

«History of Education & Children's Literature» (Hecl), five years on. An ongoing assessment

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In June 2006, presenting the first issue of this journal, we wrote: «With the setting up of *History of Education & Children's Literature* we primarily intended to create international connections with experts in the field and with research groups working in various European and non European countries. We hope to promote a profitable and crucial comparison on methodological aspects among scholars, and an equally significant interdisciplinary approach to themes and issues, then to contribute to the diffusion of the most important results of national and international researches. Last, but not least, we aim at reporting the activities of institutions and specialised organizations, in Europe and other continents, which work in the field of documentation and research both on the history of education – in its larger meaning – and on the history of literature for children and young people»¹.

Five years after that presentation, although aware that not so many years have passed, and that a scientific and cultural project, such as that promoted through the journal, requires a much longer period in order for all of its potential to emerge and develop, it is perhaps worth attempting to make an ongoing assessment of what has been achieved so far, to provide a first – and

¹ R. Sani, *History of Education & Children's Literature (HECL)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», I, 1, 2006, pp. 3-7: quotation from p. 3.

certainly temporary – evaluation of the role played by «History of Education & Children's Literature» regarding the promotion and dissemination of research results and of the renewal, at an international level, of historical-educational studies and work conducted on children's literature.

Some outstanding scholars have already mentioned the novelty represented, in the panorama of international scientific journals in the field, by «History of Education & Children's Literature», capturing the full value of the broad project as well as the constant striving for a model of dissemination of the results of the historical-educational research, able to combine the rigour and methodology of historiography with the openness to an interdisciplinary approach and a comparative dimension, and finally with the truly international nature of studies and researchers involved². Such considerations provide an opportunity to focus on the basic trends which have characterised the journal in these first five years of publication and, more particularly, on the specific content proposed, as well as on the growing success it has enjoyed, at an international level, among scholars and research institutions in this sector.

But, in order to analyse more effectively the merits of the work done, perhaps some quantitative data should be offered that can shed light on the features and extent of the experience of dissemination and promotion of the historical-educational research carried out so far.

In ten issues, printed between 2006 and 2010, «History of Education & Children's Literature» has published a total of 204 scientific articles and contributions of various kinds accepted in its five sections («Essays and Researches», «Sources and Documents», «Critical Reviews», «Discussions» and «Scientific News and Activities of Research Centres»), and 95 reviews in the section dedicated to presenting new books.

Of the articles and contributions mentioned, 92 were written in Italian (45%), 87 in English (42.6%), 19 in French (9.3%), 6 in Spanish (2.9%), 2 in German (0.9%) and 1 in Portuguese (0.49%). As regards the authors, the presence of Italian scholars is clearly predominant (148), but the contributions by specialists and researchers from Spain was also very important (16), Belgium (14), France (11), U.S.A. (6), Russia (5), Brazil (5), Germany (4), China (4), Hungary (4), Argentina (2), Sweden (2), Switzerland (2) and Portugal (2); equally significant and very encouraging, for diverse reasons, was the presence of single articles and contributions from English, Greek, Luxembourg, Slovak, Croatian, Japanese, Iranian, Mongol and Australian scholars³.

² Here we limit ourselves to recalling the important contribution by B. Sureda, *History of Education & Children's Literature (HECL), un ambiciós projecte de divulgació científica*, «Educató i Història. Revista d'Història de l'Educató», 13, gener.-juny 2009, pp. 173-176 (for the full-text article see: <<http://revistes.iec.cat/index.php/EduH/article/view/581/580>>, last access: May 15th, 2011).

³ Naturally, the total number of authors does not correspond with the number of articles and contributions published, since some are signed by more than one author.

If we consider the contributions published in the five-year period within the diverse sections of the journal, the following situation can be outlined:

- in the «Essays and Researches» section: out of a total of 136 articles printed, 66 were in English (48.5%), 51 in Italian (37.5%), 12 in French (8.8%), 4 in Spanish (2.9%), 2 in German (1.4%) and 1 in Portuguese (0.7%);
- in the «Sources and Documents» section: 14 articles were published, 13 in Italian and 1 in English;
- in the section «Critical Reviews» section: 11 articles were published, 9 in Italian and 2 in English;
- in the section «Discussions» section: out of 17 contributions that appeared, 13 were in Italian, 5 in French and 2 in English⁴;
- the section «Scientific News and Activities of Research Centres» section published 26 contributions, of which 16 in English, 6 in Italian, 2 in French and 2 in Spanish;
- in the section «Reviews» section, finally, the books were reviewed, as mentioned above, 95; of which 63 refer to books published in Italy, 13 in Spain, 5 in Brazil, 4 in France, 3 in Germany, 2 in Russia, 2 in Argentina and, finally, 3 books published respectively in the U.S.A., Sweden and Ireland. Among the authors of these reviews, in addition to Italian (87), there were also French (12) and Spanish (4) scholars.

Such a diverse and rich array of presences and contributions confirms, it seems to me, the authentically international vocation of the journal. In particular it testifies the constant and substantial effort that has broadened the network to include groups of scholars and research institutions operating around the world, some of which – such as the *Centro Internacional de la Cultura Escolar (CEINCE) de Berlanga de Duero* (Soria, Spain), the *Children's Culture Institute of the Zhejiang Normal University* (China), the *Department of Childhood Studies of the Rutgers University* (Camden, USA), the *Societat d'Història de l'Educació dels Països de Llengua Catalana* (Barcelona, Spain), the *Institute for Research on the History of Children's Literature in Iran* (Teheran, Iran) and the *Institute of Theory and History of Education of Moscow* (Russia), just to name a few examples – have pre-eminent roles in the vast and complex task to renew methods and lines of historiographic investigation and to strengthen the research field at national and international levels.

But, in order to analyse more in-depth the merits of the content that «History of Education & Children's Literature» has offered to its readers over the years, it is worth focusing on the elements which characterise the papers accepted by the journal and, in particular, on the *periodization* and on the *geopolitical*

⁴ We should keep in mind that this section contains several articles by more than one scholar, each one, on occasions, coming from a different country. Very often, therefore, contributions are presented which are written in different languages.

and *cultural context* referred to by the research contributions published in the Essays and Research section.

With regard to *periodization*, the contemporary age prevails, testified by 62 articles dedicated to themes regarding the 20th century, 30 to the 19th century and a slightly lower number of articles, 27, that investigate issues regarding both the last two centuries (19th-20th). To these we must add 7 other articles that deal with long-term issues placed between the modern and contemporary ages, and whose periodisation covers 15th-20th (1 article), 16th-20th (1), 18th-19th (4), or 18th-20th centuries (1).

A much more limited number of articles focus on the modern age: as a whole, 19 articles address topics relating to the period between 15th and 18th centuries, with peaks for 16th-17th centuries (11 articles) and 18th century (4).

The massive volume of research and study carried out on the contemporary age was expected for many reasons given the current pre-eminence, in various European and extra-European countries, of a persistent trend in historical-educational research for a series of complex and different reasons, that favours the study of the last two centuries⁵; this without mentioning the history of children's literature, which is traditionally centred, with a few exceptions, on the 19th and 20th centuries⁶.

It is also true, however, that the growing marginalization of the modern age (but the same thing is of course also true for the Middle Ages) from the panorama of historical-educational research, has resulted in an increasingly weak and episodic attention for the multiple and complex educational issues – in terms of theories, institutions, processes etc. – typical of *Ancien Régime* societies, which have only been minimally dealt with by modern historians, and sometimes only in the – inevitably partial – light of the *social history* approach, or from the always stimulating but perhaps a little too general perspective of *cultural studies*.

We can gain a good understanding of how the history of education in the modern age can no longer be limited to the genesis and evolution of school institutions and practices or of literacy and schooling processes by simply looking – just to mention some brief examples – at the large variety and richness of educational issues which in the last two decades have been gradually emerging, both in European and extra-European ambits, from the study of processes such as the colonization of the New World and of the African and Asiatic territories,

⁵ See M.-M. Compère, *L'Histoire de l'éducation en Europe. Essai comparatif sur la façon dont elle s'écrit*, Paris, I.N.R.P.-Peter Lang, 1995; and in particular A. Viñao Frago, N.A. de Gabriel Fernández (eds.), *La investigación histórico-educativa. Tendencias actuales*, Barcelona, Editorial Ronsel, 1997; M.A. Vinovskis, *History and Educational Policymaking*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1999.

⁶ See J. De Maeyer, H.-H. Ewers, R. Ghesquière, M. Manson, P. Pinset, P. Quaghébeur (eds.), *Religion, Children's Literature and Modernity in Western Europe 1750-2000*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2007.

the missionary experience of the 16th-18th centuries in the West and East Indies, the development of the family and its educational practices in the western world, the forms and methods of out-of-school transmission of knowledge, professional competencies and formational models in traditional *ancien régime* society. In this respect, it is precisely the historical-educational approach to the issues mentioned that can bring us to a broader and deeper understanding of important aspects and phenomena, but which are hard to comprehend, in their complexity, if analysed from a merely *historical-social* perspective, or with an abstract *historical-cultural* approach.

The articles on the modern age that appeared in «History of Education & Children's Literature» over these five years, moreover, testify to the fecundity and richness of the related lines of investigation, as well as to the contribution that such lines can provide towards the growth of comparative research, not limited to the important – and much more in-depth – line of the history of *school cultures*⁷, but also centred on the various forms and practices that, in terms of education, have characterized the traditional societies of the 15th-18th centuries.

Concerning, however, the *geopolitical and cultural context* which has been the subject of the studies and research published in the journal between 2006 and 2010, the situation is as follows. As is easily comprehensible, a great many of contributions focus on the events on the European continent as a whole (8 articles) and on individual European countries. On this front, considering the obviously considerable reference to Italy (80), it is worth highlighting the significant attention paid to countries such as Spain (11 articles), France (9), Russia (6), Hungary (4), U.K., Germany and Belgium (3), Sweden, Switzerland and Austria (2); to these we must add countries such as Croatia, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia, to which each is dedicated at least one research article.

More limited, but very significant in our opinion, is the presence of a certain number of articles and research projects that refer to extra-European countries and contexts. In this field, the American continent as a whole counts 7 contributions, most of which regards Latin America, i.e. Brazil (5), Argentina (1) and U.S.A (1). Equally significant is the presence of Asia, as shown by 3 contributions dedicated to China, 1 regarding Japan, and 1 on Mongolia. The picture is completed by 2 articles concerning Congo, and 1, Australia.

The articles focused on extra-European geopolitical and cultural contexts – whilst limited in quantity – seem however to corroborate the efforts made during these years by «History of Education & Children's Literature» to connote itself as a truly international journal. It is also true, however, that, in this respect, there is still a long way to go and that contacts and partnerships must be strengthened

⁷ In this regard see D. Julia, *Riflessioni sulla recente storiografia dell'educazione in Europa: per una storia comparata delle culture scolastiche*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», 3, 1996, pp. 119-147.

with individual researchers and research groups working in different continents that, can only be made possible by continuous and fruitful collaboration that is reflected in the work of the journal. Regarding this, we must not forget to express our warmest appreciation for the extraordinary support offered by some outstanding scholars, members of the Executive Council and the International Scientific Board, who have made every effort to publicise and win praise for the journal in various areas of the world; on the other hand, we feel obliged to appeal to all our board members to further intensify their efforts to promote the journal in their respective fields of research, by encouraging young researchers, such as scholars of history of education and children's literature who are already well known and established in different countries, to cooperate and offer their expertise to «History of Education & Children's Literature».

With regard to the issues examined in the articles received between 2006 and 2010 in the «Essays and Researches» section of the journal, we should first note the presence of studies on more traditional topics and trends alongside others that focus on extremely innovative issues and areas of research and which only recently have come under the historiographic spotlight⁸. In this perspective, whilst we can observe a high interest in issues which have a longstanding and solid tradition of studies and research – such as the analysis of *educational theories* and the evolution of the *pedagogical debate*, to which 23 articles were dedicated –, equally significant is the attention shown by HECL contributors for subjects that have been greatly affected by recent developments in the historiographic debate and by the extension of new lines of inquiry, such as the *role of churches and Christian denominations in education and schools* (institutions, practices, training models, etc.), to which 25 articles are dedicated; the relationship between *education, ideology and political propaganda* (21 articles) as well as the equally complex relationship between *educational practices, disciplining and social control* (20 articles); and finally, the topics concerning *ethical-civic education and building of national identities* (10 articles) and those concerning *democratic citizenship education* (7 articles).

More in general, the journal has given space to themes and issues regarding *out-of-school methods of juvenile education*, on which 10 articles were focused; *female education* (institutions, practices, educational models etc.), that was the specific subject of research in 6 articles; and, finally, the *role of the family and family education issues* (4 articles). In connection to this, a certain attention was devoted to theoretical thinking on *recent developments in historical-educational research at an international level* and, more in general, on the sources, the methods of enquiry and new lines of investigation (3 articles).

⁸ Naturally, the issues dealt with do not correspond with the total number of articles as they very often address more than one topic or they refer to a great variety of themes and topics. The outline proposed aims only to provide a necessarily general and non-exhaustive map of the main topics and of the most important historiographic lines or research touched on during the five-year period.

Particularly remarkable attention was given to the areas of research pertaining to education and school issues, namely the origin and evolution of education and training systems, the various types of schools, educational and methodological issues and the reality of teaching and teachers. On this front, in addition to 2 articles that discuss issues related to *school construction and design of spaces and places of education*, at least 26 articles can be mentioned, which are dedicated to the *innovation and reform of education and school systems*; 19 articles to the *history of school subjects, school systems and educational programs*; 26 to *school manuals and textbooks*, plus 22 articles devoted to the *history of school and educational publishing*, and finally 9 articles focused on *educational and popular journals*.

As for teachers and teaching, 21 articles investigated the issues related to *recruitment, training and professional status of teachers*; 5 to *periodical publishing for teachers*; 2 to *teachers' professional and trade union associations*; and finally, 4 to the *image and literary representation of the school and teachers' universe*. With reference to the different levels of teaching and various types of school, special attention was devoted to *primary and popular schools* (23 articles), to *educational institutions for children* (12) and to *secondary schools* (12). More limited was the number of contributions focusing on the *history of universities and higher education* (7 articles), while a certainly significant space was assigned to the events of *special education and schools for the disabled* (6 items), a sector still poorly explored by historians of education and schooling, especially in Europe.

The special attention reserved by HECL to the themes of school and education was confirmed, moreover, by the various articles centred on types of school teaching and particular courses of studies, such as those related to *technical and professional schools* (3 articles), to *agricultural education* (3), to *military schools* (3) and to *medical education* (3), as well as *school and educational systems established in colonial possessions* (2 articles). In this same field we can point to 13 articles concerning the *literacy processes* and the *relationship between schooling and economic development*, as well as various contributions (16 articles) on the *material culture of schools* (textbooks, school furnishing and equipment, teaching aids etc.), on *school and teachers' libraries*, on *school museums and didactics museums* and on *educational theatre*.

And finally, considerable space was given by HECL to themes and issues connected with the *history of children's literature* (27 articles), as, moreover, ample attention was bestowed to the *history of illustrations and illustrators for children* (11 articles) and to the *history of theories and practices of reading* (10 articles).

The gradual enhancement of the journal website (<<http://www.hecl.it/en>>), which over the years has significantly extended the quantity of sections and links, has proved to be successful, as testified by the number of contacts. In particular, the section containing information and links relevant to European

and extra-European specialised institutions, research centres, associations, scientific journals, archives, libraries and museums, on-line resources etc., has proved to be, in the opinion of many users, a useful tool for updating and for international networking for specialists and researchers.

The adoption, from the outset, of a rigorous system of evaluation of the articles proposed for publishing, namely through a double-blind peer-review process carried out by a selected number of experts, has allowed HECL to provide a guarantee of quality and to gain credit among scholars and research groups around the world as one of the most prestigious journals in the field. At the same time, peer-reviews, thanks to the continued involvement of scholars and specialist unrelated to the journal⁹, helped to increase interest and appreciation for the editorial work and for the dissemination of the research¹⁰.

In this first five years in the life of «History of Education & Children's Literature», in order to increase its circulation in both printed and online versions, we tried to promote the indexing of the journal within the main international databases, particularly in those specialised in the humanities, in the historical and social sciences and education sectors. Here, an excellent job was performed in past years but much remains to be done. While the request for evaluation is still awaiting assessment by ISI-Thomson, up to now HECL has already been positively evaluated and accepted by the international databases *Scopus* by Elsevier and *Historical Abstracts* by Ebsco, as well as in journals' directories, bibliographic repositories and databases such as Genamics-JournalSeek, Google Scholar, Nova-University of Newcastle (Australia), Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, and finally in numerous Italian databases¹¹.

Also on this issue, the hope for the coming months is to succeed in giving further impetus to the process of indexing, in order to promote an increasingly greater knowledge and use of content and scientific contributions of the journal among scholars and researchers around the world.

In June 2006, when presenting the first issue of HECL, we underlined that it was going to position itself within a scenario – scientific journals in the field – that, on an international level, offers a series of journals of extraordinary value¹²

⁹ The process of double-blind peer-reviews is entrusted to a group of experts who are called on by the journal's Editorial Office, to be part of the Referees' International Committee, that remains in office for three years.

¹⁰ The evaluation procedures carried out in the five-year period have noted the following results: about 9% of articles submitted for publishing and peer-review was declared "not approved" and was consequently rejected; in more than 65% of cases, articles were "approved with changes", that is, authors were requested to make a series of corrections/additions to the text before publishing; and finally, in 35% of cases, judgment given by experts was positive.

¹¹ ACNP-Italian Catalogue of Journals; BSN-National Historical Bibliography; EIO-Italian on-line publishing; ESSPER-Indexing of Italian journals of economy, law, social sciences and history; Journals Database of the International Institute F. Datini; Journal of History of the Church in Italy; Project On-line Journals; Modern History Journal's Directory (<<http://www.stmoderna.it>>).

¹² With reference to Europe, in particular we recall «Pedagogica Historica. International Journal

and, at the same time, we also marked that our journal aimed at establishing with them «a proficuous relationship [as well as] a constant methodological comparison. The aim is to foster an ever-increasing world-wide knowledge of Italian research about the history of education and children's literature; and, at the same time, to give Italian scholars and researchers in this field a fresh – and indispensable – chance to study in-depth trends and key results of the researches carried out in several countries in and out of Europe»¹³.

This is an important goal, of which only a small part has been achieved in the past five years. It is thus awaiting a relaunch to be pursued in the forthcoming years along with the other objective, of no less importance, to foster an authentically comparative approach to the themes and issues of the history of education and children's literature and, at the same time, to promote the continuous openness of our discipline to the stimuli and the most salient and incisive innovations that, on a methodological and cultural plane, can be offered by other ambits and sectors of historical research, as well as the humanities and social sciences.

As the legal historian Mario Sbriccoli highlighted some years ago, it is necessary to «minimize the isolationist tendency which is an innate and intimate part of our discipline to give ourselves the chance to move to nearby territories, to employ the tools of our neighbours and, in return, to lend them ours. [This is] the condition for being better understood by other historians, the premise to open up towards a comprehension of what others are doing and, something which also carries its own weight, [...] to create, within our themes of work and study, the necessary space to make way for new historiographic problems, for new stimulating themes and new subjects of research. We would be in trouble if we got lost, if we disappeared or drowned in the sea of history, [...] but also if we fell prey to the irrational fear of getting a little wet: we need to dive in and swim»¹⁴.

Our wish for «History of Education & Children's Literature» and its future collaborators is to demonstrate the capability, in the coming years, to multiply spaces and opportunities for international participation, in order to make an effective impact on broadening research horizons.

of the History of Education», «Historia de la Educación. Revista interuniversitaria», «Histoire de l'Éducation», as well as the rich panorama of specialised journals published in the U.S.A., Canada, Argentina and in several countries of the Middle and Far East.

¹³ Sani, *History of Education & Children's Literature (HECL)*, cit., p. 5.

¹⁴ M. Sbriccoli, *Storia del diritto e storia della società. Questioni di metodo e problemi di ricerca*, in P. Grossi (ed.), *Storia sociale e dimensione giuridica. Strumenti d'indagine e ipotesi di lavoro*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1986, p. 137.