

Public History of Education *Manifesto*

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**A collaborative pathway connecting
academic research, teaching and social memory
in the field of education**

<https://aiph.hypotheses.org/il-gruppo-di-lavoro-sulla-public-history-of-education>

Adherence to the ideals and objectives of Public History

The private individuals, institutions and associations signing this *Manifesto* have expressed their strong support for the *Manifesto of Italian Public History*, which was presented by the Italian Association of Public History at the Regional Conference of Public History held in Piedmont on 7 May 2018 and subsequently approved during the Pisa Assembly on 14 June 2018.

Historical-educational research and social needs

The world of educational and historical-educational research has always stood at a crossroads between several disciplinary areas and many interconnected issues. The field of teaching and special education in particular has been an arena for many experiences which we can now define as *public history* practices, based on the paradigm of *participatory action research*: a form of research which in the field of education has been the favoured approach for establishing contact with local communities and for building a collaborative educational relationship especially with schools, museums, associations and local authorities.

Yesterday as today, the public historian needs to focus primarily on social needs, especially with regards to education, so that a virtuous circle of collaboration can be formed among all stakeholders. Historical knowledge, and in particular historical-educational knowledge, can play an important cultural role. In particular, historical knowledge can effectively contribute to the deconstruction of prejudices, the building of social inclusion and understanding the hidden dimensions of the teaching and helping professions, and to the leaving behind of flawed perceptions of the "naturalness" of our personal and professional behaviours.

Nine theories to construct the Public History of Education

1) Public history is a great resource that belongs not only to historians, but to all those who, experts or not, intend to use their own particular cultural knowledge in order to adopt its communicative style, social commitment and methods.

History is an instrument of intellectual knowledge that cannot be reserved only to a group of experts. It follows that the experiential world must increasingly be put into contact with the world of academic (and non-academic) research, underlining the need for a cultural encounter and

relationship that can promote our knowledge of history while maintaining high standards of research quality in communicative and dialogical areas that are accessible to a broad public, or to specific audiences, particularly in the teaching and helping professions.

2) *When looked at from this perspective, public history is based on social needs and tries to provide shared methods of co-constructing knowledge, moving away from the usual idea of simple divulgation, dissemination and transmission.*

If historians are willing to listen, and if the process begins with specific social needs, it is not about inventing new methods of divulgation or of "spectacularising" historical content. Instead, it is about leaving behind the transmission model to ensure that historians work with stakeholders to embark on an exercise in critical thinking and to build shared knowledge, reflections and awareness.

3) *In the educational and helping professions, public history is an approach that:*

- *underlines the link between university and community, starting with the best practices adopted to date, even if they are not given the name "public history";*
- *raises awareness of the long cultural and social process of constructing current attitudes and behaviours whose roots are deep and span many generations, as in the case of adult-child relationships;*
- *provides tools for a critical understanding of society, which can be used to alter and improve the work of teachers, in particular by orienting these relationships towards the "best interests of the child".*

In the field of education (and caregiving), a specific contribution can be made to the acquisition of fundamental knowledge, in order to improve the work of teachers and focus on the "best interests of the child", which is a key concept of contemporary early-years culture¹. Historical knowledge, in this sense, is not merely an intellectual ornament that only certain social classes can afford. It is something that has concrete utility and which serves to make informed decisions by putting cultural and institutional dynamics in perspective and giving them a spatial and temporal context.

4) *Initiatives in the Public History of Education have a natural proximity to teaching and schooling. They can make an effective contribution, both to the improvement of learning and also to the generation of cultural changes within the local community.*

Educational activities, especially those aimed at the study of history and geography, have a privileged relationship with the community, which can be emphasised through a public history approach. In this sense, teaching, by going beyond the confines of the classroom, can aspire not only to improve learning, which is obvious, but also to promote shared and participatory changes in the local community.

5) *Public history within the educational and helping professions can be used as a powerful tool for training, both at the initial stage and for in-service learning.*

Reflexivity is an important part of a teacher's skillset and can be greatly enriched by an awareness of history. It allows us to observe today's teaching and learning processes, not in a fragmented way, but as part of the historical path (often very long) that formed them and led to their becoming dominant over others which have been theorised and practised. In this sense, the historical approach is a very useful tool in promoting the exercise and care of reflexivity.

6) *Public history activities favour direct contact and involvement with the people, but at the same time they work with communication and digital interaction technologies, in the name of glocalism and social empowerment. From a technological point of view, this means choosing open source software, open access communication policies and adopting the principles of open science.*

The technological changes of recent years have ushered us into a new and different era of history.

1 Art. 3, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, approved by the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 20 November 1989, ratified by Italy in 1991 (Law No. 176 of 27 May 1991, *Ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*).

Choosing an open form of digital communication means creating public history spaces of great importance, starting with the simple availability of historical sources, among which we must emphasise the special role of photographs. If culture is a primary human need, like water and air, then the digital context must be seen as an indispensable platform for the exchange of knowledge and relationships.

7) *Schools, museums, archives, libraries and local authorities are the natural interlocutors for public history initiatives.*

The world of education has long been thematic and has often forged important relationships with local cultural institutions. Museums are a good example of this, as they now contain educational centres dedicated exclusively to educating the public, and schoolchildren in particular. Local institutions, working with universities on a level playing field, are the cultural infrastructure necessary for public history to develop, become rooted in the social fabric and establish a dialogue with local communities.

8) *Historical research and teaching offer many opportunities and ways to build effective and engaging public history initiatives. However we must highlight the special role played by oral history practices, life stories and autobiographies.*

Historical knowledge deals with a vast range of human experience, ranging from personal stories to the history of collectives, up to and including “global history”. Placing emphasis on personal testimonies, although always in connection with broader cognitive frameworks, allows us to fully develop our reflectivity, promote individual and community well-being and enhance our ability to understand the present.

9) *Public history has a privileged relationship with the community and its territory, as far as the promotion and transmission of cultural heritage is concerned.*

Public history initiatives, which inherently have an educational value, can make a very effective contribution to the conservation and promotion of local cultural heritage, whether in tangible form² (such as educational museums and "historic" schools with their artifacts and archives)³, or intangibly, through family-based education and apprenticeships in artisans' workshops. This is a broad set of practices, experiences and beliefs that constitute the local identity of the “heritage communities”⁴, which have been handed down through the generations but are always at risk of being lost or forgotten. At this level, it is possible to promote not only cultural heritage in its recognised, institutionalised form, but also the "vernacular" heritage. *Public history* makes it possible to retie the threads of memory, preserve the dialogue between different generations and local culture, appreciate the wealth of cultural diversity and make an important contribution⁵ to the wider education of the younger generations, as well as the continuing education of the older ones.

2 *Convention on the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, signed in Paris in November 1972 and ratified by Italy with Law No. 184 of 6 April 1977.

3 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, adopted in Paris on 17 October 2003 by the 32nd session of the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), ratified by Italy by Law No. 167 of 27 September 2007.

4 Art. 2, *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*, Faro 27 October 2005, ratified by Italy with Law No. 133 of 1 October 2020.

5 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, Paris, 20 October 2005, ratified by Italy with Law No. 19 of 19 February 2007.