of the Casati Law of 1859 (originally the Law of the of the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia), was in that respect part of an international development.

In Italy, the development of normal schools for women was in various ways linked to a range of historical processes. These included the crisis of monasticism and the closure of religious orders, which had trained girls and governesses had been trained for a long time. In pre-unification Italy, especially in Austrian Lombardy, the presence of female teachers was already well established before unification, often linked to the work of religious congregations, such as the *Clarisse Sacramentarie* (established in Venice in 1806), the *Figlie del Cuore di Gesù* (Verona, 1810), the *Orsoline di Maria Vergine Immacolata* (Gandino, 1818); the *Figlie dell'Addolorata* (Venice, 1821), the *Maestre di S. Dorotea* (Vicenza, 1836 and Venice 1840) and many others.

The proliferation of female teachers affected both the profession and the teacher training institutions in different ways. In some countries, gendered regulations concerning wages were introduced. In Spain and Italy, under the Moyano Law of 1857 and the Casati Law of 1859, female teachers earned a third less than male teachers<sup>19</sup>. Other introduced marriage bans, like was done in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, and there were various regulations concerning what schools and classes women could teach. In Spain, for example, female teachers were not allowed to teach in boy's primary schools, in Imperial Austria, women were only allowed to teach the first four years of primary schools, and the Dutch school act of 1878 recommended that women taught only the youngest children, aged six and seven<sup>20</sup>. While not supported by legislation, similar sentiments were voiced in France, England and Russia<sup>21</sup>.

In terms of education, the normal schools were also adapted to current gendered ideologies. In the Netherlands, female teacher students took special courses in needlework, and in Slovenia, female teacher training included piano playing and women's handicraft<sup>22</sup>. In France, women's normal schools

---

<sup>19</sup> G. Cappelli, G. Quiroga Valle, *Female Teachers and the Rise of Primary Education in Italy and Spain, 1861-1921* cit., pp. 759.

<sup>20</sup> Ivi, p. 758; M. van Essen, *Strategies of Women Teachers 1860-1920* cit., p. 420; M. Paksuniemi, M. Ribarič, J. Westberg, *Unmarried, Well Behaved and Well Dressed. The Socialization Process of Female Teachers in Early Twentieth-Century Finland and Slovenia*, in «Solska kronika / School Chronicle - Journal of The History of Schooling and Education», 28, 3 (2019), p. 297.

<sup>21</sup> J.C. Albisetti, *The Feminization of Teaching in the Nineteenth Century* cit., pp. 259-60.

<sup>22</sup> M. Paksuniemi, M. Ribarič, J. Westberg, *Unmarried, Well Behaved and Well Dressed* cit., p. 302.

stressed the gender specific duties of the woman as mother, housekeeper and female teacher. Apart from adapting the curriculum of the normal school to a suitable level for future primary school teachers, this also meant that the curriculum of these normal schools was tailored to gender specific requirements. Consequently, the third-year science curriculum covered domestic economy, which included housekeeping, meal preparation, laundry and account keeping<sup>23</sup>.

As these examples show, 19<sup>th</sup> century normal schools featured both differences and common traits. These included the length of the teacher training programs, the extent to which boarding facilities were included, and in what way normal schools partook in the feminization of the teaching profession. As such, these examples certainly raise questions concerning how the Italian normal schools related to these international developments.

### *School policies of pre-unification Italy*

The Italian normal schools was the result of a changing social and political context. Prior to the unification of Italy in 1861, Italy was divided into several states. The main ones were: Kingdom of Sardinia, Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, Duchy of Parma and Piacenza, Duchy of Modena and Reggio, Grand Duchy of Tuscany, Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and the Papal States. Among these, the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia – which apart from Sardinia included areas in Northern Italy and the South-West of France – was the only constitutional monarchy of its time on the Italian Peninsula<sup>24</sup>.

In Italy, the first normal schools date back to this pre-unification period. The first normal schools were established in Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia (including the former Duchy of Milan) in 1788. The normal school was created on the initiative of Father Francesco Soave, who had tried to adapt to local needs the normal method of the educationalist and school reformer Johann Ignaz von Felbiger. Other normal schools were created in the Kingdom of Naples (then Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) between 1785 and 1789, by the Roman Catholic monastic order of the Celestines. In Northern Italy, there was also attempts at creating a method school for future teachers. These were made by the educator and theologian Ferrante Aporti around 1840. His pedagogical and didactic conferences were also attended by well-known Italian scholastic reformers, such as Carlo Boncompagni, Antonio Rayneri, Domeni-

---

<sup>23</sup> L.L. Clark, *Women and the Politics of Education in Third Republic France* cit., pp. 54-55.

<sup>24</sup> S. Di Bella, P. Currò, *Il lungo Risorgimento. Rivoluzioni, guerra civile, costituzioni nel Mezzogiorno (1796-1948)*, Vibo Valentia-Messina, Zaleuco, 2011, p. 10.



co Berti, Ferdinando Troya<sup>25</sup>. In the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, starting from the Boncompagni Law of 1848, however, these early attempts at teacher training faced opposition, particularly from the Church. The Jesuits condemned these teacher training institutions harshly and the archbishop of Turin forbade the attendance of clerics<sup>26</sup>.

The proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy on 17 March 1861 was the act that sanctioned, by the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, the birth of the new Italian unitary state, formed with the annexations of most of the states of the Italian Peninsula. The extension of the Casati Law of 1859 from the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia to the whole territory of the new Kingdom of Italy aimed to promote the spread of the primary schools for the masses, which was considered the institution responsible for the formation of the Italians<sup>27</sup>. It was following the unification process that the diffusion of normal schools assumed a major political and cultural importance, being necessary the formation of a teaching profession that was intended to promote the spread of popular literacy, oppose the private and above all religious monopoly in school matters, and instill the moral and civil values on which the new Italian ruling class intended to build the nation<sup>28</sup>.

### *Normal schools following the Casati Law of 1859*

For the first 50 years of the Kingdom of Italy, normal education, like primary education, was distinguished by gender and strongly linked to social gender expectations. According to the Casati Law (the education law of 1859 of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, which was extended after the Unification throughout the national territory), male candidates to normal schools had to be at least 16 years of age, and female candidates at least 15 years. Candi-

---

<sup>25</sup> S. Olivieri, *I maestri, in L'istruzione di base in Italia, 1859-1977*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1978, p. 56.

<sup>26</sup> A. Santoni Rugiu, *Ideologie e programmi nelle scuole elementari e magistrali dal 1859 al 1951*, Firenze, Manzuoli, 1982, p. 28; J. Winandy, *National and Religious Ideologies in the Construction of Educational Historiography. The Case of Felbiger and the Normal Method in Nineteenth Century Teacher Education*, New York, Routledge, 2022; F. Pruneri, *Le riforme della scuola e dei metodi didattici in Sardegna attraverso la corrispondenza Manunta-Cherubini (1826-1844)*, Nuoro, Il Maestrale, 2023.

<sup>27</sup> A. Criscenti, *Classe dirigente e borghesia imprenditrice nel Mezzogiorno*, in *I 150 anni dell'Italia Unita. Per un bilancio pedagogico*, cur. F. Cambi, G. Trebisacce, Pisa, RTS, 2012, in particolare pp. 239-244.

<sup>28</sup> C. Ghizzoni, *Essere Maestri in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, in *Formare alle professioni. Sacerdoti, principi, educatori*, cur. E. Becchi, M. Ferrari, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2009, p. 457.

dates had to pass an entrance examination and have received a certificate of morality issued by the municipality and a certificate of physical health. The duration of the studies was three years: at the end of the second year a lower-grade teaching license could be obtained, allowing teaching to take place in the lower cycle of the primary school (classes I-II); after the three-year period a higher-grade teaching license was obtained, which allowed teaching in the higher cycle of primary schools (classes III-IV) (art. 359).

The subjects taught in the normal schools were: Italian language and literature, geography and national history, arithmetic and geometry, notions of physics, chemistry and natural history, elementary rules of hygiene, linear drawing and calligraphy, pedagogy. In normal schools for women, the teaching of women's work was added (knitting and sewing), while men instead could study agriculture and a course on the elementary notions of rights and duties of citizens (art. 358). From the second year of normal school, there were practical traineeships at an municipal elementary school (art. 360).

The Casati law gave powers to provinces and municipalities to set up male and female magistral schools (*scuole magistrali*) at their own expense, which were a kind of lower teacher training school that prepared their candidates for the lower teacher license (art. 370). A boarding facility, established at the expense of the municipality or the province, was attached to each normal school to allow normal students to find accommodation, especially those who came from places far from where the normal school was based (art. 367). The boarding students were required to pay a fee, but the state provided annually, through public competitions, subsidized places for needy students aspiring to attend normal schools (art. 366). The salaries of normal school-teachers were paid by the State, the costs for the premises and furnishings by the municipalities (art. 363).

The Mamiani Regulation of 24 June 1860 specified the particular physiognomy of these educational institutions, whose purpose was to train "good teachers and educators", teaching students the moral, intellectual and citizenship duties that they would one day have to make children learn and practice. For this reason, the Mamiani Regulation also specified that at the boarding facility, the normal students were required to respect the duties of study and the principles of a good behavior. In the case of magistral schools, it was stipulated that these schools should last at least ten months and that the students should be taught in the same way as in normal schools, confirming that they only permitted the award of a lower grade license<sup>29</sup>.

---

<sup>29</sup> R.d. 24 giugno 1860, *Regolamento per le Scuole normali e magistrali degli Aspiranti Maestri e delle Aspiranti Maestre*, in *Leggi, Decreti e Circolari sulla Pubblica Istruzione*, pp. 11-14.

The De Sanctis Regulation of November 9 1861 offered further clarifications on the order and the teaching programs, adding religion and morality to the subjects already provided by the Casati Law, and introducing in the male course gymnastic and military exercises (art. 1). The boarding facility annexed to normal schools was placed under the moral and disciplinary direction of the Governing Council of the Normal School, composed of the Royal Inspector, the Mayor of the Municipality, the Director of the School and two other members elected every three years by the Provincial Council for Schools, chaired, in turn, by the Royal Superintendent of Studies<sup>30</sup>.

The control of the moral and disciplinary dimension of the teacher training was particularly stressed in the case of women's normal schools. Here, the assistant teacher, in addition to teaching, was responsible for supervising the classes under the orders of the director (art. 3), and a committee of inspectors assisted classes (art. 8). The boards for teacher license examinations were appointed by the Provincial Council, which, once the exams were completed, was responsible for checking that they were in order. The higher-ranking licenses were issued by the Superintendent and the lower-ranking ones by the Inspector. It is, however, important to note that attending a normal school was not required in order to receive a teacher license. If training at a normal school was lacking, a candidate could, after passing the exam, attend one year of practical training at a municipal primary school, at the end of which the district inspector issued a certificate of completed training.

Since the number of licensed primary teachers could not cover the real needs of teacher, and many schools were continuing to be run by teachers without a license, measures were taken to train an increasing number of teachers. With the royal decree of 16 February 1862 no. 475, so-called preparatory schools were established in 16 cities in central and southern Italy. These preparatory schools were 6-month long teacher training schools which provided a more limited education than that of the normal schools. In focus was the school subjects of the first four years of primary schools, which made these schools into something of a post-primary school that reinforced, or repeated, the education that teacher candidates already had been provided with at primary school. These six-month preparatory schools were established with the aim to recruit provisional personnel to be assigned to primary schools pending the introduction of licensed teachers. In fact, at the end of this training, after a written and an oral examination, a certificate was issued

---

<sup>30</sup> R.d. 9 novembre 1861, n. 315, *Che approva i Programmi ed il Regolamento per le Scuole normali e magistrali, e per gli esami di Patente de' Maestri e delle Maestre delle Scuole primarie*.

which gave permission to teach “temporarily” in a lower primary school. This certificate also implied that the student was eligible to attend the normal school.

With the same decree, and with the same objectives, the “magistral conferences” were established, which took place in the capitals of Province and lasted from a few weeks to three months<sup>31</sup>. These conferences initially took the form of “accelerated courses” to train unqualified teachers. Teachers’ participation in these conferences was, however, often hampered by economic problems, because municipalities were not always willing to grant teachers a subsidy enabling them to reach the locations where conferences were organized and to stay there for the period of time required.

At the time of the Matteucci investigation (1864), the normal schools in the Kingdom of Italy were 41. Although this substantial number, the need for trained teachers were significant: Italy required around 50,000 trained teachers, while the Kingdom had only 16,770. An element common to all regions was still the high percentage of ecclesiastical teachers, who constituted about two thirds of the entire teaching profession<sup>32</sup>.

Over time, the share of women in the normal schools increased. A decade after the Casati Law of 1859, the Scialoja survey of secondary education for men and women (1872-75) highlighted the scarcity of pupils in male normal schools and the steady increase in enrolment in normal schools for women<sup>33</sup>. If men could choose, they preferred more well-paid employments, than the often precarious and suffering office of the primary school teacher. As the Ministerial Inspector Scavia had already pointed out during the Fifth Italian Pedagogical Congress (Genoa 1868), the female teachers educated and raised in the cities only rarely and reluctantly accepted to go to teach in rural schools, therefore it was necessary to equip rural schools with teachers who were satisfied with low wages and who were willing to spend their lives benefiting from education those “rough and poor” populations<sup>34</sup>.

---

<sup>31</sup> *L'istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all'età giolittiana*, Fonti per la storia della scuola, I, cur. C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, Roma, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali. Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1994, p. 26. See also *L'altra metà della scuola. Educazione e lavoro delle donne tra Otto e Novecento*, cur. S. Polenghi, C. Ghizzoni, Torino, SEI, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> G. Talamo, *La scuola dalla legge Casati all'inchiesta del 1864*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1960, p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> *L'inchiesta Scialoja sulla istruzione secondaria maschile e femminile 1872-1875*. Fonti per la Storia della Scuola. IV, cur. L. Montevercchi, M. Raicich, Roma, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali. Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1995.

<sup>34</sup> *Atti del V congresso pedagogico italiano tenuto in Genova nel settembre 1868*, pp. 124-125 (citato in C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, *L'istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all'età giolittiana* cit., p. 27).

The mass schooling of the rural areas also faced severe challenges. Teachers in those areas were often barely literate, being the son of modest workers or small landowners. As a result, they were often not able to survive just by teaching, they were reliant on secondary employments including those of organists, master-secretaries, master-tailors, shopkeepers, farmers<sup>35</sup>.

In order to address these challenges that faced rural primary schools, measures were taken. With a circular addressed to the Prefects in 1875<sup>36</sup>, Minister Bonghi invited the provincial school councils to be particularly generous towards candidates from rural communities who wished to attend normal schools and were willing to teach in rural settings after they finalized their teacher training<sup>37</sup>. As for the normal schools for women, Bonghi prescribed that the boarding at those schools should be kept in the most modest terms, so that the female teacher candidates would become used to humble conditions, and not becoming tempted by city life. The resistance of normal students to go to teach in poor places was still denounced by Minister Coppino, in the report to the draft law on compulsory education approved on July 15, 1877 no. 3861. He also noted that if female teacher candidates agreed on teaching in rural areas, their customs and needs made them “hated” or “laughed” in the eyes of the population<sup>38</sup>. In order to face these difficulties, also highlighted by Buonazia in the survey on compulsory education published in 1878, it was decided, with royal decree 24 April 1879 no. 4866, the establishment of rural magistral schools. These magistral schools, just like those provided for in art. 370 of the Casati Law, allowed students to obtain a lower-grade license to teach in lower-grade primary schools.

### *The normal school between change and conservation*

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, further changes were implemented at the normal schools. Firstly, attempts were made at improving the curriculum of these schools. At this point, the dominant educational theories had changed in

---

<sup>35</sup> S. Ulivieri, *I maestri* cit., p. 174. For further insights into the history of teachers secondary employments in rural areas, see, e.g., J. Westberg, *How did teachers make a living? The teacher occupation, livelihood diversification and the rise of mass schooling in nineteenth-century Sweden*, in «History of Education» 48, 1 (2019), pp. 19-40.

<sup>36</sup> Circolare 6 luglio 1875 n. 442, *Sussidi agli alunni agli alunni delle scuole normali*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», 1874 1875, pp. 657-659.

<sup>37</sup> Ivi, p. 658.

<sup>38</sup> G. Bini, *La maestra nella letteratura: uno specchio della realtà*, in *L'educazione delle donne. Scuola e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, cur. S. Soldani, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1989, p. 343.

Italy. In light of new approaches in psychology, general ideas of teaching methods were replaced by notions based on observations and experimental methods. Until then, the teaching of pedagogy in normal schools had not been treated with great attention. Combined with the teaching of morality and religious history, pedagogy was often entrusted to a priest – a choice often justified by the difficulty of finding lay people with experience in the field of education<sup>39</sup>. Still in 1867, the instructions and programs signed by Minister of education Coppino insisted on a “moral” intentionality which was to mark the normal schools<sup>40</sup>. Therefore, he argued, it was believed that the lessons of pedagogy could be conveniently given by the professor of religion, who would take care of the intellectual training of future teachers, but also to make them virtuous<sup>41</sup>.

Steps were, however, taken toward towards reform of the teaching of pedagogy at the normal schools. As evidenced by the minutes of teachers’ pedagogical conferences, there was an increased interest in pedagogy, and Coppino himself also made efforts in that direction. In a circular of 29 January 1878, Coppino noted that the normal schools should not only cater to the teacher candidates’ intellectual education, as they had done in the past. Instead, the normal schools should also renew educational practices in the light of the experimental method<sup>42</sup>.

Secondly, school legislation of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century reflected an expectation of a widened citizenship in Italy, where all literate male citizens received suffrage in 1882. To meet the demand of middle-class women for further study at a higher level, Minister De Sanctis, with royal decree 16 December 1878 no. 4684/ter, established two higher normal schools for women (*Scuole Superiori Femminili di Magistero*) in Rome and Florence. However, the quality of these institutions gave rise to a lot of debate. As noted by Dina Bertoni Jovine, these institutions were, in substance, schools on a significant lower level than the universities since they merely required a completed ex-

---

<sup>39</sup> R. Gentili, *L'insegnamento della pedagogia nelle scuole normali italiane fino alla riforma del ministro Gianturco*, in «Studi di storia dell'educazione», 1 (1984), p. 11; A. Arcomano, *Pedagogia, istruzione ed educazione in Italia (1860-1873)*, Napoli, Edizioni Libreria Sapere, 1986; R. Sani, A. Tedde, *Maestri e istruzione popolare in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, Milano, Vita e pensiero, 2003.

<sup>40</sup> R.d. 10 ottobre 1867, n. 3943, *Istruzioni e programmi per le scuole normali*.

<sup>41</sup> A. Santoni Rugiu, *Ideologia e programmi nelle scuole elementari e magistrali dal 1859 al 1955* cit., p. 145.

<sup>42</sup> Circolare 29 gennaio 1878 n. 538, *Istruzioni intorno alle nuove scuole magistrali per gli insegnanti delle scuole rurali*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione» (1878), pp. 325-327.

am from normal schools, rather than the classical studies provided by Italian secondary schools<sup>43</sup>.

Thirdly, attempts were made at widening the recruitment base for the normal schools. One challenge that faced the normal schools was that many of its potential applicants did not have the knowledge required. This problem occurred mainly in the case of applicants in normal schools for women. In fact, the gap between the final year of primary school and the entry into normal school meant that potential teacher candidates lost some of their reading and writing ability. This was especially a problem for female candidates, since they could not fill the gap years by attending a technical school or a gymnasium.

In order to address this problem, Minister De Sanctis created a two-year “preparatory course” at each normal school (Regulation adopted by royal decree 30 September 1880 no. 5666)<sup>44</sup>. Concerning the normal schools, the De Sanctis Regulation made entrance examinations more difficult and selective, but abolished the bi-annual examinations since they were described as an unnecessary effort for pupils and that they took away valuable time from lessons and practical training exercises<sup>45</sup>. The number of written exams was also restricted to Italian, arithmetic, calligraphy and drawing, while practice lessons were added to the oral tests. Pupils who had reported an annual average grade of 7/10 were exempted from passing examinations from the second to the third year and license exams. In every normal school, a “board of teachers” was established, chaired by the director, with the task of ensuring compliance with the laws, of discussing and approving the teaching programs of each teacher, of choosing the textbooks and fixing the timetable of the lessons.

The regulations concerning the content of this preparatory course were aligned with that of the normal schools. However, it is interesting to note that the teaching of religion and morals was replaced by the teaching of the rights and duties of the citizen<sup>46</sup>. In line with an new kind of interest in pedagogy,

---

<sup>43</sup> D. Bertoni Jovine, *Funzione emancipatrice e contributo delle donne alle attività educative*, in *L'emancipazione femminile in Italia. Un secolo di discussioni (1861-1961)*, a cura della Società umanitaria, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1964, p. 269.

<sup>44</sup> R.d. 30 settembre 1880, n. 5666, *Regolamento per le scuole normali e per gli esami di patente dei maestri elementari*, in «Gazzetta ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», 18-21 ottobre 1880, pp. 2361-2366.

<sup>45</sup> *Insegnare a insegnare. Il tirocinio nella formazione dei docenti. Il caso di Torino*, cur. D. Maccario, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2015, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> In the elementary school programs, this replacement had already occurred with the Coppino Law on the Obligation of Elementary Education (Law n. 3961 of 15 July 1877), where religion was not foreseen but the first notions of the duties of man and the citizen. The question was

the teaching of school subjects was ordered on the basis of the experimental method, and that greater importance was given to the study of the natural sciences<sup>47</sup>.

### *Continuing reforms of the 1880s and 1890s*

During the 1880s and 1890s, further reforms were enacted in order to address the challenges that normal schools as well as primary education in rural areas faces. With the royal decree of 21 June 1883 no. 1590, the Minister Baccelli issued a new regulation for normal schools, aimed at introducing the same criteria of government and the same procedure of the examinations already adopted for other educational institutions. The rural magistral schools, which had been created from the Casati Law and then implemented to train the teachers of the rural areas, were converted into a kind of lower normal schools that only were allowed to issue the lower-grade license (*scuole normali inferiori*) that allowed teachers to teach the first years of primary school.

The urgency of training increasing numbers of teachers was now, however, complemented with an increasing desire to also raise the quality of teacher training. In a circular of 1 October of 1883, the examination committees were recommended to perform their examination of teacher candidates with utmost severity, since the government stressed the number of certified teachers was not the main concern, but that the trained teachers were “good” and “educated”<sup>48</sup>. An important part of the new regulations concerned the pedagogical conferences. These were considered by minister Baccelli as a valid tool to relieve primary teachers of “discouragement and intellectual fatigue” that often marked their profession<sup>49</sup>. With a special regulation of 1883, the pedagogical conferences were provided with a clear structure. They were to be held annually, on topics proposed by the superintendents and submitted to the approval of the ministry<sup>50</sup>.

---

the subject of a bitter discussion between lay people and Catholics: according to the latter, since the norms provided for the teaching of religion in the Casati law had not been explicitly repealed, it could not be considered abolished.

<sup>47</sup> C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, *L'istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all'età giolittiana* cit., p. 48.

<sup>48</sup> Circolare 1 ottobre 1883 n. 722, *Istruzione schiarimenti intorno al regolamento approvato con regio decreto 21 giugno 1883*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione» (1883), pp. 867-870.

<sup>49</sup> Circolare 23 giugno 1881, n. 643, *Conferenze pedagogiche*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione» (1881), p. 545.

<sup>50</sup> Circolare 22 giugno 1883, n. 706, *Circolare e regolamento sulle conferenze pedagogiche*, in C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, *L'istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all'età giolittiana* cit., p. 208.



These changes were also accompanied by reforms of the normal schools. With the royal decree of 14 September 1889 no. 6493<sup>51</sup>, Paolo Boselli issued a new regulation for normal schools, and in addition lengthening the preparatory course, making it into a three-year program<sup>52</sup>. The studies of the preparatory course, were intended to constitute a completion of the primary school, supposed to increase the culture of all those young people who did not want to stop at primary education, even if they did not want to take up a teaching career. These schools would soon become a kind of post-primary school, providing a general education for young women who wanted to extend their educational trajectory, regardless of whether they would attend an in normal school. In that sense, these school might be compared to the French *écoles primaires supérieures*. These were established as a three-year program by the Guizot Law of 1833, which was envisioned as a continuation of the teaching provided in the primary school. That mean that these French upper primary schools were intended to deepen the students' knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics, while also adding more teaching in religion, history, geography and morals<sup>53</sup>.

Within the framework of these regulations, normal schools for women remained structured according to current gendered beliefs. The normal schools for women still stressed traditional female chores, including courses in which the candidates had to show that they had acquired special ability to cut and style linen, and to be questioned about the way to teach sewing in primary school (art. 169). The persistence of these gendered ideals was also evident in the boarding that the normal schools provided. These required the female teacher candidates to take part in the work of the kitchen, to carry out all the services of the boarding house, to learn to breed silkworms, bees, chickens, pigeons, to cultivate flowers and plants, to prepare fruit, preserves etc. (art. 133). In the 1890 Instructions and Programmes, the more traditional stereotypes were once again proposed, stressing the educational importance of women's work, which gave young women the opportunity to remember their destination<sup>54</sup>.

With the royal decree of 11 September 1892 no. 689, Minister Martini modified the programs of the normal schools by reducing the cultural range

---

<sup>51</sup> R.d. 14 settembre 1889 n. 6493, *Regolamento per le scuole normali e per gli esami di patente magistrale*.

<sup>52</sup> Circolare 20 novembre 1889, n. 910, *Regolamento per le scuole normali e per gli esami di patente*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», 1889, pp. 1751-1755.

<sup>53</sup> C.R. Day, *The Development of Higher Primary and Intermediate Technical Education in France, 1800 to 1870*, in «Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques», 3, 2 (1976), p. 50.

<sup>54</sup> R.d. 17 settembre 1890, n. 7161, *Istruzioni e programmi per le scuole normali*.

of the teaching subjects. As in the case of the French normal schools, whose scope also was reduced in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this was done in order to address a fear of political unrest among the working classes, and a perceived over-education of teachers. Martini argued that the normal school programs of 1890, especially those of mathematics and natural sciences, were so extensive that they were more suited to lycées than to schools aimed at training elementary teachers<sup>55</sup>.

Minister Martini also proposed other changes to the organization of the normal schools. In 1893, he promoted the abolition of the lower teacher license, which he believed had now fallen into general disrepute. The lower normal schools, especially the male ones, were now poorly attended, and in the normal school that had the full three-year course few showed up to take the examinations for the lower license at the end of the second year<sup>56</sup>. Martini also proposed reducing the number of male normal schools to 14 (that is, one per region), and abolishing the preparatory courses attached to these schools. Of these proposals, only the one relating to the suppression of the preparatory courses attached to the male normal schools, launched with royal decree of 6 August 1893, no. 477, was accepted.

The need for a comprehensive reform of normal education was felt by Minister Baccelli, who on 25 January 1895 appointed a commission to draw up new regulations. With royal decree of 24 November 1895, the name of the preparatory school changed into “complementary course” (*corso complementare*). These now became a kind of lower secondary school for women, intended to provide a general education preparing them for their female position in family and society<sup>57</sup>. Pedagogy was separated from morality with differentiated programs and schedules. The program for morality provided, in addition to the teaching of principles for an healthy and a proper education, the main rights and duties of man and citizen and, in the third year, some notions of political economy. The history program was entirely rewritten, pro-

---

<sup>55</sup> Relazione al re premessa al r.d. 11 settembre 1892, in «Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione» (1892), p. 1638. Concerning the French normal schools, see C.R. Day, *The Rustic Man: The Rural Schoolmaster in Nineteenth-Century France*, in «Comparative Studies in Society and History» 25, 1 (1983), pp. 29-30.

<sup>56</sup> After 1883, these normal schools that provided complete 3-year courses were at times denoted as higher normal schools (*scuole normali superiori*), since they prepared teacher candidates for the higher license allowing teachers to teach also the last years of the primary school. These normal schools should, however, not be confused with the *Scuole Superiori di Magistero* of Pisa and Florence which were intended to train secondary school teachers.

<sup>57</sup> Relazione al re premessa al r.d. 24 novembre 1895, in «Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione» (1896), pp. 22-24.

viding in the first year the study of medieval history, in the second of modern history and in the third of ancient history.

With the law of 12 July 1896 no. 293, signed by Minister Gianturco, the lower license of the normal schools (providing a license to teach the first two years of elementary schools) was definitively abolished, and the teaching subjects underwent some changes. In complementary schools the teaching of French became compulsory, and in the normal course the teaching of computisteria was added to mathematics. Moreover, a tuition fee was now also required in order to attend complementary courses and the normal schools, as was already the case in gymnasiums and technical schools. By decree of 3 December 1896 no. 592, kindergarten teacher training was also introduced to this system. In order to obtain the special qualification of kindergarten teacher, students already holding a higher-grade license had to train for a year at the kindergarten attached to the school and take a practical test in the presence of the director of the school, the teacher of pedagogy and the teacher of the kindergarten.

With royal decree of 19 October 1897 no. 460, Minister Codronchi also made further changes to the curriculum of the complementary courses and the normal schools. In the complementary schools, accounting and agronomy were added as new subjects. In the normal schools, pedagogy, geography and mathematics programs were reorganized, calligraphy programs were simplified and made less abstract, physics, chemistry and natural history programs were completely revised. Manual work became compulsory in all normal schools, both male and female.

### *Changing regulations of exams and the introduction of co-education*

The Italian system of mass schooling continued to develop slowly. According to the survey conducted by Ravà in 1897-98<sup>58</sup>, this was attributed to the poverty of municipalities and families, the excessive distance of the school from home, but also to the cultural and professional level of teachers<sup>59</sup>. Minister Gallo lamented that the expansion of normal school enrolments had reduced the quality of the teacher training programs, which concerned not the least the changes made to reduce the number of exams during

---

<sup>58</sup> *L'istruzione elementare nell'anno scolastico 1897-98. Relazione a S.E. il Ministro*, in «Bollettino Ufficiale del Ministero dell'Istruzione Pubblica», 2 (1900).

<sup>59</sup> T. Tomasi, *Da Matteucci a Corradini. Le inchieste sulla scuola popolare nell'Italia liberale*, in *Problemi e momenti della storia della scuola e dell'Educazione*, Pisa, ETS, 1982, p. 130.

the teacher training programs<sup>60</sup>. By a decree of 23 August 1900, Minister Gallo consequently repealed the provisions that had abolished the examinations of passage from one class to another and the license exams for those who obtained simple sufficiency in year-end votes. With a circular of 31 August of the same year, he ordered that no one could be exempted from the exams of complementary and normal schools, unless for subjects who had obtained a score of not less than 8/10 in the final exam<sup>61</sup>.

These radical changes were, however, to some extent soon repealed. The decree of Minister Nasi of 12 June 1902 no. 175, returned to support the discretion of the board of teachers to confer teacher licenses to teacher candidates without a final exam, taking into account the average of the bi-monthly or quarterly tests (Art. 1). In a subsequent circular, it was reiterated that promotion or license without exams should not be an exception for the best, but the “rule” for all those who are eligible for promotion, on the basis of daily tests of “diligence” and “profit”<sup>62</sup>.

In the years that followed, the problem of teacher license without exams became increasingly controversial. In 1904 a special commission was appointed, chaired by the new minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, with the task of collecting and publishing all the provisions concerning the examinations of middle schools (classical, technical, normal and complementary), special schools dependent on the Ministry of Education, and primary schools<sup>63</sup>. A new regulation, adopted by the royal decree of 13 October 1904, stipulated that normal school students who had obtained a sufficient teaching aptitude could obtain the teacher license without completing the year of training, which remained compulsory for applicants from private or paternal schools. In the examinations of the complementary and normal schools a written test of mathematics was added, while the exam to obtain the diploma of kindergarten teacher was made more complex with the addition, to the practical lesson, of a written and oral test of pedagogy, oral tests on all subjects taught during the course and practical tests of Froebelian works.

On 30 March 1909, Minister Rava, noting the growing need for new teachers, presented the Chamber with a bill for the establishment of new nor-

---

<sup>60</sup> Relazione al re premessa al r.d. 23 agosto 1900, n. 317, in «Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», (1900), pp. 1544-1547.

<sup>61</sup> Circolare 31 agosto 1900 n. 68, *Esami di licenza normale e complementare*, in «Bollettino Ufficiale ministero della Pubblica Istruzione» (1900), pp. 1548-1549.

<sup>62</sup> Circolare 14 giugno 1902 n. 43, sugli esami di ammissione, di promozione e dirigenza nelle scuole secondarie classiche, tecniche, normale complementari, in «Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione» (1902), pp. 1007-1009.

<sup>63</sup> «Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione» (1904), pp. 1546-1547.

mal schools<sup>64</sup>. In order to overcome the problem of the normal schools which were poorly attended, which risked leading to the closure of mainly male schools, the bill proposed that normal schools should be made co-educational. The law of 19 July 1909 no. 525 gave the government the right to create co-educational normal schools and complementary schools (art. 2). In order to enact this law, the minister Credaro issued by royal decree of 10 April 1910 no. 278 a special regulation. According to this regulation, the superintendent, the provincial physician, the chief engineer of the civil engineering, or his delegate, was required to visit the school premises, to ensure that it could accommodate students of both sexes.

There were also further requirements, if a normal school was to become co-educational. In order for a normal school for women to also accept male candidates, the municipality had to provide a boy's primary school, where the candidates could carry out their practical training. In order for a normal school for men to become mixed, a girl's primary school and a kindergarten were to be provided for the same purpose (art. 2). In addition, the classrooms of the normal school should preferably have two entrance doors and be large enough to accommodate male and female students without any inconvenience. Students could not attend theoretical or practical lessons reserved exclusively for programmes for the opposite sex (art. 7). At the end of the school year, the director should have sent a report on the educational and disciplinary progress of the school to the superintendent (art. 10), which the superintendent in turn should have sent to the Ministry with his own observations.

However, transforming poorly attended normal schools into co-educational schools, was not enough to solve the challenges that faced these schools. As a result, on 14 December 1910, Minister Credaro returned to address to the Chamber the problem of the teacher crisis<sup>65</sup>. The Minister made several proposals to increase the number of schools which would provide teacher training. He suggested that gymnasium courses in the secondary school, many of which were located in small towns or villages without normal schools, should be used for the preparation of new teachers, establishing one or two years of pedagogical studies and experimental training<sup>66</sup>. The proposal was followed by the law of 25 May 1913, which gave the government the power to proceed with the total or partial transformation of colleges, conservatories, educators and other educational institutions including gymnasi-

---

<sup>64</sup> «Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione» (1909), pp. 1702-1707.

<sup>65</sup> «Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione» (1910), pp. 3654-3690.

<sup>66</sup> *Ivi*, p. 3660.

ums, into complementary or normal schools. Proposals for conversion were normally the responsibility of the Ministry, but not infrequently they came from the local authorities themselves. Once the needs to train teachers have been met, at the request of the municipalities, normal schools could be transformed into middle schools more suited to local needs.

To conclude, this debate concerning exams and co-education indicate the challenges that still faced normal schools at the turn of the century. In some respects, the school reforms had been successful. The number of normal schools had increased from 41 normal schools in 1863-64 (20 male and 21 female), to 150 in 1916-17<sup>67</sup>. In addition, 115 complementary schools had been established<sup>68</sup>. Despite the multiple reform attempts presented above, and a widespread awareness of the inadequacy of normal schools, the notion of normal school which provided a true higher education for teachers, was always rejected, considered a waste of resources, if not a risk to the social order<sup>69</sup>. The professional figure of the future teacher had to be framed within these limits, which would have remained substantially unchanged until the Gentile Reform of 1923<sup>70</sup>.

### *Women's normal schools and the compromise of knowledge*

An historical analysis of the evolution of the institutional physiognomy of the normal school cannot ignore the phenomenon of its feminization. From being populated by a majority of male students, the share of female teacher students soon rose. In 1861-62, the student population of normal schools numbered 2,947 boys and 2,795 girls; in 1875-76, 1,248 boys and 5,227 girls; in 1881-82, 1,238 and 7.482; in 1899 the males were 1.323 and the females 19.864<sup>71</sup>. That is, the share of female students rose from 49 percent in 1861-62, to a staggering 94 percent in 1899.

---

<sup>67</sup> V. Schirripa, *Insegnare ai bambini. Una storia di maestre e maestri in Italia*, Roma, Carocci, 2022, p. 30.

<sup>68</sup> *Gli istituti per la istruzione media e normale e la loro popolazione scolastica negli anni 1911-12 a 1916-17*, a cura dell'Ufficio Centrale di Statistica, Roma, Società poligrafica italiana, 1921, p. X (v. C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, *L'istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all'età giolittiana* cit., p. 27).

<sup>69</sup> R. Fornaca, *Scuola e politica nell'Italia liberale*, in *Scuola e politica dall'unità ad oggi*, Torino, Stampatori, 1977 p. 58.

<sup>70</sup> C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, *L'istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all'età giolittiana* cit., p. 33.

<sup>71</sup> A. Santoni Rugiu, *Orientamenti culturali, strumenti didattici, insegnanti e insegnamenti*, in A. Santoni Rugiu et al., *Storia della scuola e storia d'Italia dall'Unità ad oggi*, Bari, De Donato, 1982, p. 15.

An explanation to this development, which reflects the feminization of the teaching profession seen in most European countries, are to be found in social, economic and cultural structures. In post-unification Italy, teacher training provided a rare opportunity for women who wanted to educate themselves beyond primary education. This was true both for women who wanted to emancipate themselves socially and culturally, and for those who aimed at economic independence<sup>72</sup>. Teacher training was also promoted by men. Both secular and catholic stakeholder argued that the formation of women should be aimed at improving their ability to carry out the maternal mission, either within the family or as an extension of their natural abilities in education and social care. During the fourth pedagogical congress held in Florence in 1864, Senator Raffaello Lambruschini expressed with great solemnity the undisputed bond between women and education, declaring their aptitudes of patience and self-sacrifice<sup>73</sup>. Women therefore appeared to the ruling class and to the intellectuals of the time, as the subject most inclined to carry out the educational function, in a perspective that attributed to the teaching vocation the same sacredness of the maternal role, always in a vision of safeguarding the moral order and social hierarchies<sup>74</sup>.

In this support of the teacher training, we can thus identify a kind of compromise of knowledge, where women are allowed to reach a certain level of education. But not for reasons of emancipation, but in accordance with a certain male logic. Evidence of this compromise can be found in a boundless pedagogical literature aimed at defining how to educate the mother-woman, which permeated the school programs and textbooks, philosophical and religious thinking and, in the last decades of the century, also the texts of medicine and anthropology of positivistic inspiration.

Evidence of such a compromise is also found in how teacher training was organized. The fact that preparatory courses for teaching in kindergartens were reserved only for women demonstrates the persistence of the assumption that women were best suited to early childhood care and education. This compromise is also indicated by the regulations, reflecting regulations elsewhere in Europe, that women were only allowed to teach the first years of boy's primary schools. The reason for this was that women were not believed

---

<sup>72</sup> C. Covato, *Maestre d'Italia. Uno sguardo sull'età liberale*, in «Storia delle donne», 8 (2012), pp. 165-166. Vedi anche: A. Santoni Rugiu, *Maestre e maestri. La difficile storia degli insegnanti elementari*, Roma, Carocci, 2006.

<sup>73</sup> *Atti del quarto congresso pedagogico italiano, tenuto in Firenze nel settembre del 1864, pubblicati per cura della Società pedagogica italiana*, Milano, Tipografia di Domenico Salvi e C., 1864, p. 23.

<sup>74</sup> C. Covato, *Maestre d'Italia* cit., p. 167.

to be able to provide older boys with an example of strength, courage, and virility<sup>75</sup>. Even behind the seemingly liberal efforts to create co-educational normal schools, there were patriarchal conception of the separate destinies of men and women<sup>76</sup>.

As a result, women's normal schools had the features of a compromise. On the one hand, the normal schools constituted an exceptional channel within the Italian school system, giving women an essential function for the social development of the country and at the same time guaranteeing them professional employment as primary school teachers<sup>77</sup>. This was remarkable, since women previously had not been allowed to hold public positions, and the gymnasiums, lycées and technical schools had remained almost exclusively male until the early 1900s). On the other hand, the tendency to lower the academic credentials of the normal schools, and instead allowing them to prepare women for their future female occupations, contrasted with the emerging emancipatory conscience that manifested itself in women's claim for new rights<sup>78</sup>.

Nevertheless, female teachers in Italy took their first steps towards emancipation within a cultural climate that did not protect them, either economically and socially. From the Casati Law of 1859 until the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the salary of women teachers was one-third lower than that of male colleagues and was even lower in rural schools. Although the behavior of female teachers was bound by strict moral rules (otherwise the mayor could not issue the certificate of morality which was necessary for teaching), teacher was a socially acceptable employment for women. In that respect, the contrast is stark to other higher cultural professions that were harshly stigmatized<sup>79</sup>. There is a clear contrast between the emphasis with which official culture celebrated the female teacher, and a society that until 1919 consid-

---

<sup>75</sup> M. Dei, *Colletto bianco, grembiule nero. Gli insegnanti elementari italiani tra l'inizio del secolo e il secondo dopoguerra*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1994.

<sup>76</sup> C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, *L'istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all'età giolittiana* cit., p. 19.

<sup>77</sup> D. Bertoni Jovine, *Funzione emancipatrice e contributo delle donne alle attività educative*, in *L'emancipazione femminile in Italia. Un secolo di discussioni (1861-1961)*, a cura della Società umanitaria, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1964, p. 269.

<sup>78</sup> C. Covato, *Un'identità divisa. Diventare maestra in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, Roma, Archivio Guido Izzi, 1996, p. 58. Vedi anche: A. Buttafuoco, "In servitù regime". *Educazione ed emancipazione nella stampa politica femminile*, in *L'educazione delle donne* cit., pp. 363-391; S. Soldani, *La fortunosa conquista di un'istruzione secondaria da parte delle donne*, in *La donna in Italia, 1848-1914. Unite per unire*, cur. E. Bruni, P. Foglia, M. Messina, Cinisello Balsamo, Silvana, 2011, pp. 15-26.

<sup>79</sup> C. Covato, *Maestre d'Italia* cit., p. 168.



ered women naturally subject to husband's authority, and until 1945 did not allow women the right to vote.

The growing number of female normal school students and female teachers, which was due to the development of two closely related educational institutions (the popular primary school and the normal school), intersected the existential events of many young women who lent themselves to a profession marked by the compromises mentioned above. They were provided with the opportunities that training at a normal school, and employment in a primary school, offered, but was also affected by the persistence of prejudices and various forms of obstructionism<sup>80</sup>.

The most painful literary reconstructions, often autobiographical, show how the adventure of teaching had represented for many Italian women, was turned into something else. For these women, mostly belonging to the petty bourgeoisie or to the working classes of modest condition, their experiences of teaching was that of a socially fragile position marked by isolation and loneliness, backbiting, disease, and violence<sup>81</sup>.

The female normal schools, as the position of female teachers, nevertheless won a more secure position at the dawn of the twentieth century. The internal logic of the workers' movements, the development of socialist doctrines, the formation of women's associations, the dense thickening of debates, would all contribute to shedding further light on the challenges that female teachers faced<sup>82</sup>.

<sup>80</sup> Ivi, p. 173.

<sup>81</sup> R. Certini, *Bambini e scolari nelle memorie e nei diari di maestri e maestre: tra biografia e racconto*, in *Itinerari nella storia dell'infanzia. Bambine e bambini, modelli pedagogici e stili educativi*, cur. C. Covato, S. Olivieri, Milano, Unicopli, 2001; G. Bini, *La maestra nella letteratura: uno specchio della realtà*, in *L'educazione delle donne* cit., pp. 331-362. For an overview of the violence that female teachers could face, see, e.g., S. Backman Prytz, J. Westberg, "Arm the Schoolmistress!" *Loneliness, Male Violence, and the Work and Living Conditions of Early Twentieth-Century Female Teachers in Sweden*, in «History of Education Quarterly», 62, 1 (2022), pp. 18-37. For the emblematic Italian case of the teacher Italia Donati see: E. Belotti Gianini, *Prima della quiete: storia di Italia Donati*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2003; P. Luciani, *La condizione delle maestre italiane alla fine dell'Ottocento. Il caso Italia Donati*. Teramo: Galaad Edizioni, 2012; C. Martinelli, "Quanti la lessero, ne piansero". *Stampa, opinione pubblica e inchiesta Donati*, in «Diacronie, Studi di Storia Contemporanea», 2, fasc. 34 (2018): pp. 1-19.

<sup>82</sup> E. Garin, *La questione femminile nelle varie correnti ideologiche degli ultimi cento anni*, in *L'emancipazione femminile in Italia*, pp. 36-37; A. Buttafuoco, *Questioni di cittadinanza. Donne e diritti sociali nell'Italia liberale*, Siena, Protagon, 1997; *L'altra metà della scuola* cit., 2008; C. Gori, *Crisalidi. Emancipazioniste liberali nell'età giolittiana*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2010; P. Wilson, *Le italiane. Biografia del Novecento*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2011. For a reconstruction of the trade union debate, in particular within the National Magistral Union, see: A. Barausse, *L'Unione magistrale nazionale: dalle origini al fascismo, 1901-1925*, Brescia, La scuola, 2002; A. Dessardo, *L'Associazione magistrale "Niccolò Tommaseo". Storia di maestri*

## *Conclusions*

We began this article by focusing the reader's attention on how the expansion of mass education during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries characterized a true educational revolution in many parts of the world<sup>83</sup>. In the "long" European 19<sup>th</sup> century (1789-1914), the progressive spread of mass education was closely linked to the rise of modern empires and the emergence of principles as modernization, secularization, centrality of political power and state authority.

An integral part of this process was the "secularization" of the teaching profession. Countries such as Italy had previously seen nuns, priests, missionaries and other figures related to the clerical sphere serving as a literate class in charge of moral education, making religious orders a privileged and almost exclusive place of teacher training. The new nation states of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had transformed the teachers into "public officials", counting on them as agents of change, on the wave of cultural, social, political and economic transformations that were affecting the entire continent<sup>84</sup>.

As we have shown in the introductory part of this essay, in many countries of Europe and North America, the proliferation of mass education was closely linked to the institutional path of normal schools. In the Italian peninsula the training of elementary teachers was not unknown before 1861 and the first normal schools dated back to before the pre-unification period<sup>85</sup>, but the diffusion of both these sectors of education played a fundamental role in the process leading to the construction of the Italian Nation. The primary school for the masses was the institution responsible for the formation of the Italians: to realize their political, economic and cultural unity, to socialize their models and customs, to build their "national consciousness" by means of a widespread basic education.

---

*cattolici 1906-1930*, Roma, AVE, 2018; R. Moscati, *Le radici storiche delle maestre. Indagine sulle origini sociali degli insegnanti elementari nei primi decenni del '900*, in «Polis», 3 (1992).

<sup>83</sup> See David Baker, *The Schooled Society: The Educational Transformation of Global Culture* cit.

<sup>84</sup> S.Y. Lee, J. Winandy, *Scientization of professional teacher knowledges and construction of teaching methods*, in «Paedagogica Historica» (2021), pp. 2-3.

<sup>85</sup> *L'istruzione in Italia tra Sette e Ottocento. Da Milano a Napoli: casi regionali e tendenze nazionali*, cur. A. Bianchi, Brescia, La Scuola, 2012; Id., *L'istruzione in Italia tra Sette e Ottocento. Dal Regno di Sardegna alla Sicilia borbonica. Istituzioni scolastiche e prospettive educative*, Brescia, Scholè, 2019; Id., *L'istruzione in Italia tra Sette e Ottocento. Lombardia, Veneto, Umbria*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2007; F. Pruneri, A. Bianchi, *School reforms and university transformations and their function in Italy from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries*, in «History of Education», 1 (2010), pp. 115-136.

To answer to the first question posed to this essay – Why was the normal schools created in Italy? – we have to consider, on the one hand, the European process that linked teacher training to the extension of mass education, which began at the end of the eighteenth century and preceded in Italy the State unification. However, we also need to relate them to the process of nation building, which began with the extension of the Casati law in the kingdom of Italy. The Italian normal schools were responsible to train those teachers who should “make the Italians”, if we are to use the emblematic expression of the politician and patriot Massimo D’Azeglio: “Fatta l’Italia bisogna fare gli Italiani” (“Made Italy, must make the Italians”). It was precisely because of these objectives of “civilization” that normal schools received interest from Italian legislators.

Concerning how the Italian normal schools have developed over time, we cannot fail to note their progressive feminization. Although they provided opportunities for women, we must also note that they clearly did not signify what can be defined as true gender emancipation. Here, it is important to recognize that neither women’s normal schools or the co-educational normal schools were created to promote gender equality. The former were established in an attempt to meet the demand of trained teachers, and the latter was an attempt to save previously all-male normal schools from being closed. The normal schools were also well-adapted to current gender ideologies, manifested in the insistence on exercising what were considered to be the specific duties of women. This, as was clearly shown in the opening pages of this article, aligned normal Italian schools with an international trend.

Beyond the educational models distinguished by gender, both in the normal schools for women and in the normal schools for men, there was a general tendency to reduce the curriculum and to simplify the culture imparted, especially the scientific, fearing that excessive education might encourage emancipatory pressures and jeopardize the social order. The normal school for women, in some way, served to channel the aspirations of the middle class woman for social ascent, and to remove her from excessive pretensions.

The case of normal education raises, in fact, historiographically relevant questions concerning the relationship between political choices and educational practices, economic instances and moral attitudes. The historiography of school and education insists more and more on the need to look at the history of school as an integral part of social history, and on the need to integrate the dimension of local history with nationwide studies. Regarding the history of education in Italy during the nineteenth century, the most recent historiography tends to investigate the elements of “continuity” and “rup-

ture” in the passage from the varied panorama of the pre-unification States to the national dimension of the Kingdom of Italy<sup>86</sup>.

However, until the late 1990s, normal schools were treated only sporadically in historical research. According to Carmela Covato, this was a symptom of a questionable conviction of the political and cultural marginality of the normal school, compared to other educational institutions which have received a special historiographical attention<sup>87</sup>. An intention for the future is to

---

<sup>86</sup> S. Pivato, *Pane e grammatica. L'istruzione elementare in Romagna alla fine dell'800*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1983; *Scuola e educazione in Emilia Romagna fra le due guerre*, cur. A. Berselli, V. Telmon, Bologna, CLUEB, 1983; A.M. Bernardinis, *Il dibattito sui problemi dell'educazione dopo l'Unità, in Storia della cultura veneta*, VI, Vicenza 1986; M. Cuaz, *Alle frontiere dello Stato. La scuola elementare in Valle d'Aosta dalla Restaurazione al fascismo*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1988; T. Russo, *Culture e scuole in Basilicata nell'Ottocento*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1995; F. Cambi, *La Toscana e l'educazione. Dal Settecento a oggi tra identità regionale e laboratorio nazionale*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 1998; *Maestri e istruzione popolare in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, cit.; M. D'Ascenzo, *Tra centro e periferia. La scuola elementare a Bologna dalla Daneo-Credaro all'avocazione statale (1911-1933)*, Bologna, CLUEB, 2006; Ead., *La scuola elementare nell'età liberale. Il caso di Bologna 1859-1911*, Bologna, CLUEB, 1997; S. Re, *La formazione femminile e la figura professionale della maestra elementare. Il caso di Parma nel primo quindicennio postunitario*, in «Annali di storia moderna e contemporanea», 4 (1998), pp. 201-219; F. Pruneri, *Oltre l'alfabeto. L'istruzione popolare dall'Unità d'Italia all'età giolittiana: il caso di Brescia*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2006; T. Bertilotti, *Maestre a Lucca: comuni e scuola pubblica nell'Italia liberale*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2006; M. Piseri, *La scuola normale per la formazione delle maestre stelline*, in *La vita fragile. Infanzia, disagi e assistenza nella Milano del lungo Ottocento*, cur. C. Cenedella, S. Giuliacci, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2013, pp. 125-136. It is worth mentioning here the huge objective of the PRIN Project 2005 “For a historical atlas of the education of men and women from the age of reforms to 1859. A comparative analysis of ancient Italian states”, directed by Angelo Bianchi and aimed at examining, through quantitative research, the development of school systems in the pre-unitary Italian states.

<sup>87</sup> Before the nineties, some elements for the historical reconstruction of the development of normal schools in Italy were found in: D. Bertoni Jovine, *Funzione emancipatrice e contributo delle donne all'attività educativa*, in *L'emancipazione femminile in Italia: un secolo di discussioni (1861-1961)*, a cura della Società Umanitaria, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1964, pp. 223-269; I. Zambaldi, *Storia della scuola elementare in Italia*, Roma, LAS, 1975; S. Ulivieri, *I maestri*, in *L'istruzione di base nella politica scolastica dall'unità ai giorni nostri (1859-1977)*, cur. T. Tomasi, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1978, pp. 165-184; E. De Fort, *Storia della scuola elementare in Italia, I: Dall'Unità all'età giolittiana*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1979; *Documenti e ricerche per la storia del Magistero*, cur. G. Di Bello, A. Mannucci, A. Santoni Rugiu, Firenze, Manzuoli, 1980; A. Santoni Rugiu, *Ideologie e programmi nelle scuole elementari e magistrali dal 1859 al 1955*, Firenze, Manzuoli, 1980; F. De Vivo, *La formazione del maestro dalla legge Casati ad oggi*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1986; *Le donne a scuola. L'educazione femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, cur. I. Porciani, Firenze, Il Sedicesimo, 1987. An international comparison on the topic had been had, in the same years, with the Conference *Teacher training in Europe in the Period up to 1914* (Louvain 1979), which aimed to investigate the condition of the male and female master class, both primary and secondary, through the identification of three specific areas: “evolution of the institutional offer”, “development of study programmes”, “training, status and

analyze the historical and political development of these educational institutions in relation to reforms and transformations in the Italian school system, to the influence of new theories and approaches in the wider European context, but also in the plurality and concreteness of local accents<sup>88</sup>.

#### ABSTRACT

The expansion of mass schooling between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was followed by increasing investments in teacher training. The feminization of the teaching profession was a widespread phenomenon, while differing in characteristics between countries and regions, raising questions of moral, social, economic nature. This article delves into the intricate processes of the educational revolution, particularly focusing on the creation of normal schools, the rise of the teaching profession and its feminization in Italy following the Casati Law of 1859. As a result, this article provides insights into the recurrent reforms of teacher training institutions, the gradual feminization of these training teacher institutions, and their curricular differentiation from their male counterparts.

L'espansione dell'istruzione di massa tra il XIX e il XX secolo comportò crescenti investimenti nella formazione degli insegnanti. La femminilizzazione della professione docente costituì un fenomeno diffuso, pur con caratteristiche diverse a seconda dei paesi e delle regioni, sollevando questioni di natura morale, sociale, economica. Questo articolo approfondisce gli intricati processi di tale rivoluzione educativa e scolastica, concentrandosi in particolare sulla creazione delle scuole normali, sull'ascesa della professione docente e sulla sua femminilizzazione in Italia a seguito della Legge Casati del 1859. Di conseguenza, questo articolo fornisce approfondimenti sull'evoluzione normativa degli istituti preposti alla formazione degli insegnanti elementari, sulla loro graduale femminilizzazione e sulla differenziazione curricolare delle scuole normali femminili dalle loro controparti maschili.

---

social functions". M. de Vroede, *The History of Teacher Training: Opening Address of the International Standing Conference on the History of Education (Louvain, 24-27 September 1979)*, in «History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society», 10,1 (1981), pp. 1-8.

<sup>88</sup> The study that we wanted to present here, is part and premise of a larger study, which engages Giusy Denaro, as part of her doctoral path, in a research that aims to investigate the figure of the primary school teacher in southern Sicily and the contribution offered by the Scuola Normale Femminile of Catania in their training between 1861 and 1914, with historiographical and critical approach and using the cross-consultation of local archival sources. Various other contributions relating to the local reconstruction of the Italian normal schools, signed by Pazzaglia, Bertilotti, Barausse, Rossi, Ghizzoni, Gaudio, De Vivo, Colaci, Serra, are collected in the monographic section dedicated to pedagogical schools of the magazine «Annali di Storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche» (2003-2004).