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AND RESEARCH METHODS APPLIED TO THE TERRITORY**

Cohort 38

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

“Docility, modesty, sacrifice, and self-denial”.

**The female teacher’s profession in 19th-Century Italy and Europe, and the case
of the Province of Catania (1861-1914)**

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Index of abbreviations

<i>Amm.Prov.</i>	Amministrazione Provinciale (Provincial Administration)
<i>ASCT</i>	Archivio di Stato di Catania (State Archives of Catania)
<i>ASPA</i>	Archivio di Stato di Palermo (State Archives of Palermo)
<i>Cat.</i>	Categoria (Category)
<i>C.M.</i>	Circolare Ministeriale (Ministerial Circular)
<i>b.</i>	Busta (Folder)
<i>el.</i>	Elenco (Index)
<i>Pref.</i>	Prefettura (Prefecture)
<i>R.D.</i>	Regio Decreto (Royal Decree)

Premises, state of the art and research objectives

a. Brief overview of the research topic and historical-cultural background

In the European “long” nineteenth century, the progressive spread of popular education was closely linked to the rise of modern empires and to the affirmation of the principles of modernization, secularization, centrality of political power, and state authority. The establishment of the modern State and its related administrative structures led to the need for a rapid and widespread literacy campaign. This, in turn, increased the urgency across Europe to invest in the training of teachers. The growing circulation of people and ideas between States, often aimed at conducting comparative studies of educational systems, fostered the dissemination of emerging didactic and scientific trends, giving rise to training methods of transnational reach¹.

A crucial part of this process was the “secularization” of the teaching profession, which marked the break from a centuries-old tradition in which priests, nuns, missionaries and other clerical figures had served as the literate class responsible for moral education in many parts of the world, and in which some religious orders effectively held a near monopoly on teacher training. The enlightened regimes transformed teachers into “public officials”, counting on them as agents of change, in response to the sweeping cultural, social, political, and economic transformations occurring across the Continent². The spread of mass education was intimately tied to the institutional development of *normal schools*, *écoles normales*, *lehrerseminare*, *normaalscholen* etc. – different and similar institutions responsible for the training of primary school teachers. Established at the end of the eighteenth century and widespread throughout Europe by the mid-nineteenth century, these institutions expressed a deliberate pedagogical intent and helped shape behavioral models, moral standards, customs and mentalities that became dominant from the second half of the century through to the early 1900s.

In Italy, the first normal schools (*scuole normali*) date back to the pre-Unification period, but it was during the nation-building process (in 1861 the Kingdom of Italy arose) that their expansion acquired broader political and cultural significance, linked to the need to train a corps of male and female teachers capable of breaking the private and especially religious monopoly over education, and initiating a widespread literacy campaign through free and State-run primary schools. Although these institutions offered a basic and vocational form of education, and were considered less prestigious than the classic gymnasium-high school studies (traditional and elitist), they were recognised as essential for meeting the educational needs of the newly formed Kingdom of Italy, which required appropriately trained teachers to whom it could entrust the educational mission of instilling the moral and civic values necessary to forge a shared Italian identity³.

¹ L. Lefty, *Teacher Education and Teachers' Colleges*, in T. Fitzgerald (eds), *Handbook of Historical Studies in Education. Springer International Handbooks of Education*, Springer, Singapore 2019, p. 2. On the influence of European school models on the Italian education system from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, and on the “pedagogical journeys” undertaken by renowned scholars such as Aristide Gabelli, Antonio Labriola, Vincenzo Botta, Pasquale Villari, Eugenio Paolo Paolini, Giuseppe Dalla Vedova, and Girolamo Buonazia to collect data on foreign educational and pedagogical culture, see F. Targhetta, “Uno sguardo all'Europa”. *Modelli scolastici, viaggi pedagogici ed importazioni didattiche nei primi cinquant'anni di scuola italiana*, in M. Chiaranda (ed.), *Storia comparata dell'educazione. Problemi ed esperienze tra Otto e Novecento*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2010, pp. 155-176.

² S.Y. Lee, J. Winandy, *Scientization of professional teacher knowledges and construction of teaching methods*, in «Paedagogica Historica», 2021, 2-3.

³ V. Schirripa, *L'istruzione normale e magistrale*, in F. De Giorgi, A. Gaudio, F. Pruneri (eds.), *Manuale di storia della scuola italiana. Dal Risorgimento al XXI secolo*, Scholè, Brescia 2019, p. 205; C. Ghizzoni, *Essere Maestri in Italia fra*

Due to their particular institutional configuration and their specific social function, these institutes raise historiographically significant questions, highlighting the complex relationship between political choices and educational practices, between economic demands and moral expectations, especially when considering the progressive “feminization” of the teaching profession as an emerging phenomenon in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe⁴. The Italian female normal schools represented, for their intended audience, symbolic spaces of emancipation, paving the way for a new social and professional identity for women. The feminization of the profession can therefore be understood not only as an occupational trend, but also as evidence of the “epochal shift” in the way women were perceived – their rights, and their role in civil society⁵ –, a first step in a gradual process of professional emancipation that, within a few generations, would allow women to gain a majority presence in the educational field⁶.

However, women who wished to enter the teaching profession often faced significant challenges, starting as early as the training phase. First, an educational gap separated the completion of primary school from admission to normal school, contributing not only to the phenomenon of functional illiteracy but also to considerable discomfort, especially for girls from rural areas, who had to leave their family homes in order to pursue their studies, as the normal schools were primarily located in large urban centers. Furthermore, the markedly lower salaries compared to those of their male counterparts, along with frequent appointments in the most underdeveloped regions of the country, added to the hardships of the profession for women. These conditions shaped a form of “limited emancipation” that opened the path to employment while simultaneously condemning women to live in impoverished and degrading circumstances⁷.

Considering the context of this lengthy historical process, the present research aims to investigate the conditions of the teaching profession in Sicily during the period between the Unification of Italy and the Giolittian era, paying particular attention to the contribution of the Royal Female Normal School of Catania to the training of primary school teachers in the Etnean Province. This study explores how this institution was integrated into the Sicilian context of the time and how it contributed to shaping a new social identity for women in a setting traditionally removed from female participation in the public sphere and marked by significant cultural, social, and economic challenges.

b. State of the art and theoretical-methodological framework

The current European approach to the history of education shows a growing interest in critically analysing the relationship between education and society. This perspective encourages an examination of educational theories and practices in connection with a wide range of factors such as social class, family life, gender, demography, and economic structures, increasingly implying the need for an interdisciplinary and complex approach. The *International Standing Conference for the History of Education* – ISCHE 42, titled “*Rethinking the Social in the History of Education*”, held in

Otto e Novecento, in E. Becchi, M. Ferrari (eds.), *Formare alle professioni. Sacerdoti, principi, educatori*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2009, p. 457.

⁴ C. Covato, *La scuola normale: itinerari storiografici*, in C. Covato, A.M. Sorge (eds.), *L'istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all'età giolittiana*, Fonti per la storia della scuola, Vol. I, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali. Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, Rome 1994, p. 16. For a comparative overview of the process of feminization of the profession in Europe, see J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century: a comparative perspective*, in «History of Education», 22 (1993), 13, pp. 253-263.

⁵ C. Ghizzoni, *Il maestro nella scuola elementare italiana dall'Unità alla Grande Guerra*, in R. Sani, A. Tedde (eds.), *Maestri e istruzione popolare in Italia tra Otto e Novecento. Interpretazioni, prospettive di ricerca, esperienze in Sardegna*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2003, p. 58.

⁶ A. Carbone, *Diventare maestra nell'Italia post-unitaria. All'origine del processo di femminilizzazione di una professione*, in «La camera blu. Rivista di studi di genere», no. 19, 2018, p. 95.

⁷ S. Soldani, *Nascita della maestra elementare*, in S. Soldani, G. Turi (eds.), *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea. Vol. I. La nascita dello Stato nazionale*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1993, p. 84.

2021 at Örebro University, focused on the importance of incorporating the “social” into the study of the history of educational processes. It emphasised how a “social history of education” may encompass “every possible aspect of changing social structures, relationships and ideals”⁸.

This implies, for educational science, embracing a historiographical dimension of analysis and research, one that brings together the tools and competencies of the epistemologist, the theorist, and the historian of education in a continuous process of semantic reconstruction, which also raises significant questions on the ‘semiotic’ level⁹. Modern historiography of education can in fact be described as a “discourse about discourses”, aimed at examining how ideas concerning human beings and their normative essence (what they ought to be) have built, modeled and coordinated educational and social practices across different historical periods, through reconstructions based on scattered, heterogeneous, and often fragmentary evidence¹⁰.

In Italy too, the historiography of education is now being rethought in light of new methodologies and interpretative approaches, which increasingly highlight the need to free historical inquiry from the tendency to reduce the history of education to the history of pedagogical theories, educational policies, and the training models of the ruling classes. At the heart of this renewal lies a commitment to overcoming a form of cognitive fragmentation, both interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary, that tends to separate, as if they were distinct analytical domains, the historical-political development of theoretical constructs and regulations, from the history of education as a phenomenon rooted in ethics, customs, and individual and collective behaviours¹¹.

This methodological shift has been particularly influenced by the *Nouvelle Histoire* of the Annales tradition, which, by redirecting attention toward everyday life, social processes, and the economic and cultural dynamics of a given era, led to the expansion of the history of education and of the various formative agencies into the broader history of communities, mentalities, and the collective imaginary surrounding them and their social actors¹². This approach also allows to grasp the *longue durée* inscribed in space, highlighting not only well-established and persistent structures, but also the slower and more subtle processes of change¹³.

In the Italian context, recent historiography increasingly applies this approach to both local and national dynamics, ranging between micro- and macro-historical perspectives and across diverse

⁸ J. Westberg, F. Primus, *Rethinking the history of education: considerations for a new social history of education*, in «Paedagogica Historica», 59:1 (2023), pp. 1-3.

⁹ Regarding the method for investigating the “phenomenology” of relationships between a societal structure – as it exists in a given place and at a specific historical juncture – and its prevailing educational systems, we refer to the theory of “determinate abstractions” (*astrazioni determinate*). This theory was developed in the 1950s by Galvano Della Volpe in his *Logica come scienza positiva* (1952), building on a reinterpretation of historical materialism as an authentic science of society and history. See A. Criscenti, *Progettare la formazione per i minori. Saggio di pedagogia critica*, CUECM, Catania 2010, pp. 33-35.

¹⁰ J. Westberg, F. Primus, *Rethinking the history of education*, cit., pp. 4, 15.

¹¹ This reflects the theoretical and methodological trend of the most modern Italian pedagogical historiography, which aims to “shed light” on the education-society nexus by investigating diverse and unconventional sources and areas. For illustrative examples, see: A. Criscenti, *Socializzazione mafiosa e responsabilità educativa. L’approccio storico di Gaetano Mosca*, CUECM, Catania 1999; S. Lentini, *L’educazione in carcere. Profili storico-pedagogici della pena*, Fondazione Nazionale “Vito Fazio–Allmayer”, Palermo 2012; Id., *Lumi, arte, rivoluzione in Spagna. La pedagogia sociale di Francisco Goya*, Unicopli, Milan 2015.

¹² C. Cambi, *Immaginario e ricerca storico-educativa*, in «Studi sulla formazione», 1998, 1, pp. 149-158; D. Julia, *Riflessioni sulla recente storiografia dell’educazione in Europa: per una storia comparata delle culture scolastiche*, in «Annali di storia dell’educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», 1996, 3, pp. 119-147.

¹³ In the late 1920s, the French *Annales* current, with prominent historians such as Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, Fernand Braudel, Philippe Ariès, and Jacques Le Goff, helped strengthen the dialogue between historical research and various social sciences. This led to a vision of history as “total” history and radically changed how historical-educational research was understood and conducted. Here, the emergence of the social history of education marked a decisive break from a traditional tendency to reduce historical inquiry to the analysis of the history of pedagogical ideas. J. Le Goff, *La nuova storia*, tr. it., Mondadori, Milan 1983; A. Criscenti (ed.), *A proposito di History manifesto. Nuove tendenze per la ricerca storico-educativa*, Fondazione Vito-Fazio Allmayer, Palermo 2016.

geographic and temporal segments. Within this field of studies and research, the history of schooling, understood as an integral part of processes of modernization and territorial development, is now more clearly oriented toward investigating the evolution of educational structures and the expansion of schooling over the medium and long term across the various regions of the Nation.

Regarding the history of education in nineteenth-century Italy, the most recent historiographical contributions show a particular tendency to examine the elements of continuity and/or rupture in relation to the transition from the fragmented political landscape of the first half of the century to the national framework of the Kingdom of Italy. These studies often seek to complement nationwide investigations with a form of historical geography of education¹⁴. Indeed, while the notion of the State or the nation-State continues to hold significant resonance in both Italian and international historiography of education¹⁵, empirical evidence concerning the decentralized nature of nineteenth-century schooling compels us to examine more closely the economic, cultural, and social factors that, beyond national ideology and politics, have in concrete terms either supported or hindered the process of schooling expansion¹⁶.

The increasingly widespread attention to the material and moral peculiarities of individual territories and communities (be they rural or urban, agricultural or industrial, working-class or peasant communities), to the cultural, social and economic profiles of students and teachers, to the material conditions of school buildings, and to the presence of furnishings, equipment, and teaching tools, alongside the actual impact of pedagogical theories developed by official pedagogy and the ways and characteristics of their local penetration and circulation (through libraries, journal subscriptions, etc.), necessitates the use of heterogeneous and, in some respects, atypical sources compared to traditional ones. Registers, reports, minutes from inspection visits, various types of teaching objects, students' notebooks and diaries, class photographs, and so forth, are not only increasingly subject to preservation as cultural heritage, but also become privileged material for anyone wishing to investigate the history of the school in its concrete "making"¹⁷.

¹⁴ S. Pivato, *Pane e grammatica. L'istruzione elementare in Romagna alla fine dell'800*, Franco Angeli, Milan 1983; A.M. Bernardinis, *Il dibattito sui problemi dell'educazione dopo l'Unità*, in *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. VI, Vicenza 1986; M. Cuaz, *Alle frontiere dello Stato. La scuola elementare in Valle d'Aosta dalla Restaurazione al fascismo*, Franco Angeli, Milan 1988; T. Russo, *Culture e scuole in Basilicata nell'Ottocento*, Franco Angeli, Milan 1995; F. Cambi, *La Toscana e l'educazione. Dal Settecento a oggi tra identità regionale e laboratorio nazionale*, Le Lettere, Florence 1998; M. D'Ascenzo, *La scuola elementare nell'età liberale. Il caso di Bologna 1859-1911*, CLUEB, Bologna 1997; F. Pruneri, *Oltre l'alfabeto. L'istruzione popolare dall'Unità d'Italia all'età giolittiana: il caso di Brescia*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2006. It is important to recall here the ambitious goal of the PRIN-2005 project "Per un atlante storico dell'istruzione maschile e femminile dall'età delle riforme al 1859. Un'analisi comparata tra antichi stati italiani". Directed by Angelo Bianchi, this project aimed to examine, through quantitative research, the development of school systems in the States of pre-unification Italy.

¹⁵ For a comparative perspective on the topic, see D. Tröhler, *Education, Curriculum and Nation-Building: Contributions of Comparative Education to the Understanding of Nations and Nationalism*, Taylor & Francis Group, Milton 2023.

¹⁶ On the importance of integrating the history of schooling with social, cultural, and economic history, by investigating, for example, the impact of land ownership concentration, fiscal capacity, religion, and child labor on the local and regional history of schooling in the 19th century, see, for international studies: G. Larsson, J. Westberg, *Child Labour, Parental Neglect, School Boards, and Teacher Quality: School Inspector Reports on the Supply and Demand of Schooling in Mid-nineteenth-century Sweden*, in «Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire de l'éducation» 32, 1, Spring / Printemps 2020, pp. 70-71; E. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1976, pp. 304-321.

¹⁷ E. De Fort, *Storie di scuole, storia della scuola: sviluppi e tendenze della storiografia*, in M.T. Segà (ed.), *La scuola fa la storia. Gli archivi scolastici per la ricerca e la didattica*, Ediclo, Portogruaro 2002, pp. 31-70; L. Cantatore, *La museologia storico-educativa e la funzione della memoria nella scuola di oggi*, in G. Elia, S. Polenghi, V. Rossini (eds.), *La scuola tra saperi e valori etico-sociali. Politiche culturali e pratiche educative*, PensaMultimedia, Lecce 2019.

Regarding the history of schooling in Sicily, the current state of research includes studies by Salvatore Agresta, Silvana Raffaele, Gaetano Bonetta, Maurizio Lupo for the Bourbon period¹⁸, and by Sarino Armando Costa for the post-unification era¹⁹. Moreover, we can also point to the very recent work of a Project of Relevant National Interest (PRIN-2017) on “Education and Development in Southern Italy from Unification to the Giolittian era (1861-1914)”²⁰. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the keen interest in the history of schooling among scholars of modern history, with Giuseppe Giarrizzo being one of the most authoritative voices. These scholars emphasize the need for social history and local history to concretely investigate the relationship between schooling and institutions and community life. This approach reveals how school becomes a decisive factor in the growth of the smaller community, and a reservoir for the larger one in the “verticality” of curricula²¹. Even a seemingly niche issue like the spread of male and female teacher training schools and their function in Italian society during the first decades after unification can provide fertile ground for an “interpretive re-composition”²²; however, until the late 1990s, normal schools were the subject of sporadic and quantitatively limited studies. This trend, in Carmela Covato’s view, signaled a questionable historiographical adherence to the political and cultural marginality of this educational institution compared to other training channels, such as grammar schools (*licei*), which received privileged attention²³. This sort of “virtual invisibility of teachers” has long characterized studies in

¹⁸ S. Agresta, *L'istruzione in Sicilia (1815-1860)*, Samperi, Messina 1995; Id., *Istruzione e scolarità nella Sicilia del primo Ottocento. Fonti documentarie*, Società messinese di Storia Patria, Messina 2001; S. Agresta, C. Sindoni, *Scuole, Maestri e Metodi nella Sicilia Borbonica (1817-1860)*, Pensa MultiMedia, Lecce 2012; S. Raffaele, *Istruzione e società. Percorsi formativi nella Catania borbonica*, in «Annali della Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione. Università degli Studi di Catania», 2002, pp. 153-197; Ead., *La bottega dei saperi: politica scolastica, percorsi formativi, dinamiche sociali nel Meridione borbonico*, Bonanno, Acireale-Rome 2005; G. Bonetta, *Istruzione e società nella Sicilia dell'Ottocento*, Sellerio, Palermo 1981; M. Lupo, *Tra le provvide cure di Sua Maestà. Stato e scuola nel Mezzogiorno tra Settecento e Ottocento*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2005.

¹⁹ S.A. Costa, *La scuola e la grande scala. Vita e costume nella scuola siciliana dal 1860 agli inizi del Novecento*, Sellerio, Palermo 1990.

²⁰ The Project of Relevant National Interest “Education and Development in Southern Italy from Unification to the Giolittian Era (1861-1914)”, funded by the Ministry of Education, University and Research for the three-year period 2017-2020, involved four local research units from the Universities of Sassari, Catania, Messina, and Calabria, coordinated respectively by Profs. Fabio Pruneri (General Coordinator of the Project), Stefano Lentini, Caterina Sindoni, and Brunella Serpe. This research group, composed of a qualified team of professors and researchers in the historical and pedagogical fields, aims to investigate the relationship between development and the schooling process in the regions of Southern Italy – Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Sardinia, and Sicily – over the chronological span 1861-1914.

²¹ G. e M. Giarrizzo, *Per una storia d'Italia come storia delle sue scuole*, Maimone, Catania 2005, p. 226. Si veda anche: G. Calabrese, *Archivi delle scuole, archivio per le scuole. Atti del seminario siracusano (giugno-novembre 2005)*, Maimone, Catania 2008. For a similar approach in international studies, see A.T. Erickson, *The Urban History of Education* in J.L. Rury, E. H. Tamura (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Education*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019, pp. 33–47.

²² C. Covato, A.M. Sorge (eds.), *L'istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all'età giolittiana*, cit., p. 16.

²³ Ivi, p. 19. Prior to the 1990s, some elements for the historical reconstruction of the development of normal schools in Italy could be found in: D. Bertoni Jovine, *Funzione emancipatrice e contributo delle donne all'attività educativa*, in Società Umanitaria (ed.), *L'emancipazione femminile in Italia: un secolo di discussioni (1861-1961)*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1964, pp. 223-269; I. Zambaldi, *Storia della scuola elementare in Italia*, LAS, Rome 1975; S. Olivieri, *I maestri*, in T. Tomasi (ed.), *L'istruzione di base in Italia (1859-1977)*, Vallecchi, Florence 1977, pp.165-184; E. De Fort, *Storia della scuola elementare in Italia*, vol. I, *Dall'Unità all'età giolittiana*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1979; G. Di Bello, A. Mannucci, A. Santoni Rugiu (ed.), *Documenti e ricerche per la storia del Magistero*, Manzuoli, Florence 1980; A. Santoni Rugiu, *Ideologia e programmi nelle scuole elementari e magistrali dal 1859 al 1955*, Manzuoli, Florence 1980; F. De Vivo, *La formazione del maestro dalla legge Casati ad oggi*, La Scuola, Brescia 1986; I. Porciani (ed.), *Le donne a scuola. L'educazione femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Il Sedicesimo, Florence 1987.

An international comparison on the topic was made in the same years with the conference *Teacher training in Europe in the Period up to 1914* (Louvain 1979), aimed at investigating the condition of male and female teachers, primary and secondary, identifying three specific areas: – evolution of institutional provision, – development of curricula, – training, status and social functions. M. de Vroede, *The History of Teacher Training: Opening Address of the International*

the history of education, even internationally. Only in the last fifteen years has there been a growing interest among historians in the teaching profession, with particular attention to their legal status, career prospects, living standards and social status²⁴.

In research concerning the female teaching profession, Italian and international education historians have shown growing interest in teachers' socio-economic backgrounds and their salary and employment conditions²⁵. Some studies have investigated primary school teachers' social networks, their relationships with children and families, and their impact on girls' admission to primary school²⁶. Other studies have explored female teachers' associations and their political and journalistic activities at local and national levels²⁷. Still other have delved into the existential difficulties faced by many teachers, reconstructing their experiences of loneliness, isolation, and violence²⁸. In parallel, the need to investigate the development of the teaching profession and its influence on mass education

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.

²⁴ 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, no. 1 (2019), pp. 19-40; E. Marklund, *Who Was Going to Become a Teacher? The Socio-economic Background of Primary School Teachers in Northern Sweden 1870–1950*, in «History of Education» 50, no. 1 (Jan. 2021), pp. 1-23; K. Tolley, N. Beadie, *Socioeconomic Incentives to Teach in New York and North Carolina: Toward a More Complex Model of Teacher Labor Markets, 1800–1850*, in «History of Education Quarterly» 46, no. 1 (2006), pp. 36-72; K. Sohn, *The Social Class Origins of U.S. Teachers, 1860–1920*, in «Journal of Social History» 45, no. 4 (2012), pp. 908-935; Id., *The Living Arrangements of U.S. Teachers, 1860–1910*, in «Historical Social Research» 38, no. 1 (2013), pp. 339-365; M. Caruso (ed.), *Classroom Struggle: Organizing Elementary School Teaching in the 19th Century*, Peter Lang, Berlino 2015; M. Depaepe, F. Simon, *Social Characteristics of Belgian Primary Teachers in the Twentieth Century*, in «Cambridge Journal of Education» 27, no 3 (1997), pp. 391-404. Regarding the scarcity of studies in the international context, see: 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» (2022), p. 19; M. Larsen, *The Making and Shaping of the Victorian Teacher: A Comparative New Cultural History*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2011, p. 14; G. McCulloch, *The Struggle for the History of Education*, Routledge, London 2011, pp. 90–91.

²⁵ S. Ulivieri (ed.), *Essere donne insegnanti. Storia, professionalità e cultura di genere*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Turin 1996; C. Covato, *Un'identità divisa. Diventare maestra in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, Archivio Guido Izzi, Rome 1996; E.W. Sager, *Women Teachers in Canada, 1881–1901: Revisiting the ‘Feminization’ of an Occupation*, in «Canadian Historical Review» 88, no. 2 (June 2007), pp. 201-236; 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, no. 4 (Dec. 1999), pp. 421–427.

²⁶ M. Larsen, *The Making and Shaping of the Victorian Teacher*, cit.; G.J. Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes: A Social History of Women Teachers in America*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2014; 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 «Economic History Review» 74, no 3 (August 2021), pp. 754-783.

²⁷ C. Ghizzoni, *Maestre cattoliche e associazionismo magistrale a Milano in età giolittiana*, in S. Bartoloni (ed.), *Per le strade del mondo. Laiche e religiose fra Otto e Novecento*, il Mulino, Bologna 2007, pp. 181-212; C. Covato, *Maestre e professoressa fra ‘800 e ‘900: emancipazione femminile e stereotipi di “genere”*, in S. Ulivieri (ed.), *Essere donne insegnanti*, cit., pp. 19-46; T. Fitzgerald, E.M. Smyth, *Women Educators, Leaders and Activists: Educational Lives and Networks 1900–1960*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2014; P.A. Carter, *From Single to Married: Feminist Teachers’ Response to Family/Work Conflict in Early Twentieth-Century New York City*, in «History of Education Quarterly» 56, no. 1 (Feb. 2016), pp. 36-60; A. Nóbik, *Feminisation and Professionalisation in Hungary in the Late 19th Century: Women Teachers in Professional Discourses in Educational Journals (1887–1891)*, in «Espacio, Tiempo y Educación» 4, no. 1 (2017), pp. 1-17.

²⁸ A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù. La maestra italiana dell'Ottocento tra narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, eum, Macerata 2012; I. Porciani, *Sparsa di tanti triboli: la carriera della maestra*, in Ead. (ed.), *Le donne a scuola*, cit., pp. 170-190; P. Luciani, *La condizione delle maestre italiane alla fine dell'800. Il caso di Italia Donati*, Galaad Edizioni, Teramo 2012; S. Backman Prytz, J. Westberg, *“Arm the Schoolmistress!”*, cit., pp. 18-37; J.D. Wilson, *‘I Am Here to Help If You Need Me’: British Columbia’s Rural Teachers’ Welfare Officer, 1928–1934*, in S. Burke, P. Milewski (ed.), *Schooling in Transition: Readings in Canadian History of Education*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2012, pp. 94-118.

by adopting the specific lens of “gender studies” has strongly emerged²⁹. These analyses highlight how the expansion of female education and the subsequent massive entry of women into the profession were influenced by the existence of markedly gendered educational models and by the adoption of economic strategies based on pay disparity (gender-salary gap)³⁰. The adoption of gender history as a methodological approach is, therefore, essential for grasping the emancipatory yet controversial nature that characterized this profession as it extended to the female gender.

The present study is part of the international literature that analyses the process of the feminization of teaching in the 19th century, a phenomenon that radically changed the perception of women’s social role. With the research in question, we aimed to embrace the invitation made in the “preface” to a now-classic volume on normal education in Italy. This volume, the first of a series curated by the Central Office for Archival Heritage – *Fonti per la storia della scuola* (Sources for the History of Education) –, by offering scholars an overview of the institutional, social and cultural issues that are reflected and intertwined in the different levels of education in united Italy, and by providing a fundamental documentary base through an anthology of sources preserved at the Central State Archives, aimed to stimulate more in-depth and specific local research, to be conducted at peripheral State Archives, archives of local authorities, private or religious institutions, etc.³¹.

The aim of this research is to study the historical and political development of the normal schools in Italy, investigating not only their relationship with the reforms and transformations of the Italian school system or the influence of innovative theories and approaches in the wider European context, but also the peculiarities of their concrete achievement. The Normal School of Catania, situated within the Sicilian context, allows us to grasp these specificities and examine the relationship between the central government’s educational policies and local educational dynamics, as well as the impact of national and European pedagogical models on the territory.

To avoid limiting the scope of inquiry to the history of normal education’s regulatory evolution, and to instead focus on the relationship between local and national, and between Northern and Southern Italy – against the backdrop of the so-called “Southern Question” which profoundly impacted the conditions of school life for teachers and students between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with its social, cultural, and economic challenges –, this research aligns with the aforementioned Project of Relevant National Interest “Education and Development in Southern Italy from Unification to the Giolittian era (1861-1914)”. This continuity is evident both in the chronological period examined, and in the historiographical and critical methodological approach, which is not limited to studying pedagogical theories and top-down educational policies, but rather aims to contribute to reconstructing a “bottom-up” history of schools and communities³².

²⁹ G. Cappelli, M. Vasta, A “Silent Revolution”: school reforms and Italy’s educational gender gap in the Liberal Age (1861–1921), in «Climetrica» no. 15 (2021), pp. 203-229.

³⁰ G. Cappelli, G. Quiroga Valle, *Female Teachers and the Rise of Primary Education in Italy and Spain, 1861–1921*, cit., p. 776.

³¹ A. Dentoni-Litta, M. Raicich, M. Serio, G. Talamo, *Premessa*, in C. Covato, A.M. Sorge (eds.), *L’istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all’età giolittiana*, cit., pp. 11-12. Among the research concerning normal education that has moved in this direction over the last twenty years, the following are examples: 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», no. 4, 1998, pp. 201-219; R. Basso, *Donne in provincia. Percorsi di emancipazione attraverso la scuola nel Salento tra Otto e Novecento*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2000; A. Barausse, V. Miceli, *Le origini e i primi sviluppi dell’istruzione normale femminile in Molise (1861-1898)*, in C. Ghizzoni, S. Polenghi (eds.), *L’altra metà della scuola. Educazione e lavoro delle donne tra Otto e Novecento*, SEI, Turin 2008, pp. 135-158; V. Miceli, *Cultura pedagogica e manualistica scolastica. L’esperienza della Scuola Normale maschile di Campobasso (1872-1898)*, in «Espacio, Tiempo y Educación», vol. 2, 1, 2015, pp. 231-252.

³² The author collaborated on the aforementioned Project of Relevant National Interest as an external specialist for the local unit in Catania from 2019 to 2020, and as a research fellow from 2020 to 2022.

c. Objectives, research phases and project stakeholders

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the teaching profession in the Province of Catania between 1861 and 1914, with a specific focus on the figure of the female primary school teacher. The aim is to analyse their cultural, legal, and economic status, the material and moral demands of the profession, their relationship with the community and local authorities, and to offer an understanding of their social and gender positioning within Sicilian society at the turn of the two centuries. This study also seeks to contribute to a greater understanding of the role normal schools played in the literacy and professionalization of women in Sicily, and how these institutions responded to both the inherent demand for female education and the desire for social and economic emancipation among their student target.

Therefore, an accurate examination of the curricular, regulatory, and organizational aspects of the institutions responsible for training male and female primary school teachers in Italy was followed by the acquisition of documentary material, some of which is unpublished, housed in various archives across the territory. In particular, the extensive archival research conducted at the historical archive of the Human Sciences High School “Giuseppina Turrisi-Colonna” (formerly the Female Normal School of Catania)³³ and at the State Archive of Catania aimed to gather information regarding:

- the catchment area of the Female Normal School of Catania (geographical origin and social class of the aspiring teachers);
- the intellectual and material resources of the Normal School (teachers’ training and careers, teaching methods, premises, educational materials, libraries, financial resources, etc.);
- the relationship between the school and the local territory (its impact and outreach, relationship with local institutions and authorities).

The three-year project was structured into three phases, each corresponding to a distinct level of analysis:

1. Analysis of the regulatory framework and school reforms – The first phase involved an in-depth study of the evolution of central legislation and regulations concerning normal education from 1861 to 1914. This aimed to delineate the political-educational agenda pursued by the Italian ruling class during the first fifty years after the national unification. It particularly analysed the impact of pedagogical theories of the era (from herbartianism to pedagogical positivism) on curricula, content, and teaching methods. This included a shift from mnemonic and moralistic learning to the progressive adoption of the objective and experimental method, leading to greater attention to the psycho-physical aspects of the learning process and early childhood education. This was also accompanied by greater attention to the practical dimension of training, with the introduction of internships, the activation of the Froebelian course, the annexation of kindergartens, and so forth³⁴;

³³ The “Giuseppina Turrisi Colonna” Normal School, along with the “Nicola Spedalieri” High School, also founded in 1861, is the oldest public high school in post-unification Catania. The “Mario Cutelli” Gymnasium and the “Carlo Gemmellaro” Technical Institute date back to 1866, the Nautical Institute to 1874, and the “Mario Cutelli” High School to 1899 (G. Pagnano, *Il caso Catania. Appunti per uno studio*, in G. e M. Giarrizzo, *Per una storia d’Italia come storia delle sue scuole*, cit., p. 281). The only existing publication on the history of the Normal School for Women of Catania, published in 2017 as the result of extensive and dedicated research by Francesco Impallomeni, while belonging to a genre of celebratory and memoir-style publications, nonetheless serves as a valuable “guide” due to its lists of directors, principals, and teachers, brief biographies of illustrious professors, and the significant number of photographic and documentary illustrations that make up over half of the volume. F. Impallomeni (ed.), *Dalla Reale Scuola Normale Femminile al Liceo G. Turrisi Colonna*, Arti Grafiche Etna, Catania 2017.

³⁴ At this level, what Carla Ghizzoni defines as the “legal teacher” (“*maestro legale*”) emerges. C. Ghizzoni, *Il maestro nella scuola elementare italiana*, cit. p. 23.

2. Archival research and reconstruction of the Institute's history – The second phase involved acquiring documentation related to the Normal School for Women of Catania. This included consulting and digitizing documents from the historical archive of the “Giuseppina Turrisi Colonna” High School³⁵ and the State Archive of Catania (from the Prefecture - *Prefettura*, Provincial education office - *Provveditorato agli Studi*, and Provincial Administration - *Amministrazione Provinciale* collections)³⁶, to supplement data obtained from “official” bibliographical sources such as the *Annuari della pubblica istruzione* (Yearbooks of Public Education) and *Stati del personale addetto alla pubblica istruzione* (Lists of Public Education Personnel)³⁷. Extracts of resolutions concerning the adaptation of premises, furnishing, and scientific material provision, statistics on aspiring female teachers and governmental and provincial subsidies for boarders, along with annual reports from directors and teachers, enabled the reconstruction of the Institute's history from its founding year to the first decade of the twentieth century. Particular attention was paid to material and educational resources, the geographical origin and socio-economic status of the students, and the evolution of teaching practices.
3. Analysis of the biographies of former students who became teachers – The third and final phase of the research focused on reconstructing the individual stories of female teachers who graduated from the Normal School of Catania. This was based on scattered documentary material found in the *Prefettura* collection and the more systematically organized *Provveditorato agli Studi* collection (teachers' personal files)³⁸. Numerous documents produced by local authorities and central and peripheral school authorities (circulars, regulations, registers, reports, minutes of school inspection visits, extracts of resolutions for appointments, salaries, and promotions), as well as annual reports from the teachers themselves and their produced school and extracurricular materials (short essays, pedagogical compendiums, etc.), allowed for an examination of their cultural and professional profiles, working conditions, territorial assignments, and the implementation of teaching innovations.

It is expected that this research, through the acquisition, cataloguing, and digitization of archival materials, has contributed to the protection of cultural heritage, the preservation of historical memory, and the valorisation of the region's archival patrimony, with beneficial repercussions for the scientific community and for local studies in the history of schooling and education³⁹. The collected data will enrich the database of the PRIN Project “Education and Development in Southern Italy from Unification to the Giolittian era (1861-1914)” which will make it available via open-source platforms for broad and accessible dissemination of the results.

³⁵ Archivio Storico del Liceo Statale “G. Turrisi Colonna”, Registri, bb. 1-13.

³⁶ Archivio di Stato di Catania, fondo Prefettura, el. 1 bis, b. 293; el. 33 b. 58; el. 38, b. 22; el. 41, b. 50; Archivio di Stato di Catania, fondo Provveditorato agli Studi, class. A4 - Fascicoli personali insegnanti nelle scuole Superiori di Catania e provincia, bb. 47, 50, 54, 56, 57, 58, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69.

³⁷ *Annuari dell'Istruzione Pubblica del Regno d'Italia e Stati del personale addetto alla pubblica istruzione del regno d'Italia*, aa.ss. 1861-1914.

³⁸ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, class. A3 – Fascicoli personali insegnanti elementari e asili infantili del Comune di Catania e provincia; bb. 1-43.

³⁹ The research project was supported by a three-year agreement stipulated between the University of Catania and the “G. Turrisi Colonna” High School (referents Prof. Stefano Lentini, coordinator of the PRIN Catania research unit, and Prof. Emanuele Rapisarda, former School Director of the Institute). This agreement aimed to promote studies and research on the history of the Institute through the retrieval, cataloguing, and digitization of documentary material present in its archive (Resolution of the Council of the Department of Educational Sciences, April 19, 2022).

1. Literacy and teacher training in 19th-century Europe

1.1. The spread of primary education and the birth of the modern State

The 19th century marked a turning point in European educational history, witnessing the rise of mass schooling. This development responded to the economic, social, and political changes triggered by the Industrial Revolution and the reform movements of Nation-States, which recognized primary education as a crucial tool for social control, but also as a foundational pillar for the “modernization” and “rationalization” of the state apparatus, paralleling urban expansion and techno-scientific and industrial development.

Primary school went from being an exclusive privilege for the elite to becoming a progressively wider possibility for the popular classes. Although limited to teaching reading, writing, arithmetic, and moral and religious education, it had a decisive impact on the economic and social fabric, as well as on health, fertility, and mortality rates. It also served to consolidate and standardize national identities and customs⁴⁰. The extension of schooling to the masses constituted a true “educational revolution”, leading to a progressive increase in enrolments, school attendance, and the average level of education across Europe, albeit with significant national and regional variations⁴¹.

The French Revolution had already laid the groundwork for a centralized and secular education system, but it was during the 19th century that public education became regulated with the creation of national school laws. These included the 1806 school law of the Batavian Republic, the 1814 laws in Denmark, the 1833 Guizot Law in France, the 1838 Someruelos and 1857 Moyano Laws in Spain, and the 1859 Casati Law in Italy. Despite the existence of national legislative frameworks, 19th-century schooling generally remained decentralized in terms of organization and funding, which were entrusted to the competence of local authorities, parishes, villages, municipalities, or voluntary associations⁴².

From the late 18th century, centralized educational policies were adopted by Countries like Prussia and Austria, where public education was central to ambitious social, economic, and political reform programs aimed at strengthening State power. Indeed, both the 1763 school reform of Frederick II of Prussia and that of 1774 of Maria Theresa of Austria established the compulsory nature of primary education, which was financed by the State⁴³.

In England, conversely, popular education continued to develop, for most of the 19th century, through individual philanthropic initiatives aimed at establishing social control over the indigent and working

⁴⁰ D. Baker, *The Schooled Society: The Educational Transformation of Global Culture*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2014, p. 7.

⁴¹ G. Cappelli et al., *Human Capital in Europe, 1830s–1930s: A General Survey*, in «Journal of economic surveys» (2023), pp. 12–16. For an overview of school legislation see J. Westberg, L. Boser, I. Brühwiler (eds.), *School Acts and the Rise of Mass Schooling. Education Policy in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. For comparative education statistics: R.J. Barro, Chong-hwa Yi, *Education Matters: Global Schooling Gains from the 19th to the 21st Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

⁴² G. Cappelli et al., *Human Capital in Europe, 1830s–1930s*, cit., p. 14; P.H. Lindert, *Growing Public: Social Spending and Economic Growth since the Eighteenth Century Vol. 1 the Story*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

⁴³ J.V.H. Melton, *Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988. On the extension of the school reforms of Imperial Austria to Habsburg Lombardy, see: F. Piseri, *La legislazione per l'istruzione primaria nella Lombardia tra Sette e Ottocento*, in A. Bianchi (ed.), *L'istruzione in Italia tra Sette e Ottocento. Lombardia – Veneto – Umbria. Studi*, vol. I, La Scuola, Brescia 2007,

classes⁴⁴. A central legislation was not introduced until the Education Act of 1870, which mandated the division of territory into school districts and the creation of local school boards responsible for financial administration and oversight of schools. From that point on, the percentage of children attending school progressively increased, rising from 26% in 1871 to 57% in 1891, and reaching 70% by 1911⁴⁵.

In Sweden, following an 1842 school law, parishes were tasked with organizing school districts. In that instance too, it was up to each district's school boards to establish and fund schools, provide suitable premises, and remunerate teachers⁴⁶. Less than thirty years after the law's implementation, although each district had opened schools, only 43.2% of school-aged children were attending them⁴⁷. In the Swedish case, the spread of mass education was primarily hindered by the socio-economic conditions of the territory: as a predominantly rural Country, where 90% of the population lived in the countryside and about 80% worked in agriculture, families' need for child labor was the main obstacle to school attendance⁴⁸. Similar challenges arose in rural France, plagued by extreme poverty, abandoned school buildings, child labor, and long distances to reach schools⁴⁹. Spain, too, had trouble in alphabetizing its peasant masses for much of the century, a problem exacerbated by a highly decentralized school system where the management and funding of schools were the responsibility of municipalities often unable to cope⁵⁰.

These same managerial and financial challenges also characterized Italian primary schools in the late 19th century, which were regulated by the 1859 Casati Law of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia,

pp. 92-100; Id., *Dalla virtù al buon comportamento. Le prime esperienze di istruzione pubblica e laica nell'età delle riforme teresiano-giuseppine: con qualche esempio della Brescia veneziana*, in «Quaderni di Intercultura», anno IX (2017), pp. 97-110.

⁴⁴ A parliamentary report from 1839 stated that primary education imparted to the poor and working classes should promote religious and moral instruction, habits of order, good manners, hygiene and foster positive sentiments between employers and their workers, while being careful not to encourage aspirations of rising above their station and role in society. B.H. Bergen, *Only a Schoolmaster: Gender, Class, and the Effort to Professionalize Elementary Teaching in England, 1870-1910*, in «History of Education Quarterly», Vol. 22, no. 1, Cambridge University Press (Spring, 1982), pp. 2-3.

⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 3.

⁴⁶ In the Swedish case, too, the primary school curriculum mandated the development of basic knowledge, including reading, writing, arithmetic, religious singing, biblical history, and catechism, all within a school system marked by strong social class segregation. G. Larsson, J. Westberg, *Child Labour, Parental Neglect, School Boards, and Teacher Quality*, cit., p. 72; A. Berg, E. Larsson, *Diligent and docile workers: descriptions of the working poor and the social order in the Läsebok för folkskolan, 1868-1920s*, in «Paedagogica Historica», 59(1), 2022, pp. 19-35.

⁴⁷ G. Larsson, J. Westberg, *Child Labour, Parental Neglect, School Boards, and Teacher Quality*, cit., p. 72.

⁴⁸ The strong popular resistance to primary education, considered useless and harmful, manifested in neglecting to send children to school and refusing to pay school fees (ivi., p. 71). It is also interesting to note that in Sundvall, a region of Sweden that experienced progressive industrialization, conflicts among social groups regarding the opening of schools were not attributable to elite opposition to mass schooling, but rather to inequality in wealth distribution, particularly concerning distinctions made by regulations regarding the responsibility of farmers and landless individuals in funding schools. J. Westberg, *A conflicted political will to levy local taxes: inequality and local school politics in Sweden, 1840-1900*, in «Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy», vol. 4, no. 1/2018, pp. 3-12.

⁴⁹ D.M. Baker, P.J. Harrigan (eds), *The Making of Frenchmen: Current Directions in the History of Education in France, 1679-1979*, Historical Reflections Press, Waterloo 1980; E. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, cit., pp. 304-321. The "structural incompatibility" between rural labor and schooling has also been discussed with regard to Eastern Ontario, and this obstacle factor has also been recognized in the Russian context (M. Corbett, *Protracted Struggle: Rural Resistance and Normalization in Canadian Educational History*, in «Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation» 13, no. 1 (2011), 23, p. 30; B. Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy, 1861-1914*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1986, pp. 370-373).

⁵⁰ In Spain, primary education only began to advance significantly following a 1902 reform that placed schools under state control. A similar development occurred in Italy with the 1911 Daneo-Credaro Law. G. Cappelli, G. Quiroga Valle, *Female Teachers and the Rise of Primary Education in Italy and Spain, 1861-1921*, cit., p. 757.

extended to the entire Kingdom of Italy in 1861. An 1877 law by Minister Coppino increased mandatory school attendance from two to three years, emphasized compulsory education for peasant families, and provided financial support to municipal administrations from the central government. However, government subsidies to schools remained quite low (less than 2% of total municipal spending on education), and the number of enrolled school-aged children grew very slowly (from 24.7% in 1860 to just 37% in 1890)⁵¹.

In some instances, the process of schooling faced ideological and cultural resistance. In the Swedish case, beyond the disinterest of district school boards, who considered school management and oversight a marginal issue compared to others, religion also significantly influenced attendance at primary schools. This led groups of Methodists, Baptists, and Pietists, dissatisfied with the moral education provided in parish schools, to take actions that included school absenteeism and the establishment of private schools⁵².

At the same time, it is undeniable that from the late 18th century, Protestant Countries were particularly active in reforming the ethical-social codes upon which to build the values of a new middle class, moving towards a “secularized” morality⁵³. German education at that time was dominated by the so-called philanthropists (Campe, Salzmann, Basedow, Rochow), who aimed to provide a philosophical discourse detached from religious beliefs, marking the phase of what was known as “rationalism”. In contrast to the low attendance at parish schools, the Lutheran philanthropic schools attracted a large number of students, even gaining the favor of non-Protestants⁵⁴.

Even the “enlightened despots” of some Catholic States, in their educational policies, exhibited trends somewhat analogous to those of Protestant Countries⁵⁵. The expulsion of the Jesuits, undertaken in Portugal, Austria, Spain, France, by the Bourbons in Naples, Sicily, and in the Grand Duchy of Parma, as well as the suppression of religious orders that would occur a century later in unified liberal Italy, should be attributed not so much to theological disagreements but to a program of societal and state reform. This program had been taking shape since the Enlightenment critique and the tenets of jurisdictionalism, and it aimed to reduce the Church’s economic and political influence by abolishing its fiscal and patrimonial privileges and immunities, and dismantling its monopoly in the educational and cultural spheres⁵⁶.

The formation of a public and “laic” education system thus took shape alongside the consolidation of Nation-States. Through the secularization of knowledge, national ideology became intellectually tangible in its discursive development, aiming to mold, perpetuate, and normalize identity values

⁵¹ G. Cappelli, *A Struggling Nation Since Its Founding? Liberal Italy and the Cost of Neglecting Primary Education*, in L. Boser, I. Brühwiler, J. Westberg (eds.), *School Acts and the Rise of Mass Schooling*, cit., p. 237; 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, no. 2 (2020), p. 147.

⁵² G. Larsson, J. Westberg, *Child Labour, Parental Neglect, School Boards, and Teacher Quality*, cit., pp. 75-81.

⁵³ In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), Max Weber noted a strong convergence between the paradigmatic characteristics of the Protestant ethic, such as individual discipline in the face of faith, the idea of profession as a calling, and the worship of work, and the so-called spirit of capitalism. For further reading, see: M. Weber, *Economia e società*, trad. it. di T. Bagiotti, Edizioni di Comunità, Milan 1961. On this topic, see also G.P. Brizzi, *Scuola e istruzione popolare dall'età della Controriforma al secolo dei Lumi*, in E. Becchi (ed.), *Storia dell'educazione*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1987, pp. 73-88.

⁵⁴ S.Y. Lee, J. Winandy, *Scientization of professional teacher knowledges and construction of teaching methods*, cit., pp. 4-5.

⁵⁵ C. Covato, *La scuola normale: itinerari storiografici*, cit., p. 16.

⁵⁶ W.V. Bangert, *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù*, Marietti, Genoa 1990, pp. 391-418; P. Bianchini (ed.), *Morte e resurrezione di un ordine religioso*, Vita e pensiero, Milan 2006, p. 7.

within the populace⁵⁷. While in England, despite the increased regulation, the mass primary school system retained a strong denominational component⁵⁸, in France, educational reforms culminated in the Ferry Laws of 1882: these laws made primary education free, secular and compulsory, assigning the State the exclusive task of educating new generations; they also sanctioned the introduction of *morale laïque* (secular morality) into the primary school curriculum, replacing moral and religious instruction⁵⁹.

In the curriculum of Italian public primary schools, the replacement of religious instruction with notions on the rights and duties of citizens occurred with the Coppino Law of 1877. This caused bitter debates between secularists and Catholics, with the latter arguing that religious instruction could not be considered abolished, as the relevant provisions in the Casati Law had not been repealed.

Moreover, while the 1866 law on the dissolution of religious corporations and orders, which had traditionally managed schools throughout the Peninsula⁶⁰, aimed to limit the predominance of pre-existing educational and scholastic institutions in favor of the emerging state school, its effects were less significant than its proponents had hoped for: this resulted in a compromise, not due to conciliatory intentions but rather to the State's limited capacity, both centrally and peripherally, to immediately create a new network of schools and a renewed teaching body.

Due to these contingencies, educational institutions of religious origin were able to continue existing and exerting their influence on the Italian cultural and intellectual landscape between the two centuries, albeit with the stipulation of reconverting into private institutions⁶¹.

1.2. The primary school teacher: from “missionary” of moral education to secularized “civil servant”

The spread of mass education brought with it a significant transformation in the figure of the primary teacher. This role became progressively recognized at the state level, institutionalized, and

⁵⁷ S.Y. Lee, J. Winandy, *Scientization of professional teacher knowledges and construction of teaching methods*, cit., pp. 4-5.

⁵⁸ B.H. Bergen, *Only a Schoolmaster*, cit., p. 2.

⁵⁹ L.L. Clark, *Women and the Politics of Education in Third Republic France*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2023, p. 50.

⁶⁰ The male religious orders and corporations with the largest number of educational institutions were: the Piarists (68 institutions), the Barnabites (16), the Brothers of the Christian Schools (15), the Somascans (13), the Vincentian Missionaries (12), and the Franciscans (11). Among female corporations, the Sisters and Daughters of Charity (199 institutions), the Collegine Sisters of the Holy Family (95), the Daughters of St. Joseph (41), the Sisters of Mercy (39), and the Benedictines (38) stood out. See: G. Rocca, *Donne religiose. Contributo a una storia della condizione femminile in Italia nei secoli XIX-XX*, Rome 1992; S. Franchini, P. Pozzuoli (eds.), *Gli istituti femminili di educazione e di istruzione (1861-1910)*, Fonti per la storia della scuola, vol. 7, Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Dipartimento per i beni archivistici e librari, Direzione generale per gli archivi, Rome 2005.

⁶¹ The Barnabites continued to maintain a significant presence precisely where they managed to implement this delicate ‘reconversion’, founding new institutions in places of ancient presence, such as the *Collegio Alla Querce* in Florence and the *Collegio Bianchi* in Naples. The return of the Jesuits as managers of schools open to the public occurred between the 1880s and 1890s, and was fiercely opposed, including on a regulatory level, in areas where liberal-Masonic political currents were present, as in the case of Brescia and Livorno. The events of the *Collegio Mondragone* in Frascati, whose *pareggiamento* (equalization), initially granted and then revoked, became a political case in 1899, also testified to the limited sympathy towards the Order. Conversely, the case of *pareggiamento* granted to the normal school of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Nizza Monferrato in 1900 indicates a more favorable attitude of the political class towards Salesian environments, and also a greater propensity of liberal elites towards the Catholic presence in popular education, particularly for females. For a reference bibliography on the topic, see: G. Talamo, *La scuola dalla legge Casati all'inchiesta del 1864*, Giuffrè, Milan 1960, pp. 23-30; G. Bonetta, *Istruzione e società nella Sicilia dell'Ottocento*, cit.,

secularized, assuming a central position in the processes of nationalization underway in the 19th century. This reflected a broader trend toward the secularization and rationalization of European society, which found one of its primary battlegrounds in the school context and made the schoolmaster the linchpin of this political-educational project.

In various States, before this period, the profession had been the exclusive domain of the clergy, or was carried out by improvised and poorly qualified teachers. 18th and 19th-century Prussian and Austrian teachers were individuals with little or no formal training; they served the local community by performing this and other tasks, working individually and independently of the central government. Tutors and governesses for the elite classes often held the equivalent of a secondary school graduation, while the level of education for those serving the popular classes was much more rudimentary⁶².

This also held true for Habsburg Lombardy, where schooling was primarily provided by private tutors. Alternatively, where a sufficient number of pupils and funds allowed, teachers were recruited from the ecclesiastical proletariat, paid through bequests and donations from confraternities, or with contributions from municipalities or private benefactors. Their work focused on teaching the Latin language and grammar, and only occasionally included reading and writing. These latter objectives were considered too burdensome and generally irrelevant, given that the Counter-Reformation model upheld Latin as the official language in liturgy and its knowledge as a prerequisite for access to higher levels of education⁶³. The reality for the teaching class in the other Italian kingdoms around 1815 was no different. Following the brief but intense revolutionary experiences of a constitutional and liberal nature in the late 18th century (the Jacobin republics of 1796-97), the restoration of absolute monarchies saw religious orders regain their monopoly on education. In some cases, teaching staff were even appointed from among a barely literate ecclesiastical proletariat⁶⁴.

Even in *ancien régime* France, education was entrusted to religious congregations and orders. This particularly involved the work of the Jesuit Colleges, where teaching was exclusively in Latin, but

pp. 73-94; G. Chiosso, *Libertà e popolarità nell'esperienza storica della scuola cattolica*, in Conferenza Episcopale Italia, *La presenza della scuola cattolica in Italia*, La Scuola, Brescia 1992, pp. 69-112; A. Gaudio, *Educazione e scuola nella Toscana dell'Ottocento. Dalla restaurazione alla caduta della Destra*, La Scuola, Brescia 2001, pp. 250-280; Id., *Per una geografia storica delle scuole cattoliche*, in L. Pazzaglia (ed.), *Chiesa, cultura e educazione tra le due guerre*, La Scuola, Brescia 2003, pp. 359-374; G. Martina, *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù in Italia (1814-1983)*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2003; C. Saggiocco, *L'Italia in seminario. 1861-1907*, Carocci, Rome 2008; F. Casella, *Il Mezzogiorno d'Italia e le istituzioni educative salesiane. Richieste di fondazioni (1879-1922)*, LAS, Rome 2000; M. Sangalli (ed.), *Chiesa e scuola. Percorsi di storia dell'educazione tra XII e XX secolo*, Cantagalli, Siena 2000; G. Malizia, S. Ciatelli (eds.), *Dieci anni di ricerche. Scuola cattolica in Italia*, La Scuola, Brescia 2008.

⁶² A.J. LaVopa, *Prussian Schoolteachers: Profession and Office, 1763-1848*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1980, p. 25; 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.

⁶³ M. Piseri, *Un sistema educativo tra Sette e Ottocento e i suoi maestri. Il caso della Lombardia*, in E. Becchi, M. Ferrari (eds.), *Formare alle professioni*, cit., pp. 369-374; S. Polenghi, *Scuole elementari e manuali per i maestri tra Sette e Ottocento. Dall'Austria alla Lombardia*, in E. Becchi, M. Ferrari (eds.), *Formare alle professioni*, cit., pp. 398-418; Ead. (ed.), *La scuola degli Asburgo. Pedagogia e formazione degli insegnanti tra il Danubio e il Po (1773-1918)*, SEI, Turin 2012.

⁶⁴ L. Pazzaglia (ed.), *Chiesa e prospettive educative in Italia tra Restaurazione e Unificazione*, La Scuola, Brescia 1994; C. Sindoni, *Scuole e istituzioni educative negli Stati preunitari*, in F. De Giorgi, A. Gaudio, F. Pruneri (eds.), *Manuale di Storia della scuola italiana. Dal Risorgimento al XXI secolo*, Scholé, Brescia 2019, pp. 27-67.

also that of the Oratorians and the Brothers of the Christian Schools. These latter groups were more dedicated to popular education and willing to teach reading and writing in French⁶⁵.

With the pivotal shift to mass education in the 19th century, the creation of uniform school systems led various Nations to regulate stately the teacher training. In this field, Jesuit academies had historically claimed an international presence, especially, of course, regarding higher-level studies⁶⁶. However, the social and political transformations underway since the late 18th century made clear the need to move towards increasingly secularized knowledge. This necessitated refounding teaching content and practices, abandoning the *ratio studiorum* based on catechetical education and rote memorization, and reorganizing knowledge on rational and empirical foundations⁶⁷.

Within the context of the Habsburg monarchy, the concept of a new type of teacher began to emerge in the late 18th century. This shift occurred as the Enlightenment's anthropocentric outlook moved educational authority from religion to the State, shaping the figure of an "ideal" teacher increasingly distant from the role as a religious instructor, to acquire the status of a "public official", responding to the historical, political, and cultural events of the time. Mid-19th century pedagogical publications continued to advocate for a teacher devoted to moral and religious education, however, they also persistently linked this with the secular notion of a teacher as a bearer of "culture" and "civilization", aligning with the prevailing new ideologies and aiming for the institutionalized normalization of teachers as agents of change⁶⁸.

In the same vein, jacobin pedagogues, and later the positivists, continued to uphold the moral value of primary teachers' educational work, preserving the vision of the teacher as an "apostle" and "missionary", but stripping it of religious content and replacing it with political objectives within the framework of a nationalization process for the masses where "civil religion" became central⁶⁹. Indeed, the Italian and French teachers of the nineteenth century were also decorated with this ideological investiture, trained with the aim of transmitting ethical and social values consistent with the political objectives of their own Nation-States and of "carrying out" an intense work of cultural homogenization, especially in rural areas and in those characterized by linguistic or dialectal plurality. For the primary school teachers of post-unification Italy, tasked with alphabetizing the populace and instilling a "national consciousness", the gap between the canonical language of literary Tuscan and local dialects represented one of the main educational challenges of the era, and the most salient feature of the heterogeneous traditions and cultures that were coming together within the unified framework⁷⁰; French primary school teachers, whom Charles Péguy famously dubbed the "Black

⁶⁵ The congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the first lay Catholic congregation dedicated to teaching, founded in Reims by Jean-Baptiste de La Salle in 1684, is notable for having abandoned the individual teaching method in favor of the simultaneous method. It is also recognized for conceiving of a popular school with a practical character based on applied sciences, and for establishing the first seminary for future educators in 1685. According to the Congregation's rule, these educators were to dedicate their lives to the Christian mission of teaching and remain celibate, despite remaining laymen. For this reason, some historians attribute several educational and scholastic achievements of subsequent centuries to the Congregation's activities, including the invention of the middle school, vocational school, Sunday and evening schools, and schools for the training of primary teachers. L. Savoré, *Scuole cristiane*, in *Enciclopedia Italiana* Treccani 1936.

⁶⁶ P.F. Grendler, *Jesuit Schools and Universities in Europe 1548-1773*, Brill, Leiden 2019.

⁶⁷ S.Y. Lee, J. Winandy, *Scientization of professional teacher knowledges and construction of teaching methods*, cit., pp. 1-2; L. Lefty, *Teacher Education and Teachers' Colleges*, cit., p. 2.

⁶⁸ S.Y. Lee, J. Winandy, *Scientization of professional teacher knowledges and construction of teaching methods*, cit., pp. 2-5.

⁶⁹ S. Polenghi, *Scuole elementari e manuali per i maestri tra Sette e Ottocento. Dall'Austria alla Lombardia*, in E. Becchi, M. Ferrari (eds.), *Formare alle professioni*, cit., p. 403.

⁷⁰ Moreover, the annexation of the Duchy of Tuscany to the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont, sanctioned on March 11, 1860, highlighted two opposing visions regarding the cultural and professional identity that the primary teacher should embody. The "Tuscan" vision, leveraging the ancient primacy of the language and the prestigious pedagogical tradition

Hussars of the Republic”⁷¹, were particularly tasked with addressing the illiteracy of the peasant class and the reluctance of local “notables” toward popular education, within a political project that assigned schools, alongside the army and transport networks, the role of integrating the entire population into the Nation’s circuit⁷².

However, a discrepancy existed between the “ideal” image of teachers propagated by the ruling classes (regarding the profession’s status and respectability) and their “actual” reality beyond rhetoric, as demonstrated by various scholarly works that have attempted to understand the socio-economic status conferred by the profession, as well as the backgrounds and motivations of those who pursued it. The discretionary power and abuses by municipal authorities over Belgian and Italian teachers, the job insecurity of their French counterparts, and the existential solitude of Austrian and Finnish teachers⁷³, all clearly demonstrate how this category, whether it comprised educated or semi-illiterate individuals, well-paid or underpaid, belonging to the middle class or common folk, was, in practice, considered at “the very edge of professional respectability”⁷⁴.

In 19th-century Europe, teachers often had to secure multiple income sources to survive, whether legal or illegal, formal or informal, and remunerated monetarily or non-monetarily (grain, fodder, cereals). In Sweden, multiple employment was a widespread practice, particularly among teachers in rural areas: it involved 57% of them in 1896 (compared to 17% in urban areas), and common additional roles included sacristan and organist, followed by treasurer, librarian, postal and telegraph station manager, accountant and farmer. In mid-century England, about half of all teachers held secondary occupations, including merchant, and in Prussia, up to 1901, 20% of primary school teachers worked as organists in parishes. In rural Italy, it was also not uncommon for teachers to be

of moderates who identified with the «*Guida dell’Educatore*» (Educator’s Guide) journal lineage, tended to envision an “ideal” teacher, rich in knowledge as well as didactic skills. The “Piedmontese” vision, characterized by pedantic and meticulous prescription of highly detailed curricula, aimed to form a modest type of teacher, who learned to speak Italian well but “left Dante to the scholars” (T. Tomasi, *Dalla scuola normale al liceo magistrale*, in «*Scuola e Città*», 1965, no. 6-7, p. 426). Between the two approaches, the latter would prevail, favoring a basic and professionalizing training for primary teachers. While less prestigious than other study paths, this training was considered sufficient for the needs of popular schooling and certainly more realistic and achievable. For further details, see: C. Ghizzoni, *Essere Maestri in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, cit.; A. Gaudio, *La «Guida dell’Educatore» di Raffaello Lambruschini*, in G. Chiosso (ed.), *Scuola e stampa nel Risorgimento. Giornali e riviste per l’educazione prima dell’Unità*, Franco Angeli, Milan 1989, pp. 119–145; Id., *La storiografia su Lambruschini: un educatore o un classico della pedagogia nazionale*, in L. Caimi (ed.), *Autorità e libertà: Tra coscienza personale, vita civile e processi educativi. Studi in onore di Luciano Pazzaglia*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2011, pp. 145–158; F. Cambi (ed.), *Raffaello Lambruschini pedagogista della libertà*, FirenzeLibri, Reggello 2006.

⁷¹ The French poet and essayist Charles Péguy (1873–1914), a student of Romain Rolland and Henri Bergson at the *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris in 1894, developed socialist convictions during his formative years, however, he later converted to Catholicism in 1907. His polemical writings and ideological stances made him suspect in the eyes of both the Church, whose authoritarianism he attacked, and the socialists, whose anticlericalism and later pacifism he denounced. J. Bastaire, *Péguy, il NonCristiano*, translated by G. Cavalli, Editoriale Jaca Book, Milan 1994, p. 24.

⁷² E. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, cit., pp. 304–321.

⁷³ M. Depaepe, F. Simon, *Social Characteristics of Belgian Primary Teachers in the Twentieth Century*, cit., p. 402; H. Cavallera, *La fondazione della coscienza nazionale nel positivismo e nel neoidealismo italiano*, in F. Cambi, G. Trebisacce (eds.), *I 150 anni dell’Italia Unità. Per un bilancio pedagogico*, ETS, Pisa 2012, p. 57; C.R. Day, *The Rustic Man: The Rural Schoolmaster in Nineteenth-Century France*, in «*Comparative Studies in Society and History*» 25, no. 1 (Jan. 1983), p. 40; E. Anttila, A. Väänänen, *Rural Schoolteachers and the Pressures of Community Life: Local and Cosmopolitan Coping Strategies in Mid-twentieth-century Finland*, in «*History of Education*» 42, no. 2 (March 2013), pp. 182–203; C. Gerdenitsch, *Popular Education in Rough Terrain: The Educational Discourse in Austrian Teachers’ Journals at the Turn of the 20th Century*, in C. Gerdenitsch, J. Hopfner (eds.), *Erziehung und Bildung in ländlichen Regionen—Rural Education*, Peter Lang Publishing Group, Frankfurt 2011, pp. 61–72.

⁷⁴ S. Backman Prytz, J. Westberg, “*Arm the Schoolmistress!*”, cit., p. 20.

sacristans, organists, librarians, tax officials, auction managers, notaries, postal workers, or even artisans, tailors, shoemakers, barbers, carpenters, hunters and aviculturists⁷⁵.

From the latter half of the 19th century, the role of the primary school teacher gained greater importance in several European Countries, both for the improvement in their socio-economic status and for a clearer definition of their legal position, linked to the evolution of their specific training. This process can be defined as “professionalization”, having consisted in the progressive recognition by society and culture of the time for the service provided by teachers, in qualifying their skills through social and economic rewards, and finally in granting them trade union and political visibility⁷⁶.

In the Netherlands, the legal and financial status of teachers saw a gradual improvement starting in the 1860s, thanks to interventions regarding salaries and pensions. At that time, the professionalization of the category was also aided by the introduction of stringent certification standards, the emergence of teacher associations, and the production of numerous educational journals⁷⁷. In the Belgian context too, primary teachers gradually enjoyed greater legal protections from the second half of the century, both in public and denominational sectors, and, even in this case, the main factor in improving their status was the growing influence of trade union organizations, which often resorted to journalism to counter arbitrary acts and denounce abuses of power⁷⁸. Similarly, in late 19th-century Italy, the development of teacher associations, coinciding with the spread of workers’ movements and socialist doctrines, was accompanied by a prolific output of periodicals on schooling and education. These publications helped increase teachers’ corporate self-awareness and drew public attention to the profession’s critical issues⁷⁹.

However, while the economic and social development goals of Nations demanded increasingly widespread and effective literacy, and thus greater professionalism from teachers, a “paradox”

⁷⁵ Internationally, the expression “makeshift economy”, coined by Olwen Hufton, has become very influential. It describes the practice of poor families relying on diversified means of subsistence. This diversity of livelihoods or multiple occupations has also been described by the Swedish term *mångsyssleri*, the French *pluriactivité*, and the German *mehrfachstätigkeit*. Some scholars have noted that the diversification of livelihoods had a positive influence on the expansion of mass education in certain Countries, facilitating its spread precisely because of reduced wage expenses. Furthermore, it appears that involvement in multiple occupations helped strengthen teachers’ social relationships and interactions, countering the risk of leading an isolated life; this phenomenon affected Austria, Finland, and France. J. Westberg, *How did teachers make a living?*, cit., pp. 22-36; M. Lamberti, *State, Society, and the Elementary School in Imperial Germany*, Oxford University Press, New York 1989, p. 14; P. Gardner, *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England: The People’s Education*, Croom Helm, London 1984, p. 125; S. Olivieri, *I maestri*, cit., p. 174.

⁷⁶ In defining “professionalization” concept, functionalist studies suggest adopting a bourgeois perspective, focusing on aspects like the division of labor, the importance of institutionalized knowledge, professional ethics, and occupation as a determinant of social standing. Some scholars reject applying this ideal type to the teaching profession, considering it almost always an imperfect realization, and preferring to study the concrete reality and daily practice of the profession. Magali Sarfatti Larson further emphasizes the processual nature of professionalization and the need to consider the historical context within which a particular group seeks to negotiate the boundaries of an area within the social division of labor and establish control over it, thereby reserving social and economic rewards for providing a given service. In this sense, the concept of professionalization is understood as a monopoly over a sector of knowledge and control over the market for that knowledge. B.H. Bergen, *Only a Schoolmaster*, cit., pp. 6-7. See also M. de Vroede, *The History of Teacher Training*, cit., p. 6.

⁷⁷ M. van Essen, *Strategies of Women Teachers 1860–1920*, cit., p. 419-420.

⁷⁸ M. Depaepe, F. Simon, *Social Characteristics of Belgian Primary Teachers in the Twentieth Century*, cit., pp. 397-398.

⁷⁹ The earliest forms of Italian teacher associations had a mutualistic character: like the liberal-leaning workers’ mutual aid societies, they began by providing insurance and welfare functions before evolving into forms of corporate representation and trade union organization. The demands of these teacher societies shared common themes, ranging from the salary issue (especially concerning the differing treatment of urban and rural teachers) to the pension fund (though already envisioned by the Casati Law of 1859, but only effectively implemented in the 1870s and properly reformed between the Giolittian era and Fascism). Regarding the rapid expansion of educational periodicals, which formed the true connective tissue of this associationism, it is interesting to note that «*L’avvenire dei maestri elementari*» («The future of

occurred, consisting in the fact that the possibility of accessing more lucrative occupations, offered by the incipient industrialization and the modernization of administrative structures, made the teaching profession progressively less attractive in some States. In Italy, for example, the profession became gradually less desirable for men, as they could access careers in the tertiary sector, commerce, industry and public administration, especially in the Country's more urban and economically developed areas⁸⁰. A similar trend occurred in some German States, where increased job opportunities in industry made the profession progressively less appealing to men from the lower middle class (*mittelstand*), comprising artisans, small traders and innkeepers, who had traditionally supplied the largest contingent of recruits. This also happened in the USA, where the industrial development of the East Coast and the westward pioneer movement by the end of the century pushed men towards new occupations⁸¹. Some studies on the profession's developments in the Netherlands also suggest that the positive regard for the teaching profession, prior to industrialization's take-off in the last decade of the 19th century, can be attributed to a lack of white-collar jobs⁸².

On the other hand, while the possibility of pursuing a primary teaching career offered upward mobility to a specific segment of the population, this professional category rarely managed to achieve positions superior to that of a mere scholastic "proletariat". In Belgium, the teaching profession, despite enjoying respectability among some of the population, convincing rural workers, artisans, and small traders to encourage their children toward a teaching career, rarely guaranteed a real social promotion, but it leveled teachers' status to that of the broad mass of a working middle class⁸³. In England too, the profession, which had begun to introduce proper certifications between the 1840s and 1850s and adopt salary scales based on years of satisfactory service starting in the 1870s, continued to suffer from significant discredit among the higher echelons of society. The English middle class did not aspire to teaching (except at the university level) as an opportunity for social mobility, and the primary school teachers, often labeled as those who had failed in other trades, complained of holding a much more degraded position than they felt they deserved. This led the National Union of Elementary Teachers, founded in 1870, to remove the term "Elementary" from its title in 1889, hoping for a unified professional framework that would allow primary school teachers to ascend to the social status of secondary school teachers. However, English teachers remained in an interstitial position between the working class and the middle class to which secondary school teachers belonged, the latter keen to emphasize this demarcation when a special Commission discussed the creation of a professional register in 1899⁸⁴.

elementary teachers»), founded in 1880 through the collaboration of various teacher societies, publicized the case of the teacher Italia Donati, who died by suicide due to persecution by the mayor of Porciano (in Tuscany) and quickly became a symbol of the unfortunate conditions in which the Italian teaching class, particularly women, had to operate. Other newspaper, such as «*Il risveglio educativo*» («The educational awakening»), «*Il corriere delle maestre*» («The teachers' courier»), «*Il lavoro educativo*» («Educational work»), and «*I diritti della scuola*» («The rights of the school»), which emerged around the Giolittian age, made an essential contribution to the organization of the *Unione Magistrale Nazionale*, first national association of Italian teachers, founded in 1901, that actively worked for the economic and legal improvement of the teaching class, achieving milestones that included salary increases and pension reform. G. Chiosso (ed.), *Scuola e stampa nell'Italia liberale. Giornali e riviste per l'educazione dall'Unità a fine secolo*, La Scuola, Brescia 1993; Id. (ed.), *I periodici scolastici nell'Italia del secondo Ottocento*, La Scuola, Brescia 2014.

⁸⁰ A. Carbone, *Diventare maestra nell'Italia post-unitaria.*, cit. p. 95.

⁸¹ J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century*, cit., pp. 253-254.

⁸² M. van Essen, *Strategies of Women Teachers 1860–1920*, cit., p. 419-420.

⁸³ M. Depaepe, F. Simon, *Social Characteristics of Belgian Primary Teachers in the Twentieth Century*, cit., p. 396.

⁸⁴ B.H. Bergen, *Only a Schoolmaster*, cit., pp. 1-2, 8-15.

1.3. The expansion of normal schools in Europe and early initiatives in pre-Unification Italy

Throughout the 19th century, the need to shape citizens in line with individual Nation-States' political agendas through mass schooling, and the need to ensure uniform education via standardized practices and techniques, necessitated investment in specific teacher training. The establishment of dedicated institutions for this purpose addressed the urgent need to create increasingly structured and systematic training pathways for teachers. These pathways did not just focus on imparting basic cultural knowledge and the moral and civic development of future educators; they aimed to professionalize them through appropriate “didactic” and “methodological” training.

These institutions found their early precursors in some German States, whose initiatives, stemming from Protestant rationalist currents, were later adopted as models by other Countries as Enlightenment ideas spread and in response to the political circumstances and social and cultural changes of the era⁸⁵. Influenced by Pietism and philanthropism, Prussia was a pioneer in the institutionalization of teacher training schools, providing, from the early 18th century, a model of seminary-style training with theoretical and practical lessons (*schullehrseminar*), initiated by August Hermann Francke with his *Seminarium selectum praeceptorium* founded in Halle in 1707⁸⁶.

The German catholic States showed a keen interest in these developments in Protestant areas, so much so that the Augustinian abbot Johann Ignaz Felbiger, dissatisfied with the state of parish schools in his hometown (Sagan, Silesia), drew inspiration from the ideas of Johann Julius Hecker and Johann Friedrich Hahn, who worked at Francke's teacher seminary, to draft regulations for schools intended for teacher training which would spread throughout predominantly Catholic Southern and Western Germany from the late 18th century. For his teacher training school founded in Silesia in 1774, Felbiger adopted the “tabular-literal” method used by Hahn in 1763 for teaching catechism. This method, which marked the shift from individual teaching to simultaneous instruction, based on choral reading aloud, the use of teaching aids for audience presentation, and frequent use of questions and answers, became the “norm” for all other schools established for this purpose, later being defined as the “Sagan method” or “normal method”⁸⁷.

The term “normal” (from the Latin *norma*: a unit of measurement referring to a carpenter's square), first used by Felbiger to define the Sagan school (*normalschule*), was repurposed in France in 1794. There, it referred to the first public secondary school, the *École Normale Supérieure*, which aimed to train teachers who would, in turn, establish secondary normal schools (*écoles normales*) and reform the education system according to republican values⁸⁸. The same term later became widespread but was used to describe methodical training pathways that did not always refer to the same type of institution.

To be precise, for most 19th-century European States, the actual model for establishing teacher training institutions was not the schools inspired by Felbiger, which in practice only late 18th-century Austria adopted (Theresian reform of 1774), instead, it was the Prussian seminary. Beyond their similar methodological foundations, these institutions were entirely different: while the *Schullehrseminar* presented itself as an independent, full-time institution (with boarding facilities), offering a three-year course of study and an annexed practical school, the *Normalschulen* were

⁸⁵ M. de Vroede, *The History of Teacher Training*, cit., p. 2.

⁸⁶ E. Hoser, *Francke*, in M. Laeng (ed.), *Enciclopedia pedagogica*, vol. III, La Scuola, Brescia 1989, pp. 5085-5088; G. Catalfamo, *Il pensiero pedagogico nei secoli XVII e XVIII*, in M.F. Sciacca (ed.), *Grande antologia filosofica*, vol. XVI, Marzolari, Milan 1968, pp. 228-235; F. Buzzi, *Pietismo*, in *Enciclopedia Filosofica*, vol. IV, Bompiani, Milan 2006, pp. 8621-8622.

⁸⁷ S.Y. Lee, J. Winandy, *Scientization of professional teacher knowledges and construction of teaching methods*, cit., pp. 5-7; J.V.H. Melton, *Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria*, cit.; S. Polenghi, *La pedagogia di Felbiger e il metodo normale*, in «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», 8, 2001, pp. 245-268.

⁸⁸ L. Lefty, *Teacher Education and Teachers' Colleges*, cit., p. 3.

essentially primary schools (*Hauptschule*) that earned the “normal” designation by providing some practical pedagogical lessons through short-term courses (a few weeks or months)⁸⁹.

In the 1830s, French *écoles normales* bore clear resemblances to German seminaries, being boarding institutions with two-year study programs, often compared by contemporaries to “lay convents” (*couvents laïques*)⁹⁰. Similarly, the Spanish *escuelas normales*, which emerged in the 1840s, were initially conceived as boarding colleges, though they later became day schools. The Belgian *écoles normales* and Dutch *normaalscholen* were similar to the seminaries established in the Netherlands based on the Prussian model (*kweekscholen*)⁹¹. Even the Swedish seminary for teacher training (*folkskollärarseminarium*), at the time of its first state-level regulation in 1862, was an independent institution structured with two years of theoretical studies and a third year of practical training at a primary school. However, unlike its German counterparts, it did not have boarding facilities⁹².

In England, the first teacher training college emerged in 1805 through the initiative of Joseph Lancaster, who devised the “peer tutoring” method, which stipulated that students more advanced in their studies (monitors) would assist the primary instructor in simultaneous teaching to a certain number of children⁹³; but it was James Kay who, in 1840, conceived of the first national institution in London for training teachers aimed at indigent young people (the Battersea Normal School): that school would inspire subsequent creations of training institution by charitable organizations, like the British Society and the National Society, whose apprenticeship system required student-teachers to practice in primary schools, receiving secondary instruction from the school principals as well⁹⁴.

Unlike the cases presented above, the first normal schools to spread across the Italian Peninsula, dating back to the late 18th century, predominantly adopted the Austrian *Normalschule* model inspired by Felbiger. Their proliferation was significantly boosted by the Habsburg-ruled Lombardy-Venetia Kingdom, where the “normal method” was implemented not through the opening of seminaries (following the Prussian model), but by adding a “methodology and catechism” (“*metodica e catechistica*”) course to primary schools. This course, lasting between three and six months, was accessible after successfully completing the fourth primary grade, included practical training, and concluded with a qualifying examination⁹⁵. Teaching according to the normal method had also found considerable diffusion in late 18th-century Sicily, thanks to the commitment of Canon Giovanni Agostino De Cosmi in adapting it to the Island’s educational and scholastic needs⁹⁶. It would be

⁸⁹ M. de Vroede, *The History of Teacher Training*, cit., p. 7.

⁹⁰ Access to *écoles normales* required tuition payment, but students largely financed their education through scholarships, with the stipulation of practicing for at least ten years in primary schools. C.R. Day, *The Rustic Man*, cit., p. 28; L.L. Clark, *Women and the Politics of Education in Third Republic France*, cit., pp. 43-44.

⁹¹ M. de Vroede, *The History of Teacher Training*, cit., pp. 7-8.

⁹² J. Westberg, G. Denaro, *The rise of normal Schools in the Kingdom of Italy: mass schooling, teacher training and the feminization of the teaching profession, 1859-1911*, in «Annali della facoltà di Scienze della formazione», Università degli Studi di Catania, no. 22 (2023), p. 127.

⁹³ The peer tutoring method would become widespread in Europe, the Americas, South Africa, Egypt, India (under the name of the “Madras” system) and in the British colonies. B.H. Bergen, *Only a Schoolmaster*, cit., pp. 8-9.

⁹⁴ Teacher training institutions were also fundamental in the process of modernization and nation-building in the Americas. The first was founded in the United States in 1834, inspired by the Prussian model, followed by Brazil in 1835, Chile in 1840, Argentina in 1870, the Dominican Republic in 1875, and Canada in 1902. Normal schools also appeared in Japan in 1872 and in China in 1895. L. Lefty, *Teacher Education and Teachers’ Colleges*, cit., p. 3.

⁹⁵ In the Lombardy-Venetia Kingdom, the first normal school was officially founded in Brera in 1788 by the Somascan priest Francesco Soave, following his visit to the Tyrolean schools of Rovereto, Trento, and Bolzano, where the method had been applied. Soave himself was tasked with translating Felbiger’s Regulation for German normal schools, followed by a compendium to apply the method in Austrian Lombardy (*Compendio del metodo delle scuole normali ad uso delle scuole della Lombardia austriaca*), published in 1821. For further details: C. Pancera, *I testi scolastici di Francesco Soave*, in L. Bellatalla (ed.), *Maestri, didattica e dirigenza nell’Italia dell’Ottocento*, Tecomproject, Ferrara 2000, pp. 43-53; C. Mazzini, S. Fornara (eds.), *Francesco Soave e la grammatica del Settecento*, Edizioni Dall’Orso, Alessandria 2004; D. Corzuol, *Scuole normali e studio della retorica nella Lombardia Austriaca del Settecento. Francesco Soave figura di mediatore tra area italiana e area tedesca*, Giardini Editori e Stampatori, Pisa 2007.

⁹⁶ C. Sindoni, *Giovanni Agostino De Cosmi e la scuola popolare di Sicilia*, Samperi, Messina 2011.

further promoted by the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the 1820s, with regulations that affected both its continental domains (Naples) and insular domains (Sicily). In this case too, it involved the opening of “model” elementary schools (*scuole elementari “modello”*) where the method was applied and learned, rather than the establishment of independent teacher training institutions⁹⁷.

Conversely, Ferrante Aporti’s initiative, as director of Cremona’s primary schools in 1821, to establish a “School of Method” (*Scuola di Metodo*) in 1844 at the University of Turin (Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia) can be likened to those in mid-19th century Prussia, which, besides the progressive spread of seminaries, also fostered the activation of pedagogy courses in almost all universities (most notably at Leipzig and Jena)⁹⁸. Aporti’s School of Method served as a laboratory for the production of a series of manuals and teaching aids, such as Vincenzo Troya’s *Sillabari*, Giovanni Antonio Rayneri’s *Principii della metodica* (1850) and *Della pedagogica* (1859), and Casimiro Danna’s *L’arte del comporre insegnata per gradi e per esempi alle famiglie ed alle scuole primarie, speciali e di latinità* (1858). In the latter half of the century, the initiatives experimented in the Savoy Kingdom increasingly aligned with the Prussian model of seminary training⁹⁹: this would ultimately lead, with the Lanza Law of 20 June 1858, and subsequently the Casati Law of 13 November 1859 (later extended to the entire Kingdom of Italy), to formalize the institution of normal schools organized into three-year study programs, equipped with boarding facilities, and with an annexed practice school¹⁰⁰.

Following an Imperial school law of 1869, Austria also aligned itself with the prevailing European model of teacher training schools, establishing four-year boarding institutions for teachers (*Lehrerbildungsanstalt*), which students could enter from the age of 14, and whose admission exam

⁹⁷ At that time, alongside the normal method, the Lancastrian method was also introduced in Naples by Antonio Scoppa from Messina (Sicily). This method spread in the same years in the Grand Duchy of Parma, Piacenza and Guastalla through the initiative of Don Paolo Gandolfi, and in the Duchy of Tuscany driven by Count Girolamo de’ Bardi and the pedagogue Enrico Mayer. In the early 19th century, Lancastrian schools were also promoted in Piedmont by Ludovico di Breme, Marquis of Gattinara, and Prospero Balbo, but they were suppressed after the uprisings of 1821. C. Sindoni, *Influenze inglesi nella scuola popolare ottocentesca. Note sull’introduzione del metodo di Joseph Lancaster in Sicilia*, in «Quaderni di Intercultura» anno VII (2015), pp. 101-116; G. Chiosso, *Carità educatrice e istruzione in Piemonte. Aristocratici, filantropi e preti di fonte all’educazione del popolo nel primo ‘800*, SEI, Turin 2007, pp. 101-102.

⁹⁸ J. Bowen, *Storia dell’educazione occidentale*, Mondadori, Milan 1983, p. 283.

⁹⁹ Among the initiatives, we recall that of Domenico Berti, who, after attending the conferences of the Turin School of Method, began to privately instruct a group of young women at his home. Following the initiative’s success, Berti obtained suitable premises from the government for conducting lessons. In 1852, the school became a three-year program, and a boarding school was established to facilitate non-resident students in Turin. The annexation, starting in 1854, of a primary course to facilitate practical exercises and internships aligned Berti’s institute with the model adopted for normal schools in other European States. S. Ulivieri, *I maestri*, cit., p. 168.

¹⁰⁰ Under the Casati Law, to enrol in a normal school, males needed to be 16 years old and females 15. Candidates had to pass an admission exam and were required to present a certificate of morality issued by the municipality and a certificate of good physical constitution. At the end of the second year, students could obtain a lower-grade license, qualifying them to teach in the lower primary school cycle (grades I-II). Upon completing the three-year program, they earned a higher-grade license, enabling them to teach in the upper cycle (grades III-IV) (art. 359). The subjects taught included: Italian language and literature, geography and national history, arithmetic and accounting, elements of geometry, basic notions of physics, chemistry, and natural history, elementary hygiene rules, linear drawing and calligraphy, and pedagogy. In normal schools for females, the teaching of women’s work (knitting and sewing) was provided. In male normal schools, an elementary course in agriculture and notions on citizens’ rights and duties could be added (art. 358). Starting from the second year, practical internship lessons were required at a primary course provided to the institute by the Municipality where it was established (art. 360). Those who had not attended a normal school could also sit for the licensing exams (art. 371). The Casati Law empowered Provinces and Municipalities to establish male and female teacher training schools (*scuole magistrali*) at their own expense, preparing candidates for the lower-grade license (art. 370). Each normal schools and *scuole magistrali* included a boarding facility, established at the expense of the Municipality or Province, to accommodate normal students, especially those from distant locations (art. 367). Boarding students were required to pay a fee, but the State annually provided subsidized places through public competitions for needy students aspiring to attend normal schools (art. 366). Teachers’ salaries were borne by the State, while expenses for premises and furnishings were the responsibility of the Municipalities (art. 363).

covered primary school subjects. As in most other European States, the increased investment in teacher training was linked to the need to rationalize the education system and reorganize it with a secular focus. Indeed, the enactment of this law, which also raised compulsory schooling from 6 to 8 years, coincided with the dissolution of the Jesuit order within the monarchy, and the consequent need to renew teaching staff's training pathways¹⁰¹.

Though differing in duration and type, these institutions for teacher training helped define common educational standards, transforming teaching into a recognized, regulated and certified profession. At the same time, they did not just provide technical and pedagogical preparation, but they also served an ideological function, adapting teacher training to the emerging political, cultural and social needs peculiar to various Nation-States.

In Protestant Prussia, which, as we've seen, had spearheaded innovative initiatives in teacher training since the late 18th century, the political decision to drastically reduce the curricular breadth of teacher seminaries, after the 1848 uprisings, sparked new critical voices, that contrasted the educational conservatism of the restored old political order with the occurrence to adapt teacher training to the "real" needs of the German masses¹⁰². The Catholic Germany's *normalschulen* also kept pace with the Protestant front's innovative drives, significantly decreasing Latin lessons in favor of the national language and integrating catechetical intellectual and moral training with the teaching of natural and "real" sciences. By promoting Pietist virtues like hard work, obedience, and inner piety, German normal schools aimed not only to mold good citizens but also men useful to society, responding to the demands raised by burgeoning mercantilism and the construction of that new national identity which the mid-century uprisings had helped delineate¹⁰³.

In France, where normal schools had established a consolidated structure with the Guizot Law of 1833, which mandated their opening in every district, the Ferry Reforms of 1882 further accelerated the process of forming a qualified teaching body grounded in secular morality, aimed at creating a cohesive citizenry¹⁰⁴. Britain's education system, on the other hand, would continue to suffer for the rest of the century from a lack of specific training for primary teachers, even though it had seen increased State intervention (certifications for primary teaching were introduced in the mid-1840s, and training colleges were placed under state control in the 1860s)¹⁰⁵. While higher-grade teachers were afforded increasingly advanced study paths (secondary and sometimes university level, characterized by a broad curriculum and the use of Latin as a universal language), primary teachers' training would be progressively curtailed with increasingly simplified programs, based on the assumption that a schoolmaster did not need to know more than necessary¹⁰⁶.

In the Italian peninsula, the birth of the first normal schools, which we have seen dating back to the pre-Union period, was due both to the contribution of religious congregations (the Somascan Fathers in the Lombardy-Venetia Kingdom and the Celestine Fathers in the Kingdom of Naples) and to initiatives of a secular-liberal character (like the Piedmontese School of Method, whose pedagogical lectures attracted the interest of school reformers such as Carlo Boncompagni, Antonio Rayneri,

¹⁰¹ J. Scheipl, *La formazione degli insegnanti in Austria. "Lavori in corso"*, in O. Zanato Orlandi (ed.), *Percorsi nella professione docenti. Innovazione formativa e didattica. Atti della V Biennale Internazionale sulla Didattica Universitaria. Padova 1-2-3 dicembre 2004*, PensaMultimedia, Lecce 2006, pp. 381-406.

¹⁰² M. de Vroede, *The History of Teacher Training*, cit., p. 5.

¹⁰³ S.Y. Lee, J. Winandy, *Scientization of professional teacher knowledges and construction of teaching methods*, cit., pp. 7-8.

¹⁰⁴ C.R. Day, *The Rustic Man*, cit., p. 28; L.L. Clark, *Women and the Politics of Education in Third Republic France*, cit., pp. 43-44.

¹⁰⁵ M. de Vroede, *The History of Teacher Training*, cit., p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ B.H. Bergen, *Only a Schoolmaster*, cit., pp. 8-9.

Domenico Berti, and Ferdinando Troya)¹⁰⁷. Following the uprisings of 1848, although resized in a moderate way, these initiatives found strong opposition from the Catholic Church, receiving the harsh condemnation by the Jesuits and the ban of attendance to ecclesiastics by the archbishop of Turin. However, this did not alter the liberal direction that the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia would continue to pursue in its educational policies during the second half of the century. These policies, first with the Boncompagni Law of 1848 and then with the Casati Law of 1859 (which would become the foundational law of the Italian school system), aimed to concentrate control of public education in the hands of the State and promote its progressive secularization, including through the training of teaching staff¹⁰⁸.

In contrast, other pre-unification Italian States, which had also ridden similar waves of reform, experienced different post-1848 outcomes. In the 1830s and 1840s, the Duchy of Tuscany had also intended to launch a reform plan for primary and secondary education: this was part of a liberal political socialization project, strongly promoted by figures like Gino Capponi and Raffaello Lambruschini, and heavily encouraged by journals such as «*Giornale Agrario Toscano*», «*Antologia*», and «*Guida dell'Educatore*»¹⁰⁹; however, following the altered political landscape due to the events of 1848, the 1852 law on primary and secondary education entrusted control over education to the bishops, breaking the Tuscan government's constitutional tradition. The same would have been the reaction of the Bourbon government in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which, in response to the revolutionary movements of the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s, implemented increasingly stringent educational policies, ultimately centralizing control over schools and teachers in clerical hands¹¹⁰.

Thus, as the teaching profession evolved towards greater institutionalization and secularization, contingent on the changing social and political landscape of the European Century, State attention to teacher training progressively increased, alongside a heightened concern for teachers' moral and political conduct. In 19th-century Italy, as in the rest of Europe, the professional training of primary teachers continued to combine rigorous pedagogical preparation with a strong emphasis on discipline; the official certification required to practice the profession, issued at the end of the training course, often had to be supplemented by a "certificate of morality" (*certificato di moralità*) in addition to the

¹⁰⁷ S. Ulivieri, *I maestri*, cit., p. 168.

¹⁰⁸ A. Santoni Rugiu, *Ideologia e programmi nelle scuole elementari e magistrali dal 1859 al 1955*, cit., p. 28.

¹⁰⁹ For a more or less updated bibliography on Gino Capponi, see: A. Gambaro, *La critica pedagogica di Gino Capponi*, Laterza, Bari 1956; G. Gentile, *Gino Capponi e la cultura toscana nel secolo decimonono*, Sansoni, Florence 1973; R. Gentili, *Gino Capponi un aristocratico dell'800*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1974; G. Nencioni, *Gino Capponi: linguista, storico, pensatore*, Olschki, Florence 1977; G. Spadolini, *La Firenze di Gino Capponi fra restaurazione e romanticismo*, Le Monnier, Florence 1985; G. Genovesi, *Introduzione*, in G. Capponi, *Sull'educazione: frammento, 1841*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1993; P. Bagnoli (ed.), *Gino Capponi: storia e progresso nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Olschki, Florence 1994; A. Palotti Langé, *Gino Capponi, un fiorentino europeo*, Le Monnier, Florence 2000. On Lambruschini's figure, see the already cited publications: A. Gaudio, *La «Guida dell'Educatore» di Raffaello Lambruschini*, cit.; Id., *La storiografia su Lambruschini*, cit.; F. Cambi (ed.), *Raffaello Lambruschini pedagogista della libertà*, cit. For more on the intellectual exchanges between Gino Capponi and Raffaello Lambruschini, see G. Gabrielli, *Gino Capponi – Raffaello Lambruschini. Carteggio (1828-1873)*, Le Monnier, Florence 1996.

¹¹⁰ On the Bourbon's educational policy in Sicily, refer to: A. Crimi, *Teoria educativa e scuola popolare in Sicilia nel tempo dei Borboni*, Accademia di scienze, lettere e belle arti degli zelanti e dei dafnici, Acireale 1978; G. Bonetta, *Istruzione e società nella Sicilia dell'Ottocento*, cit.; S. Agresta, *L'istruzione in Sicilia (1815-1860)*, cit.; Id., *Istruzione e scolarità nella Sicilia del primo Ottocento. Fonti documentarie*, cit.; M. Lupo, *Tra le provvide cure di Sua Maestà*, cit.; S. Raffaele, *La bottega dei saperi*, cit.; S. Agresta, C. Sindoni, *Scuole, maestri e metodi nella Sicilia borbonica (1817-1860)*, cit.

one for teaching aptitude, and moral training would maintain a preeminent role in both teachers' and students' educational journeys.

In Swedish seminaries, the teaching of geography, history, natural history, physical education, singing, gardening, and administration was accompanied by instruction in biblical history and catechism¹¹¹. In Norway, the teaching of religion continued to take precedence alongside the vernacular language and arithmetic, while in Spain, moral training was favoured over professional development¹¹². In French normal schools, even the teaching of psychology was subordinated to learning rules of good conduct, believing that understanding human psychological and physical development provided insights into how children learned to choose between good and bad ideas and behaviors¹¹³. Within the Habsburg Empire, teachers' ethics were often supervised by clerical authorities or officials previously trained as religious ministers¹¹⁴. Similarly, the Lancastrian system, which became predominant in English teacher training, placed significant emphasis on religious education and incessant vigilance, and that, in the college founded by Kay in 1840, was coupled with strict discipline, including a simple diet and strenuous outdoor labor¹¹⁵.

In Italy, in June 1860, a regulation signed by Minister Terenzio Mamiani specified the "noble office" of normal schools, aimed to instill in aspiring teachers the moral, intellectual and civic qualities they, in turn, would need to impart and encourage¹¹⁶. A subsequent regulation for municipal primary schools provided for the distribution of medals, prizes, and certificates of merit to students who excelled most in "achievement" (*profitto*) and "conduct" (*condotta*), and into the "instructions to teachers" annexed to the same regulation, particular emphasis was placed on the catechism (*catechism*) and biblical history (*storia sacra*) curricula, so that students would draw the most useful moral considerations from those teachings¹¹⁷.

While the prevalence of religious values survived the profession's institutionalization process and its purported secularization, it was precisely the reliance on specific training for teachers that, by systematizing the separation between content and method, allowed for the refinement of their pedagogical knowledge and didactic skills, thereby promoting their professional evolution¹¹⁸.

1.4. The feminization of the primary teaching profession: factors and variability

Throughout the 19th century, the primary teaching profession, traditionally dominated by men, saw an increasingly massive participation of women. This phenomenon can be attributed to multiple factors: both socio-cultural, like the growing emancipatory from the traditional roles imposed on

¹¹¹ J. Westberg, *Basic Schools in Each and Every Parish: The School Act of 1842 and the Rise of Mass Schooling in Sweden*, in L. Boser, I. Brühwiler, J. Westberg (eds.), *School Acts and the Rise of Mass Schooling*, cit., p. 206.

¹¹² M. de Vroede, *The History of Teacher Training*, cit., p. 4.

¹¹³ L.L. Clark, *Women and the Politics of Education in Third Republic France*, cit., p. 50.

¹¹⁴ S.Y. Lee, J. Winandy, *Scientization of professional teacher knowledges and construction of teaching methods*, cit., p. 16.

¹¹⁵ B.H. Bergen, *Only a Schoolmaster*, cit., p. 8.

¹¹⁶ R.D. June 24, 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.

¹¹⁷ *Istruzione ai maestri delle Scuole primarie sul modo di svolgere i Programmi approvati col Regio Decreto 15 settembre 1860*, in *Codice dell'Istruzione secondaria classica e tecnica e della primaria e normale. Raccolta delle leggi, regolamenti, istruzioni ed altri provvedimenti governativi emanati in base alla Legge 13 novembre 1859 con note spiegative e raffronti colle leggi preesistenti approvata dal Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione*, Tip. scolastica di Seb. Franco e Figli e Comp., Turin 1861, pp. 415-436.

¹¹⁸ S.Y. Lee, J. Winandy, *Scientization of professional teacher knowledges and construction of teaching methods*, cit., pp. 16-17.

women by the agricultural and pre-industrial societal system; and economic, like the widespread practice of paying female teachers lower salaries than their male colleagues, which allowed local administrations to contain the costs of expanding schooling.

At the same time, because many European States had formal or informal prohibitions against married women teaching in schools, the progressive feminization of primary education led to the emergence of an entirely new and peculiar female life condition: that of the “single woman”, capable of providing for her own livelihood and ascending the social ladder, not subordinate to a marital bond, but through the exercise of a profession¹¹⁹.

This emancipatory process through the profession significantly intertwined with the development of normal schools and similar institutions for training primary teachers. These institutions often represented unique spaces for post-elementary education for women, offering them a first opportunity for salaried employment that would later lead them to assume a majority position in the educational professions.

1.4.1. Women teachers’ training and role: gender stereotypes and occupational segregation

The first seminaries for training female teachers emerged in Prussia in 1832, and within three decades, they spread to other German States¹²⁰. In France, the first female normal schools appeared in 1838, followed by England’s first institution for female teachers in 1841. However, it was only in the second half of the century that women’s entry into primary education was formalized and regulated, with the introduction of a “certification” that enabled them to practice the profession, although possession of this requirement was not always rigorously respected.

In the Habsburg monarchy, this certification came with the 1869 elementary education law. It was also introduced in France, though the majority of female teachers there remained exempt from it until 1881. In England too, about half of all primary schoolmistresses still worked without certification or as supplementary teachers as late as 1907. In the Netherlands, an 1806 school law formally mandated a certificate to practice, but for the first half of the century, certification requirements for women were very low, as the first institutions for training female teachers only began in 1857¹²¹.

In Italy, it was the measures introduced by Minister Cibrario of the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont in 1852, followed by the Lanza Law of 1858 and the Casati Law of 1859, that institutionalized and regulated female normal schools, as well as the certification requirements for female teachers¹²². The late 1850s also saw the first certification standards for teachers in Sweden and Denmark. Clear regulations then emerged in Russian-governed Finland between the 1860s and 1870s¹²³.

¹¹⁹ M. Perrot, *In margine: L'Ottocento*, Laterza, Bari 1988, p. 237.

¹²⁰ Towards the end of the 1830s, Prussian seminaries for training female teachers were also adopted as models in the United States. In 1838, Massachusetts’ first normal schools were founded, open from the outset to both women and men. J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century*, cit., p. 256.

¹²¹ M. van Essen, *Strategies of Women Teachers 1860–1920*, cit., pp. 415, 421.

¹²² The 1853 regulation distinguished the normal schools of the Savoy Kingdom into male and female, higher and lower, stipulating a one-year internship for men and six months for women after the licensing exam. The Lanza Law of 20 June 1858 established the opening of 6 male and 6 female normal schools. The Casati Law of 13 November 1859, instituted 9 for each gender (Law November 13, 1859, no. 3725, Title V – *Dell’istruzione elementare*, Chapter V - *Delle Scuole Normali*, art. 357).

¹²³ J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century*, cit., p. 256-257. Regarding the impact of certification on the feminization process of primary education, it has been noted that its almost simultaneous introduction for female teachers in Italy and Denmark in the late 1850s, and in Austria and Russia around the 1870s, did not produce the same levels of feminization. Germany, with its rigorous certification standards, had the lowest rate of feminization among European Countries, suggesting an inverse correlation between certification and feminization (*ibidem*).

The educational identity of these school institutions was shaped by two main factors: the debate surrounding the spread of popular education (including the content and values to be transmitted through mass schooling, and the level of preparation required for its teachers), and the responses developed by society and culture of that time regarding the social roles and behavioural models assigned to women. Consequently, the curricula for these study programs were adapted not only to the cultural level deemed appropriate for future primary school teachers, but also to what were considered the specific needs of each gender.

In German teacher seminaries, women received a less extensive education than men, excluding subjects like mathematics, sciences, and classical languages¹²⁴. For female students in English training colleges, geometry and economics were replaced by tailoring, sewing, and home economics¹²⁵. In France, civics education for aspiring female teachers omitted the section on record-keeping, which was preparatory for the distinctly male office of local mayor (*maire*), instead, it meticulously focused on teaching home economics and emphasized the specific duties of female teachers as educators of future mothers and homemakers¹²⁶. In the Netherlands, female students took special sewing courses, and in Slovenia, teacher training for women included piano and female crafts¹²⁷. Similarly, in Italy, female normal schools heavily prioritized “women’s work” (knitting and sewing): their curriculum did not include agricultural notions, which were common in male normal schools, and, like their French counterparts, they emphasized the image of a female teacher embodying the virtues befitting a “good mother”¹²⁸.

It was precisely this image of the “teacher-mother”, endowed with qualities traditionally associated with the female gender, such as patience, gentleness, and self-sacrifice, that determined the scope of women’s inclusion in various levels and grades of 19th-century schooling, also leading to the “occupational segregation” that affected female teaching throughout the century. While entrusting women with preschool education was justified by their attributed natural inclination for childcare, the possibility of finding employment in primary, and even secondary, education varied significantly, depending on the policies of coeducation or gender-segregation adopted by each State regarding its student populations. Indeed, women’s entry into the profession was facilitated in Countries that established separate channels for male and female primary education, conversely, it met greater resistance where a “mixed” system for schooling boys and girls prevailed, as such systems tended to prefer assigning classes (especially higher grades) to male teachers.

In France, the Falloux law of 1850 required municipalities with at least 800 inhabitants to establish separate schools for boys and girls, which led to women representing, by the 1890s, 50% of the teaching staff. Coeducational schools (*écoles mixtes*) also existed in France, but they were generally attended by only a small number of students (just 12.5% of French school-aged children in 1910). Women were allowed to teach in these mixed schools, but this decision was met with criticism and

¹²⁴ F. Paciello, *Il femminismo tedesco dalla nascita del Secondo Reich all'avvento del nazismo, raccontato dalle donne che lo hanno vissuto* [doctoral thesis], Università di Roma Sapienza, 2018/2019, p. 418.

¹²⁵ B.H. Bergen, *Only a Schoolmaster*, cit., p. 14.

¹²⁶ Particular emphasis was placed on the maternal qualities of the normal school director, who was responsible for teaching morality, pedagogy, and psychology to aspiring female teachers. In 1890, Director Marie Porte of the normal school in Lyon was praised for being an excellent *mère de famille* for students and faculty, just as, in 1898, Director Herminie Bousquet of Montpellier, who prepared teachers to be “good homemakers” (*ménagères*). L.L. Clark, *Women and the Politics of Education in Third Republic France*, cit., pp. 43-47, 54-55.

¹²⁷ 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 «Šolska kronika / School Chronicle – Journal of The History of Schooling and Education», 28, no. 3 (2019), p. 302.

¹²⁸ C. Covato, *Maestre d'Italia*, cit., p. 167.

widespread dissatisfaction, driven by the conviction that entrusting these schools to a female teacher would prevent young boys from learning “virile virtues”¹²⁹.

In Italy, under the Casati Law of 1859, primary schools were also segregated by gender. Despite this, female teachers sometimes served in the lower cycle (first and second grade) of primary schools for boys. They were also often assigned to schools in remote rural areas. These schools, although coeducational, did not raise any particular concerns about the “masculinity” of their male students, as attendance generally lasted only the first two years, and was extended to only three years by the compulsory education act of 1877. Employed in both urban girls’ schools and mixed rural schools, women came to constitute 68% of the teaching staff in Italian primary schools by the last decade of the 19th century¹³⁰.

In Spanish primary schools, in addition to gender segregation, there was a stark disparity in educational offerings for boys and girls: the Moyano Law of 1857 established “incomplete” schools (characterized by reduced curricula) for both sexes in every municipality, while the opening of “complete” schools was stipulated, for boys, in municipalities with populations over 500 inhabitants, for girls, in municipalities with populations over 2000 inhabitants. Unlike France and Italy, in the Spanish case there was an explicit ban on women teaching in boys’ schools, while economic and cultural factors hindered the presence of female teachers in mixed schools, opened in very small and rural municipalities¹³¹.

In Austria, too, students were segregated by sex. However, this was more rigorously applied in the education of urban middle-class children (in Vienna, in 1896, there were 143 boys’ schools and an equal number of girls’ schools, while only 10 were coeducational), while, among the lower strata of the population, and especially in rural areas, coeducation was very common (in 1896, out of a total of 17.799 Austrian public schools, 15.680 educated both sexes together). Despite being considered suitable for teaching in public schools, the presence of women in primary education declined following the economic Depression of the 1890s, so much so that by the early 20th century, they covered barely 30% of the Austrian teaching staff¹³².

In Prussia, the significant wage increases that were implemented from the 1870s, and the establishment of state pension systems in the mid-1880s, improved the socio-economic “status” of the teaching profession. This made it increasingly coveted by men, with the result that by the end of the century, female presence in the primary teaching staff was below 30%¹³³.

Contrary to the cases reported above, in the 1860s, the Dutch school system provided for the coeducation of boys and girls in the primary education sector, and consequently concentrated it predominantly in male teachers hands, while entrusting the care and education of early childhood to women. So, primary instruction was initially an inaccessible field for women, except in the private sector, where there were primary schools for girls taught by female teachers, favored by Catholic families, who at the time constituted 30% of the Dutch population. Following an 1878 schools law, women gained greater employment opportunities in the public primary education sector, as needlework became a mandatory subject for all primary school girls. Besides teaching female crafts, women were sometimes allowed to teach in the lower elementary grades (ages 6-7), while teaching older children (ages 8-12) remained exclusively a male task. This resulted in a relatively low

¹²⁹ J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century*, cit., p. 259

¹³⁰ J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century*, cit., p. 255.

¹³¹ G. Cappelli, G. Quiroga Valle, *Female Teachers and the Rise of Primary Education in Italy and Spain, 1861–1921*, cit., p. 758.

¹³² F. Paciello, *Il femminismo tedesco dalla nascita del Secondo Reich all’avvento del nazismo*, cit., pp. 99-100, 155; J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century*, cit., pp. 254-256.

¹³³ J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century*, cit., pp. 260-261.

feminization rate: by the 1890s, women occupied only 28% of the Dutch public school teaching staff, meanwhile sex segregation continued to positively influence female participation in the private sector¹³⁴.

In Sweden, the feminization rate of primary teaching reached 66% in the 1890s, however, similar to the Netherlands, women were predominantly employed in teaching lower grades (*småskola*), making up only 40% of the teaching staff in higher grades (*folkskola*). The coeducational system was also responsible for the low feminization of primary teaching in Denmark, where, during the same period, female presence in primary schools was below 30%¹³⁵.

In the United Kingdom, while coeducation had long been established in Scotland, it was not fully implemented in England and Wales, where, under the Education Act of 1870, the organization of primary education into infant schools (ages 5-7), junior schools (ages 7-10), and senior schools (ages 10-12) included the division of older pupils by sex. Women were authorized to teach in mixed lower primary classes, but they suffered from low esteem, so much so that many parents even preferred their sons attend higher grades rather than entrust them to a schoolmistress. Nevertheless, the percentage of women involved in primary teaching saw a slow increase, rising from about half of the teaching staff in the 1870s to covering three-quarters within forty years¹³⁶.

1.4.2. A troubled profession: celibacy, isolation, and wage discrimination

The growing demand for teachers, linked to the widespread schooling project, was a decisive factor in women's entry into the profession. This influx would become increasingly massive over the course of the century, so much so that it can be argued that a progressive "feminization" of the profession occurred. However, becoming a primary school teacher often did not guarantee good living and working conditions for women: this was due both to the widespread belief that women's work should be secondary to that of men, which justified wage disparities and career discrimination against female teachers in several Countries, and to the conditions of isolation and insecurity that women often had to face, especially those sent to teach in rural areas.

Firstly, the biographies of many 19th-century women show that they could hardly aspire to social promotion through a teaching career without sacrificing their private lives. As a result, the desire for financial autonomy and improved status by teaching often led to them remaining unmarried.

Protestant Prussia had established rigid regulations regarding the spinsterhood of female teachers. In Austria, following the Theresian regulation of 1774, a 1786 law enacted by Joseph II (which remained in effect until the early 20th century), in founding the first schools for girls destined to become "governesses", sanctioned the prohibition for married women to teach, providing, conversely, a path

¹³⁴ In the 1920s, greater teaching opportunities for women in public primary schools seemed to emerge. Indeed, a 1920 law established a certification allowing them to teach at the lower grade, obtainable from special schools for training teachers for the 6-7 age classes. However, financial cuts to education in the following decade made it impossible to create new training institutions, thus, achieving the certification that favoured a greater female presence in primary schools remained merely a paper measure. As a result, by the 1930s, less than 17% of Dutch primary teachers were women, often uncertified and holding auxiliary roles. In contrast, within secondary education, which was reserved for young women from bourgeois families, female teachers held a consolidated position due to a rigorous gender division at that level of education. Certification to teach in girls' secondary schools had been introduced in 1863, and from the mid-1880s onward, over 50% of modern language certificates were obtained by women. M. van Essen, *Strategies of Women Teachers 1860–1920*, cit., pp. 415-431; M. Paksunemi, M. Ribarič, J. Westberg, *Unmarried, Well Behaved and Well Dressed*, cit., p. 297.

¹³⁵ S. Backman Prytz, J. Westberg, "Arm the Schoolmistress!", cit., p. 23; J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century*, cit., p. 255-256.

¹³⁶ B.H. Bergen, *Only a Schoolmaster*, cit., pp. 12-13.

for unmarried women's sustenance¹³⁷. In Catholic Germany, the prohibition of marriage encouraged women to pursue teaching as a permanent career, a commitment further supported by viewing the profession as a religious vocation¹³⁸. Similarly, in Italy, although married women were not formally banned from primary teaching, female normal school students were encouraged to embrace the teaching profession as a lifelong vocation, and female teachers who were absent from school due to maternity reasons were often required to pay for their substitutes¹³⁹.

The decision to impose a ban on marriage for female teachers was often driven by economic convenience, as it was believed that unmarried women, having no family support obligations, would be less likely to demand excessive salaries. In 19th-century Russia, for instance, the entirely female teaching staff was typically recruited from unmarried women, out of concern that mothers would be less "docile" employees. These restrictions also proved financially beneficial because they led women to view the profession as temporary, creating a continuous turnover in the teaching staff and eliminating the need for salary increases based on seniority. Similar dynamics can be observed in the United States in the early 20th century, where only 8% of teachers were married and the average tenure for women in teaching lasted just two or three years; neglected by men, who favored new roles with the advent of industrial development, primary teaching was increasingly considered "a good exercise for the young unmarried woman", and in this case, too, the fact that female teachers left the profession to get married ensured a constant turnover in the teaching staff, allowing administrations to reduced primary education expenses¹⁴⁰.

On the other hand, not all States insisted on the same strictness regarding the requirement for spinsterhood. In France, for example, a marriage ban for female teachers was never introduced, and by 1898, more than half of the teachers were married; if the percentage of unmarried teachers would increase in the first decade of the 20th century to encompass two-thirds of the total French female teaching staff, this was not due to the establishment of stringent policies for married women, but rather to the transfer of many religious teachers to public schools¹⁴¹.

In the Netherlands, despite the absence of legal provisions on the marital status of female teachers throughout the 19th century, it was common for women to resign or be dismissed by school boards after marrying. In 1910, there was an initial attempt to legislate a marriage ban, but the proposal's failure, following the liberals' rise to power, continued to allow non-single women to enter the profession: these women constituted 11% of the Dutch female primary teaching staff in 1920, including widows and divorced women who were accepted to teach to cope with their economic hardships. Nevertheless, a marriage ban would be introduced starting in 1925¹⁴².

In England, there were no particular restrictions against married teachers, who still constituted merely 12% of the female teaching staff until the first fifteen years of the 20th century; nonetheless, the demand for spinsterhood would become more stringent in the aftermath of World War I¹⁴³. The attitude of the German States toward the spinsterhood of female teachers would gradually change following the teaching crisis of the post-war period: back then, the shortage of male teachers made it

¹³⁷ B. Mazohl-Wallnig, *L'educazione delle donne nel mondo austro-tedesco del Secolo XIX*, in «Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica», 2, 1991, numero monografico *Donne, istruzione cultura tra XVIII e XX secolo*, pp. 57-75; G.P. Brizzi, *Scuola e istruzione popolare dall'età della Controriforma al secolo dei Lumi*, cit., pp. 73-88.

¹³⁸ J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century*, cit., p. 258-259.

¹³⁹ I. Porciani, *Sparsa di tanti triboli*, cit., p. 172.

¹⁴⁰ J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century*, cit., pp. 253-254, 258.

¹⁴¹ Ivi, p. 258.

¹⁴² M. van Essen, *Strategies of Women Teachers 1860-1920*, cit., p. 432.

¹⁴³ J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century*, cit., p. 258.

necessary to recruit married women, leading, finally, to the complete disappearance of marital barriers¹⁴⁴.

It is important to note, however, that women's access to primary teaching careers was not enough to eliminate gender inequalities; in fact, in some ways, it reinforced them. This happened not only by maintaining a rigid separation of roles for men and women within school systems, as observed, but also through frequent wage discrimination between the sexes. In several European States, the employment of women in schools, so steeped in social maternalism and moralistic pretexts, essentially met a demand for low-cost labor: it was particularly favored by the lack of alternative employment opportunities for women, and therefore by their greater willingness to work even for lower wages¹⁴⁵.

Both the Moyano Law in Spain (1857) and the Casati Law in Italy (1859) stipulated that female teachers should earn one-third less than their male counterparts. Similarly, the salaries earned by English schoolmistresses in the 1860s, Scottish schoolmistresses between the 1880s and 1890s, and French schoolmistresses until the end of the century were likewise lower¹⁴⁶. In Sweden and Hungary, school administrations commonly recruited female teachers for "economic" reasons¹⁴⁷, and evidence of similar expedients exists in some North American States¹⁴⁸. However, throughout the 19th century, no salary differences were stipulated for Dutch female teachers, though they were undoubtedly underpaid considering their workload: indeed, they were expected to provide embroidery lessons during after-school hours in all classes, and since this was considered a specific female task and a preliminary competence for female teachers within schools, it was not deemed appropriate to provide them with additional pay¹⁴⁹.

¹⁴⁴ M. van Essen, *Strategies of Women Teachers 1860–1920*, cit., pp. 432–433.

¹⁴⁵ Regarding the individual tendency to overestimate earnings in contexts of poverty and/or limited access to the labor market, see P.H. Lindert, *Revealing Failures in the History of School Finance*, in «National Bureau of Economic Research», Working Paper 15491 (Nov. 2009), p. 21.

¹⁴⁶ G. Cappelli, G. Quiroga Valle, *Female Teachers and the Rise of Primary Education in Italy and Spain, 1861–1921*, cit., pp. 756–759; B.H. Bergen, *Only a Schoolmaster*, cit., pp. 12–14; J. McDermid, "Intellectual instruction is best left to a man": the feminisation of the scottish teaching profession in the second half of the nineteenth century, in «Women's History Review», vol. 6, no. 1 (1997), p. 105; S. Trouvé-Finding, *Teaching as a woman's job: the impact of the admission of women to elementary teaching in England and France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries*, in «History of Education», vol. 34, no. 5 (2005), pp. 492–493.

¹⁴⁷ J. Westberg, *How did teachers make a living?*, cit., pp. 19–40; A. Nóbik, *Feminisation and Professionalisation in Hungary in the Late 19th Century*, cit., p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ Studies on 19th-century education in Kansas, Iowa, and Massachusetts revealed that hiring low-wage female teachers was an economic tactic which allowed local administrations to control the rising expenses of the expanding school system. Similarly, in Ontario, the feminization process was driven by the limited job opportunities for women and their willingness to work for poor wages. W.E. Fuller, *Country Schoolteaching on the Sod-House Frontier*, in «Arizona and the West», 17, no. 2 (1975), p. 124; K. Sohn, *The Gender Gap in Earnings Among Teachers: The Case of Iowa in 1915*, in «Feminist Economics», 21, no. 4 (2015), pp. 175–196; C.F. Kaestle, M.A. Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1980, pp. 202–203; E.W. Sager, *Women Teachers in Canada, 1881–1901*, cit., pp. 201–236.

¹⁴⁹ The introduction of salary differences between male and female teachers was, plausibly, among the aims of the already mentioned 1920 law, which provided for a lower-grade certification for female teachers and a higher-grade one for men, and very likely intended not only to confine female teaching to the lower elementary grades but also to assign different salaries based on certification requirements. The failure to implement the law, due to the government's financial unavailability to create specific training institutes where certificates could be obtained, confirmed the equal pay of Dutch female teachers, which in those same years was also obtained by French and German primary colleagues, while the English ones would have had to settle for a salary equal to 4/5 of that of men. In the women's secondary education sector, dutch female teachers, conversely, enjoyed the same opportunities as men regarding promotion, income, and marital status. However, their work was long viewed as a form of social maternalism, so much so that the vast majority of teachers gave lessons in their own homes, and a quarter of them were married or widowed women in the 1830s. M. van Essen, *Strategies of Women Teachers 1860–1920*, cit., pp. 415–421, 431; M. Paksuniemi, M. Ribarič, J. Westberg, *Unmarried, Well Behaved and Well Dressed*, cit., p. 297.

In addition to the wage gap, the lives of female teachers were sometimes marked by extreme emotional and psychological fragility, along with inadequate protection of their personal safety. This was the case for Swedish female teachers working in village schools, who operated in geographically isolated locations, with limited social interaction and frequently exposed to threats and harassment. The issue of their safety became a significant social concern around the turn of the century, leading to a public debate on the necessary measures to protect them. Solutions discussed and, in some cases, implemented included providing telephones for seeking help in emergencies, authorizing them to own guard dogs, and even proposing to allow female teachers to carry defensive weapons, although this idea was controversial and not universally accepted¹⁵⁰.

Italian schoolmistresses also faced highly vulnerable situations, both physically and psychologically, particularly those sent to remote rural schools. They were forced to live alone and often far from their parental homes, a condition that exposed them to male insolence and fuelled popular prejudices about their moral integrity. A notable example from 1886 was the widely publicized case of Italia Donati, a Tuscan teacher subjected to pressure from the local mayor and driven to suicide by public slander¹⁵¹. Cases of violence and sexual abuse also affected Russian teachers during the 1917 revolution, and the assassination of a teacher occurred in British Columbia in 1926¹⁵².

1.4.3. Intellectual advancement and professional safeguards: movements and actions for women emancipation

As we've seen, the extent, timing, and cost of women's entry into primary teaching depended on a multitude of factors, including economic and social structure, law, cultural traditions, and gender ideologies. Their demand in the labor market was influenced by variables like schooling, urbanization and wars. The material and moral conditions of the profession were constrained by the social constructs of masculinity and femininity, and by related forms of socio-cultural discrimination, occupational segregation, and unequal economic treatment¹⁵³.

This was part of a much broader context of gender inequality, which in many European States relegated women to a status of social, legal and economic minority: they were entirely excluded from active and passive electorates, deprived of the right to manage their own assets after marriage, and also of access to secondary and university education, thus preventing them from aspiring to socially qualified and economically profitable work positions.

Between the 1860s and 1870s, a radical critique emerged against the roles and duties conventionally assigned to women in European society, leading to calls for civil and social rights. In several European States, female teachers also participated in these demands, organizing into unions and forming associations. They fought for equal pay and social security protection for teachers, for equal opportunities in education (as they were often excluded from advanced training programs), and for the abolition of career restrictions, particularly regarding their ability to hold leadership positions in public schools and teach at higher levels of education.

¹⁵⁰ Regarding the isolation and vulnerability of female teachers in Sweden and the strategies adopted to improve their safety, see S. Backman Prytz, J. Westberg, *"Arm the Schoolmistress!"*, cit., pp. 18-37.

¹⁵¹ Regarding the condition of Italian female teachers between the 19th and 20th centuries, see: S. Soldani, *Nascita della maestra elementare*, cit.; S. Ulivieri (ed.), *Essere donne insegnanti*, cit.; C. Covato, *Un'identità divisa*, cit.; A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù*, cit.; I. Porciani (ed.), *Le donne a scuola*, cit.; P. Luciani, *La condizione delle maestre italiane alla fine dell'800*, cit.

¹⁵² B. Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools*, cit., pp. 188-189; D. Wilson, *'I Am Here to Help If You Need Me'*, cit., p. 210.

¹⁵³ J.C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century*, cit., p. 263.

The discussion surrounding the condition of working women first emerged in mid-19th century England, where the pressing industrialization brought to light the issue of the female workforce, mainly employed in the textile sector. This spurred debates about occupations, working hours, and wages deemed appropriate for women, as well as the material and moral repercussions of factory work, which for British women was the only alternative to the traditional roles of governess and instructress.

The growing awareness of the need to invest in women's professional education to ensure their true emancipation through work led, in 1859, activists Jessie Boucherett, Barbara Bodichon, Adelaide Anne Procter and Lydia Becker to found the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women (SPEW), whose activities included the establishment of the first women's school of accounting and commerce, accompanied by courses in arithmetic and stenography. The SPEW's periodical, the *English Woman's Journal*, played a significant role in the debate on expanding educational and occupational opportunities for women, boasting feminists Bessie Rayner Parkes and Emily Davies among its editors. At that time, the debate for extending voting rights to women also saw important developments. The women's suffrage movement, which had acquired its first organized form in the 1850s (the Langham Place Circle, led by the aforementioned Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes), culminated in 1867 with the formation of the first national association for women's suffrage: the National Society for Women's Suffrage, led by activist Millicent Garrett Fawcett¹⁵⁴.

That very year, John Stuart Mill, a member of the British Parliament, influenced by the feminist ideas of his wife Harriet Taylor, leveraged the promulgation of the Second Reform Act, which extended voting rights to small landowners and heads of households in England and Wales, to propose an amendment to the bill which sought to neutralize gender-specific language by replacing the term "man" with "person" – a proposal that proved unsuccessful. This was followed, in 1869, by the publication of the famous essay *The Subjection of Women*, a provocative work that supported women's emancipation from male subservience as a foundation for the social and economic progress of Nations. It was soon hailed as a "manifesto" for English suffragettes and stimulated debate on the "woman question" across the European landscape. Indeed, the work was translated into French by the republican Émile-Honoré Cazelles (1869), into Dutch by the Saint-Simonian Adrianus Jacobus Nieuwenhuis (1870), into German by the writer and women's rights advocate Jenny Hirsch (1870), and into Italian by the journalist and pioneer of the women's emancipation movement Annamaria Mozzoni (1870).

The feminist struggle for gender equality was deeply rooted in French tradition, owing its first significant demands for civil and political rights to the women of the Revolution. These demands, which peaked with the publication of the *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* in 1791¹⁵⁵, persisted and expanded in the following century despite harsh post-Constituent suppressions

¹⁵⁴ The movement of "suffragettes" would have undergone even more radical developments in the last decade of the century, when Emmeline Pankhurst, in disagreement with other activists who considered the achievement of partial results (such as granting voting rights only to unmarried women) sufficient, attempted to intensify relations with trade unionism and the English Labour Party, lastly escalating the feminist struggle by founding, in 1903, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), an organization composed solely of women that employed militant tactics of civil disobedience and direct action. P. Gordon, D. Doughan, "Society for Promoting the Employment of Women", in *Dictionary of British Women's Organisations, 1825-1960*, Woburn Press, London-Portland 2001, pp. 129-130; G. Holloway, *Women And Work In Britain Since 1840*, Routledge, London 2005, p. 216.

¹⁵⁵ Studies on Olympe de Gouges boast several contributions from Italian scholars: S. Mousset, *Olympe de Gouges e i diritti della donna*, Argo, Lecce 2005; F. Zanelli Quarantini (ed.), *Olympe de Gouges, La musa barbara. Scritti politici (1788-1793)*, Medusa, Milan 2009; A. Criscenti, *Donne in Rivoluzione: Olympe de Gouges, e la Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne (1791)*, in L. Cardullo, D. Iozzia (eds.), *Bellezza e virtù. Studi per Maria Barbanti*, Bonanno, Rome-Acireale 2014, pp. 691-708; Ead., *Il contributo di Sophie de Grouchy e Olympe de Gouges agli intenti inclusivi della Grande Rivoluzione. Con il testo della Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne (France*

and the limitations imposed by the monarchical restoration, supported by early 19th-century utopian socialism. During the period from the 1848 revolts to the proclamation of the Third Republic, French women distinguished themselves through strong political engagement, expressed through the founding of numerous associations. One such organization, the *Union des femmes pour la défense de Paris et les soins aux blessés*, formed in April 1871, also proves the existence of a genuine feminist movement supporting the libertarian socialist experiment of the Paris Commune. The *Union des femmes*, where socialist Nathalie Lemel and feminist writer André Léo were active, fought for women's financial autonomy and equal pay, for the closure of brothels, the abolition of prostitution, and the introduction of divorce, as well as for secular education and vocational training.

Regarding French female vocational education, the educator and philanthropist Elisa Lemonnier was certainly a pioneer. A sympathizer of Saint-Simonian thought, like her husband, the philosopher Charles Lemonnier, Elisa, from a bourgeois family, had been active since 1848 in opening sewing courses for impoverished Parisian women. Over the next two decades, she dedicated herself to establishing foundations aimed at emancipating working-class women by teaching them a trade (such as the Society for maternal protection - *Société de protection maternelle*, founded in 1856 and converted in 1862 into the Society for female vocational training - *Société pour l'enseignement professionnel des femmes*). In the following decade, several French municipalities opened vocational schools for girls based on Lemonnier's model. These institutions proved so effective in meeting the emerging needs of the female proletariat that they earned a gold medal at the 1878 Universal Exposition and were officially included among manual apprenticeship schools under a law promulgated in 1880¹⁵⁶. In that same year, the creation of five-year high school programs (*lycées de jeunes filles*) was decreed to provide daughters of the French bourgeoisie with secondary education. However, these differed from male programs as they omitted the study of philosophy (its course was reduced to morality) and the study of Greek and Latin languages (necessary for obtaining both classical and scientific baccalaureates). Instead, they included domestic economy in the third and fifth-year curricula, and from 1882, a knitting course (*travaux à l'aiguille*) in the third year¹⁵⁷. The

1791), in «Quaderni degli Annali del Dipartimento Jonico - Donne, Politica, Istituzioni» (2015), pp. 287-308; Ead., *Olympe de Gouges, Les trois urnes, ou le salut de la patrie* (1793), in «SpazioFilosofico» (2017) 19, pp. 175-190; R. Bufano, *Sovranità nazionale e rappresentanza femminile: Parigi 1788-1789*, in «Storia e Politica» (2020) 1, pp. 23-43; Ead., *Anche noi siamo cittadine: quali diritti politici per le donne nella Rivoluzione francese*, Milella, Lecce 2020; A. Loche, *Moderatismo politico, radicalismo sociale, femminismo in Olympe de Gouges*, in A. Loche, M.L. Lussu (eds.), *Saggi di filosofia e storia della filosofia. Scritti dedicati a Maria Teresa Marcialis*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2012, pp. 103-121; Ead., *La Liberté Ou La Mort. Il progetto politico e giuridico di Olympe de Gouges*, con *Postfazione* di Thomas Casadei, Mucchi, Modena 2021. For recent studies in French and English, see: O. Blanc, *Olympe de Gouges, des droits de la femme à la guillotine*, Taillandier, Paris 2014; M. Faucheux, *Olympe de Gouges*, Gallimard, Paris 2018; J.R. Cole, *Between the Queen and the Cabby: Olympe de Gouges's Rights of Woman*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montréal 2011; C.L. Sherman, *Reading Olympe de Gouges*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2013.

¹⁵⁶ The Lemonnier institutions, lasting three years, provided morning lessons in French, history, geography, arithmetic, physics and chemistry, drawing, writing and hygiene. In the afternoons, English and notions of commerce, accounting, civil and commercial law were taught, alongside attendance at sewing, tailoring, drawing, wood engraving, and porcelain painting workshops. On the work of Elisa Lemonnier, see: J. Toussaint, *Lemonnier (madame Elisa)*, in Ferdinand Buisson (ed.), *Nouveau dictionnaire de pédagogie et d'instruction primaire publié*, Hachette, Paris 1911 (consultabile sul sito dell'Institut Français de l'Éducation al seguente link: <http://www.inrp.fr/edition-electronique/lodel/dictionnaire-ferdinand-buisson/document.php?id=3044>; accessed 30 June 2025); René e Pierre Ramond, *Élisa, une saint-simonienne au siècle des Ferlus*, Anne Marie Denis éditeur, Sorèze (Tarn) 2008.

¹⁵⁷ For more on this, see: F. Mayeur, *L'enseignement secondaire des jeunes filles sous la Troisième République*, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris 1977; Ead., *Histoire générale de l'enseignement et de l'éducation en France. De la Révolution à l'École républicaine*, Vol. III, Nouvelle Librairie de France, Paris 1981, pp. 139-158; J.C. Albisetti, *The French Lycees de jeunes filles in International Perspective, 1878-1910*, in «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 40, no. 1-2, 2004, pp. 143-156; R. Rogers, *Les Bourgeoises au pensionnat. L'éducation féminine au XIX^e siècle*, Presses

extremely elementary scientific curricula offered in these female secondary institutions drew criticism from journalist and civil rights activist Hubertine Auclert, who deplored the absence of subjects useful for women's economic and intellectual emancipation¹⁵⁸.

In the Netherlands, secondary schools for young women from affluent families had long existed, though their curriculum was limited to French and tasks deemed suitable for their gender. The bourgeois feminist campaign to achieve educational pathways comparable to those for men ignited in the 1870s, leading to an elevation of the cultural standard of educational curricula and, from 1871, to the access of women to male secondary schools. However, achieving the same level of general education did not increase Dutch young women's employment opportunities: their primary strategy for boosting their job potential remained, until the 1880s, attending special courses that provided sewing certificates¹⁵⁹. During that years, social reformers, municipal authorities and private organizations pushed also for the opening of vocational training schools for working-class girls, which expanded job opportunities for female teachers¹⁶⁰. At the same time, however, Dutch female teachers showed limited participation in mixed trade unions and professional organizations, making up just 10% of the members of a major teachers' association in 1898 (an association that, nonetheless, aimed to address gender disparities within the profession, advocating for equal pay for male and female teachers in 1910). Attempts to gain influence within the sector by organizing along gender lines and forming pressure groups also had little lasting impact or effectiveness (the only association exclusively composed of female teachers, founded in 1893, was dissolved in 1916 due to a lack of membership)¹⁶¹.

In this regard, Dutch female teachers were similar to their French counterparts, who also showed low associative involvement in the first decade of the 20th century. In contrast, their English colleagues constituted about 60% of the members of a mixed teachers' association in 1915 (electing the first female president in 1910) and would organize into the National Union of Women Teachers (NUWT) in 1920¹⁶². Also Swedish teachers, from 1916 until the end of the 1930s, actively participated in the debate on the "woman question" and in proposing solutions to alleviate the living conditions of teachers in rural areas (among the most prominent activists in this field were educator and writer Anna Maria Roos and journalist and civil rights teacher Elin Wägner), within an evolving social and cultural context where the concept of widespread education and that of citizenship now seemed to move on parallel tracks¹⁶³.

The German feminist movement, in its debate on women's employment, found itself divided: on one side was the idea that women should avoid the capitalist logic of exploitation by remaining confined

Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes 2007; A. Prost, *Inférieur ou novateur? L'enseignement secondaire des jeunes filles (1880-1887)*, in «Histoire de l'éducation», no. 115/116 (2007), pp. 149-169.

¹⁵⁸ Marie Anne Hubertine Auclert (1848-1914) took part, in 1876, in the *Association pour le droit des femmes*, founded in 1870 by Leon Richer and Maria Deraismes, where she served as a librarian. In 1878, entering into conflict with Richer over the issue of eligibility and women's right to vote, she left the association, and in 1883 she founded the society *Le Suffrage des femmes*. Maria Deraismes, driven by the same reasons, decided in 1882 to split from Richer and found the *Ligue française pour le droit des femmes* (LFDF). For further details: S.C. Hause, *Hubertine Auclert: the French suffragette*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1987; C.J. Eichner, *La Citoyenne in the World: Hubertine Auclert and Feminist Imperialism*, Duke University Press, Durham 2009; R. Nuñez, *Rethinking Universalism: Olympe Audouard, Hubertine Auclert, and the Gender Politics of the Civilizing Mission*, in «French Politics, Culture & Society» (2012), vol. 30 (1), pp. 23-45.

¹⁵⁹ M. van Essen, *Strategies of Women Teachers 1860-1920*, cit., pp. 421-22.

¹⁶⁰ Ivi, pp. 418-419.

¹⁶¹ Ivi, pp. 415, 425-426.

¹⁶² Ivi, p. 430.

¹⁶³ S. Backman Prytz, J. Westberg, "Arm the Schoolmistress!", cit., pp. 29-33; A. Karlsson Sjögren, E. Larsson, S. Rimm, *Agents and subjects: schooling and conceptions of citizenship in early nineteenth-century Sweden*, in «History of Education», 48 (2019), no. 3, pp. 297-316.

to the protected environment of the domestic sphere or by progressing in intellectual studies; on the other side was the idea of dismantling obstacles to their full social and economic emancipation, educating them not only for motherhood but also for work, and ensuring them equal pay and legal protections. This led to the emergence of two distinct fronts: a “bourgeois” feminism, which, in its more progressive ranks, insisted on women’s access to higher education and universities, and fought for the recognition of the right to association and assembly; and a “proletarian” feminism, which embraced the principles of socialism and class struggle, advocating for compulsory schooling for young female workers, for obtaining legal protections, and for greater State control over factory working conditions¹⁶⁴.

Regarding the working conditions of female teachers, a significant role in their improvement was played particularly by the General Association of German Women Teachers (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Lehrerinnenverein*, ADLV), founded in 1890 by the pedagogue and activist Helen Lange. This association established mutual aid funds and employment agencies, as well as advanced training courses for teachers, boasting over 1000 members in its second year of activity¹⁶⁵. The Prussian association of female schoolteachers founded in 1894 by Elisabeth Schneider and Maria Lischnewska (*Landesverein preussischer Volksschullehrerinnen*) also played a key role in advocating for teachers’ rights: at the time of the promulgation of the State regulation for teachers in 1897, this association conducted a statistical study on the salary conditions of female teachers, laying the groundwork for further actions, including the creation of a pension fund¹⁶⁶.

German women’s emancipation movements were accompanied by a strong awareness of the necessary actions concerning education, especially from the last two decades of the century. Among the initiatives launched by the bourgeois front, it is worth noting the creation in Berlin in 1889 of the first “real schools” for women (*Realkurse für Frauen*): these were soon transformed into four-year gymnasiums-lyceums (*Gymnasialkurse*) and also spread to other cities. The aforementioned Helen Lange, who was their main promoter, strove for these general culture female secondary institutions to improve their educational offerings to become increasingly similar to those for males, even hoping

¹⁶⁴ The clear separation between bourgeois and proletarian women stands out as a peculiar characteristic of German feminism. From the 1860s onwards, two important female associative realities had formed, corresponding to two different organizational models: the first was the General Association of German Women (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein*), founded in Saxony in 1865, during a gathering of local associations fighting for women’s education and work (an event that caused much sensation, as on that occasion, women for the first time claimed the right to speak and organize publicly); the second was the Association for the Promotion of the Female Gender (*Verein zur Förderung des weiblichen Geschlechts*), founded in Berlin in 1866, which presented itself as a liberal organization. The distinction between proletarian and bourgeois feminism became particularly evident in the last decade of the 19th century, when workers’ associations approached the socialist party, founding the Association for the Legal Protection of Women (*Rechtsschutzverein für Frauen*) in 1894, meanwhile, bourgeois women’s associations, both liberal and conservative, established a national associative body in the same year, the Federation of German Women’s Associations (*Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine*, BDF). While bourgeois associationism distinguished itself primarily by its dedication to charitable works, the fight against alcoholism and prostitution, and women’s access to higher education, workers’ associations promoted the establishment of shelters for working women in various cities and launched a battle for the presence of female inspectors in factories. The movement for the legal protection of women, also supported by the more radical bourgeois wing, obtained, in 1897, the authorization from the Ministry of Interior for the employment of female personnel in union inspections. The BDF commission tasked for this purpose, from 1898 the Commission for Worker Protection (*Kommission für Arbeiterinnenschutz*), chaired by Jeannette Schwerin and then by Anna Simson, also managed the training of future inspectors. A.M. Käppeli, *Scenari del femminismo*, in G. Duby, M. Perrot, *Storia delle donne. L’Ottocento*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2007, pp.492-493; F. Paciello, *Il femminismo tedesco dalla nascita del Secondo Reich all’avvento del nazismo*, cit., pp. 44-45, 76-78.

¹⁶⁵ Within it, prominent roles were held by the journalist and educator Auguste Schmidt, co-founder in 1865, along with Louise Otto-Peters, of the first association for german women’s rights (the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein*, ADF), and Marie Loeper-Housselle, founder in 1884 of the first professional journal for german female teachers (*«Die Lehrerin in Schule und Haus»*), which later became the official journal of the ADLV. The journal changed its name to *«Die Lehrerin»* (*«The Teacher»*) in 1910, and to *«Deutsche Lehrerinnenzeitung»* (*«German Female Teachers’ Journal»*) from 1924 to 1933. F. Paciello, *Il femminismo tedesco dalla nascita del Secondo Reich all’avvento del nazismo*, cit., p. 14.

¹⁶⁶ Ivi, pp. 44, 67-68.

for coeducation. This was realized following a reform proposal developed in 1907 by Maria Lischnewska, which envisioned the transformation of these schools into high schools (*Oberrealschulen*). Upon completion, this made it possible to access teacher training seminars without taking any exams, as well as careers in the postal service, railways, and public administration¹⁶⁷. The battle for access to academic studies was won in 1908, when a reform of the senior teacher qualification (*Oberlehrerin*), a qualification obtainable after five years of service by passing an exam based on scientific knowledge, allowed women to matriculate at university. From the following year, those who had attended teacher training seminars were also able to enroll in the Faculty of Philosophy, and from 1913, in other faculties after passing an examination¹⁶⁸.

Feminist currents closer to socialism, conversely, recognized women's vocational education as the most suitable remedy for addressing the social emergencies affecting the German populace at that time (from alcoholism to prostitution and infant mortality). Among the initiatives promoted in this field were those of the women's section of the German Academic Association (*Deutsche akademische Vereinigung*), established in 1888 and led by educator and radical bourgeois Minna Cauer, which organized gardening and photography courses in various cities. The women's section of the Academic Association also liaised with the German Society for Ethical Culture (*Gesellschaft für ethische Kultur*), founded in Berlin in 1892 and directed by supporter of ethical-social reform Georg von Gizycki, where activist Jeannette Schwerin also worked¹⁶⁹. Within this sphere fall the activities of several pioneers of "social work", including Alice Salomon, who founded a Female Social School (*Soziale Frauenschule*) in Berlin in 1908. This was organized as a two-year theoretical-practical course focused on childcare, taught by volunteer instructors from social welfare offices and health departments. Also notable were the writer and activist Gertrud Bäumer, who worked at a similarly named school in Hamburg and, along with Marie Baum, founded another institute in 1917 (the *Sozialpädagogisches Institut*) aimed at training professionals in social assistance¹⁷⁰.

Movements for women's emancipation were particularly active in some cantons of German-speaking Switzerland (Bern and Zurich) and in the city of Geneva. This led to the approval of a law in 1873 that provided equal admission rights to university for students of both sexes; and then, in 1877, an international association, the *Verein der Freundinnen junger Mädchen*, was founded with the aim of offering help and protection to all young women, regardless of nationality, religion, or social standing¹⁷¹. France and Germany were also oriented, in the last thirty years of the 19th century, towards coordinating the women's emancipation movement transnationally: in 1878, the first international congress for women's rights was held in Paris, followed by the international congress in Berlin in 1896, where discussions focused on female labor and the protection of women workers.

¹⁶⁷ Women were not allowed to hold leadership positions in female secondary schools, and the issue was raised to the Ministry of Education in 1906 by a teachers and academic students association (the *Verband akademisch gebildeter und studierender Lehrerinnen*). Against the criticisms of more conservative exponents, who in a petition presented to the Chamber of Deputies in 1910 argued that it would be humiliating for a man to work as a subordinate to a woman, the voice of Gertrud Bäumer particularly rose, who that year presided over the Federation of German Women's Associations (the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine*, BDF). Ivi, pp. 96, 244-249, 311.

¹⁶⁸ Ivi, p. 41, 213.

¹⁶⁹ Ivi, p. 43.

¹⁷⁰ The *Sozialpädagogisches Institut* in Hamburg primarily accepted women graduates from social schools, providing vocational education that included the following subjects: history, psychology, pedagogy, social ethics, law, citizenship, economics, hygiene, social assistance, and child and youth care. Ivi, p. 21.

¹⁷¹ In the last decade of the 19th century, the presence of women in swiss industries became significant, particularly in linen, silk textile, and tobacco factories, where female workers comprised nearly 80% by 1895: this surge led numerous labor movements to advocate for the emancipation of female factory workers. Additionally, various associations championed issues such as education, vocational training, participation in public administration, and the legal status of women (these topics were central to a special congress held during the 1896 National Exhibition in Geneva). Subsequently, these groups united their efforts within the Federation of Swiss Women's Associations (*Bund schweizerischer Frauenvereine*): formed in May 1900, this federation rapidly grew to include 26 associations and around 9500 members within just one year. Ivi, pp. 49-51, 76.

A further Parisian congress took place in 1900, covering topics such as philanthropy, public morality, education, labor, arts, and sciences¹⁷². The final two decades of the 19th century also saw a progressive internationalization of networks among female teachers. This was evidenced by the affiliation of numerous European women's teacher associations with the International Council of Women, founded in Washington in 1888, and it was further highlighted by their active participation in the International Congress of Women in Chicago in 1893 (during which the educators called for the establishment of an international minimum wage, the creation of supranational pension funds, and the introduction of common training standards)¹⁷³.

From the second half of the 19th century, Italy also participated in the debates on women's emancipation that were unfolding across Europe. Among the most active figures in the fight for women's education and suffrage was the Lombard feminist and patriot Annamaria Mozzoni. Starting in 1865 and for approximately two decades, she conducted an extensive public campaign on these issues¹⁷⁴, strongly emphasizing the civic value of women's actions in recent national history, and frequently referencing Italian women's shared participation in the Risorgimento movement. Annamaria Mozzoni launched a scathing critique against a societal structure that failed to recognize women as subjects bearing civil and political rights: notable interventions include her address on the civil and political conditions of Italian women delivered in Bergamo in 1878, and her indignant *Letter* to the President of the Council of Ministers Giuseppe Zanardelli in 1881, criticizing him for having opposed any opening towards women's suffrage in the drafting of the law on electoral reform. In 1878, on the occasion of the aforementioned international congress in Paris, Mozzoni was commissioned by Minister De Sanctis to draft an official report on the event and collect, on behalf of the government, the most suitable solutions tested in Europe regarding female education. In subsequent years, she remained deeply committed to mobilizing women, both bourgeois and of humble origin, towards a marked political radicalization, urging them to "rebel against dogma" (*"ribellarsi al dogma"*), repudiate the "authoritarian bond of marriage" (*"vincolo autoritario del matrimonio"*), and downplay the role of the family, that "conventional divinity to which real humanity was sacrificed" (*"divinità convenzionale alla quale si immola l'umanità reale"*) (from her conferences *Alle fanciulle che studiano – To the Girls Who Study*, and *Alle figlie del popolo – To the Daughters of the People*, both of 1884)¹⁷⁵.

As radical as Mozzoni's observations were, they lucidly described the condition of women in 19th-century Italy, which was shaped by a deeply rooted tradition that typically confined "well-bred young ladies" to boarding schools and convents, preparing them for future wifely duties, and limiting their access to secondary grammar-school and lyceum education, and thus to the liberal professions. So, normal schools represented the only path for further education and potential professionalization for young women of good social backgrounds, and this effectively made the female teacher the exclusive representative of the rising petty bourgeoisie in the job market¹⁷⁶.

¹⁷² Ivi, p. 274.

¹⁷³ Ivi, p. 272.

¹⁷⁴ From February to March 1865, the first Italian secular and progressive women's periodical, *La Voce delle donne* (The Voice of Women), published in Parma by Giovannina Bertola Garcea, serialized Mozzoni's essay *La donna in faccia al progetto del nuovo Codice civile italiano* (Tipografia Sociale, Milan 1865), and hosted some of her *Letters* on current affairs and bibliographic reviews. In 1866, the essay *Un passo avanti nella cultura femminile. Tesi e progetto* (Tipografia Internazionale, Milan 1866) was printed. Between 1868 and 1872, she made several contributions to the emancipationist periodical *La Donna*, directed by Gualberta Alaide Beccari, and in June 1871, in Luigi Pianciani's *Roma del popolo*, she discussed the *Questione dell'emancipazione femminile*, defining it as the core of the "social question". Simonetta Soldani (ed.), *MOZZONI, Marianna*, in Treccani - Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani - Volume 77 (2012), [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/marianna-mozzoni_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/marianna-mozzoni_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (accessed 30 June 2025).

¹⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁶ T. Bertilotti, *Tra offerta istituzionale e domanda sociale. Le Scuole Normali dall'Unità alla 'crisi magistrale'*, in «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», 2, 1995, pp. 379-382; S. Soldani, *Nascita della maestra elementare*, cit., p. 79.

At the same time, prominent figures like Aristide Gabelli, Pasquale Villari, and Carlo Tenca acknowledged that the constant increase in enrollment in female normal schools was primarily due to the lack of an alternative to the traditional boarding school model and the teaching career; indeed, there were no appropriate secondary education institutions for women of better social standing, who often flocked to normal schools simply to continue their studies and not necessarily because they intended to become teachers¹⁷⁷. Between the 1860s and 1870s, some municipalities attempted to address these needs by establishing female higher schools (*scuole superiori femminili*)¹⁷⁸, however, these institutions neither proliferated nor opened doors to future occupations for bourgeois daughters. It is significant that by the late 1890s, almost as a confirmation of a long-standing trend, students from the final year of the *Scuola superiore femminile* in Milan, the first of its kind (founded in 1861), were allowed to sit for the normal school leaving exams¹⁷⁹.

In mid-19th century Lombardy, initiatives very similar to those in France were also promoted in the field of assistance for working-class women and female vocational training. These were spearheaded by Laura Solara Mantegazza, a Mazzinian and later Garibaldian patriot from the affluent Milanese bourgeoisie. Her notable contributions include establishing a refuge for nursing infants (*ricovero per bambini lattanti*) in 1850, a mutual aid association for female workers (*Associazione generale di mutuo soccorso per le operaie*) in 1862, and a female vocational school (*Scuola professionale femminile*) in 1870¹⁸⁰. Mantegazza's work was continued by the emancipatory philanthropist Alessandrina Ravizza: collaborating with welfare organizations and women's associations active in Milan (including the *Società Umanitaria*, founded in 1893, and the *Unione Femminile*, established in 1899), she promoted the opening of workshop-schools to professionalize impoverished women. In 1907, Ravizza also founded a "Work House" (*Casa di Lavoro*) that provided lodging, meals, and a job to unemployed men and women for a three-week period while they sought new employment¹⁸¹. However, apart from these sporadic and local initiatives, which aimed to train female factory workers for integration into the manufacturing industry, Italian female vocational education (where it spread) continued to be limited to embroidery, sewing, and tailoring, or remained within the sphere of domestic economy. This was due both to the absence of an economic system capable of absorbing alternative professional profiles and to the preference for working-class women to contribute to the family budget by performing care work. Thus, pursuing the path of the normal school represented the only "employable" route for young women from working-class families, as well as for those from the Italian petty bourgeoisie.

Italian female teachers largely shared the limitations and costs faced by their European counterparts, participating in the struggles for popular and female emancipation at the end of the century,

¹⁷⁷ For further details, see: M. Moretti, *Pasquale Villari e l'istruzione femminile: dibattiti di opinione e iniziative di riforma*, in Soldani (ed.), *L'educazione delle donne. Scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 1989, pp. 497-530.

¹⁷⁸ These *scuole superiori femminili* were organized as day schools and subsidized by the government according to the provisions of the Bargoni circular of July 9, 1869. S. Franchini, P. Pozzuoli (eds.), *Gli istituti femminili di educazione e di istruzione (1861-1910)*, cit., pp. 53-54.

¹⁷⁹ C. Ghizzoni, *L'istruzione delle donne nell'Ottocento tra conservazione e modernità. La Scuola superiore femminile "A. Manzoni" di Milano*, in «History of Education & Children's Literature», XIX, 2 (2024), p. 54.

¹⁸⁰ The school included a preparatory class and a three-year course, offering subjects still largely inaccessible to women, such as bookkeeping, commercial practice, commodity science, and industrial design. A circulating library (*biblioteca circolante*) promoted the acquisition of general culture. See: R. Raimondo, *La pedagogia sociale di Alessandra Ravizza fra Otto e Novecento*, Carocci, Rome 2020, pp. 23-24.

¹⁸¹ Organized into departments for garment manufacturing and repair, address writing/copying, toys, paper converting, and carpentry, the *Casa di Lavoro* achieved such success with its production that it received an honorary diploma. In the latter two departments, starting in 1908, it began producing didactic materials and furniture commissioned by Maria Montessori for the *Casa dei bambini* in Milan and Rome (chairs and desks, toys, colored cards, and specially worked bricks for tactile perception). On the figure of Alessandrina Ravizza and her collaboration with prominent women in the Italian panorama of the time, such as Maria Montessori, Anna Kuliscioff, Ersilia Majno, Bambina Venegoni, as well as with Filippo Turati, Augusto Osimo, and other exponents of reformist socialism, see R. Raimondo, *La pedagogia sociale di Alessandra Ravizza fra Otto e Novecento*, cit.

advocating for the rights of their professional category and gender. Many of them flocked to the aforementioned *Unione Femminile* (Women's Union), founded in Milan in 1899 and later spread to other cities across the peninsula. They also joined the Committee for the improvement of women's conditions (*Comitato per il miglioramento delle condizioni della donna*) established in Bologna in 1890, and the League for the protection of female interests (*Lega per la tutela degli interessi femminili*) founded in Milan in 1893 and in Turin in 1894 (in subsequent years, similar associations were promoted in Venice, Rome, Naples, and Palermo).

In 1903, the National Council of Italian Women (*Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane*, CNDI) was officially established in Rome. In the same year, Linda Malnati founded the Committee for the Revival of Female Activity (*Comitato per il risveglio dell'attività femminile*) within the Milanese Teachers' Association (AMM). Her goal was to boost the political influence of female members; despite making up about 80% of the association's membership, they had previously had little impact on decisions. As a fierce socialist and pro-suffrage activist, in 1909, Malnati would join the board of directors of the *Unione Magistrale Nazionale* (UMN), the first national association of primary male and female teachers founded in 1901. She continued to champion the political and civil cause of Italian women, though not without various compromises and even calls to moderate her stances to keep her position¹⁸².

¹⁸² Fiorella Imprenti (ed.), "*Linda Malnati*", in *Enciclopedia delle donne.it* – biografie, 2020, <https://www.enciclopediaelledonne.it/edd.nsf/biografie/linda-malnati> (accessed 30 June 2025).

2. Legislative evolution of normal education in the Kingdom of Italy

2.1. Italian Unification and the urgency of training primary teachers

The establishment of the Kingdom of Italy, proclaimed on 17 March 1861, was the culmination of half a century of Risorgimento struggles, which led to the plebiscitary annexation of most pre-unification States to the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. This marked a turning point for the organization of the national school system, which faced the challenge of harmonizing highly disparate territorial realities. Its primary task was to combat high rates of illiteracy through a widespread basic education (Istat data from 1861 indicate a male illiteracy rate of 72% and a female rate of 84%¹⁸³). During the Unification process, the popular school was the institution tasked with shaping italians, aiming to achieve their political, economic and cultural unity, to socialize their models and customs, and to build their “national consciousness”. It was at this time that the establishment of normal schools took on great political-cultural significance, due to the urgent need to train a teaching class that would initiate the literacy of the working classes, fight the private and above all religious monopoly in school teaching, and instill the moral and civil values upon which the new italian (liberal) ruling class intended to build the Nation¹⁸⁴.

The school system established by the Casati Law of 1859 for the Savoyard Kingdom was thus extended, after unification, to the entire national territory. This promoted the opening of free four-year primary schools and mandated compulsory schooling for the first two years (often the only ones provided in rural areas)¹⁸⁵. Under the Casati Law, normal education was organized as a three-year course of study: at the end of the second year it was possible to obtain a lower-grade certification, qualifying for teaching in the lower cycle of primary schools (grades I-II); completing the third year granted a higher-grade certification, enabling teaching in the upper cycle (grades III-IV). This education was provided in gender-segregated institutions (male normal schools and female normal schools), which had attached boarding facilities and primary schools for practical training.

That normal schools were not included among secondary education institutions in the Casati Law, but rather discussed within the section dedicated to primary education¹⁸⁶, indicates their main purpose for the Savoyard legislator: they were seen as preparatory for spreading “popular culture”, suffering from a lower status compared to the more general and theoretical *ginnasio-liceo* track, which was traditionally elitist. However, they shared with vocational institutes (also undervalued in the

¹⁸³ For further reading on this topic, see: C.M. Cipolla, *Istruzione e sviluppo economico in Italia*, U.T.E.T, Turin 1971.

¹⁸⁴ V. Schirripa, *L'istruzione normale e magistrale*, cit., p. 205; C. Ghizzoni, *Essere Maestri in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, cit., p. 457.

¹⁸⁵ The application of the law proved to be a particularly demanding test, especially in the Southern regions, where the illiteracy rate at the time of Unification exceeded 90%. There, the persistence of strong social and cultural resistance to schooling, along with a chronic lack of resources and adequate facilities – which particularly affected rural areas – constituted the most distinctly educational instances of that Southern Question – *Questione Meridionale* which would become increasingly evident towards the end of the century, marking those italian regions' failure to align with the social and economic development of the northern Peninsula and other european Countries. See F. Stizzo, *Mezzogiorno e questione educativa tra Otto e Novecento. Il magistero di uno straordinario itinerario intellettuale e filantropico*, in F. Cambi, G. Trebisacce (eds.), *I 150 anni dell'Italia Unità*, cit., p. 311.

¹⁸⁶ Law November 13, 1859, no. 3725, Title V – *Dell'istruzione elementare*, Chapter V - *Delle Scuole Normali*, artt. 357-372.

educational landscape of that time) a “practical” nature and a socializing role for the masses¹⁸⁷. Normal schools would continue to struggle against the prestige of classical secondary education in unified liberal Italy, even though they were endowed with grand rhetoric about their function in the new national context: to train teachers as “educators”, “moralizers”, and agents of “italianization”. The De Sanctis Decree of 9 November 1861, no. 315¹⁸⁸, contributed to shaping both male and female normal schools as instruments of social control and dissemination of national culture: it added religion and morality to the subjects already stipulated by the Casati Law¹⁸⁹, introduced gymnastic and military exercises into the male curriculum, and further clarified teaching programs in accordance with an essentially traditional and hierarchical view of knowledge (art. 1). To exercise greater control over the conduct of aspiring primary teachers, the decree entrusted the moral and disciplinary direction of the boarding school attached to the normal schools to the School’s Governing Council (*Consiglio direttivo della scuola*). This council was composed of the Institute Director, the Royal Inspector, the Municipal Mayor, and two other members elected every three years by the Provincial School Council, and was presided over by the Royal Superintendent of Studies (*Regio Provveditore agli studi*). The concern for moral conduct seemed to primarily target female normal schools, whose supervision was assigned to a committee of female inspectors (art. 8) and, by order of the director, the assistant teacher of female handicrafts (art. 3). Finally, as already established by the Casati Law, the De Sanctis Decree allowed teachers who had not attended a normal school to sit for the certification exams, on the condition that, after passing the exam, they completed a one-year internship at a public primary school. The examination boards were appointed by the Provincial School Council, which was responsible for confirming the full regularity at the end of the exams. Higher-grade certifications were issued by the Superintendent of Studies, and lower-grade ones by the District Inspector.

However, in the years immediately following the unification of Italy, the number of qualified primary school teachers was still insufficient to meet the Nation’s needs, and many primary schools continued to be run by unqualified teachers. Therefore, efforts were made to address the teacher shortage with measures aimed at acquiring teaching certification as quickly as possible, pending their regular provision by normal schools. With Royal Decree of 16 February 1862, no. 475, six-month “preparatory schools” (*scuole preparatorie*) for aspiring female teachers were established in 16 cities in central and southern Italy. These schools provided a limited education compared to the normal course, being essentially aimed at reinforcing the basic instruction that aspiring teachers had received during the four-year primary school cycle. These six-month preparatory schools were instituted with the goal of recruiting provisional staff to be assigned to primary schools while awaiting the introduction of certified teachers; indeed, at the end of the course, after passing a written and an oral exam, a certificate was issued which authorized “temporary” teaching in the lower cycle of primary schools, but which also permitted admission to normal schools. With the same decree, and with the

¹⁸⁷ This specific social mandate of normal schools had been emphasized by the aforementioned regulation of the Savoyard kingdom of 24 June 1860 (Mamiani regulation), which underlined the necessity for these institutions to train good teachers and educators, developing in future teachers the moral, intellectual and civic aptitudes they would later have to transmit to their pupils. R.D. June 24, 1860, no. 4151, *Regolamento per le Scuole normali e magistrali degli Aspiranti Maestri e delle Aspiranti Maestre*, cit., p. 14.

¹⁸⁸ R.D. November 9, 1861, no. 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*.

¹⁸⁹ The subjects taught in normal schools under the Casati Law were: italian language and literature, geography and national history, arithmetic and accounting, elements of geometry, notions of physics, chemistry and natural history, elementary rules of hygiene, linear drawing and calligraphy, pedagogy. In female normal schools, the teaching of female handicrafts (knitting and sewing) was included, while in male normal schools, an elementary course in agriculture and notions of citizens’ rights and duties could be added (art. 358).

same objectives, conferences for teachers (*conferenze magistrali*) were established, which took place in provincial capitals and lasted from a few weeks to three months¹⁹⁰. These conferences were configured as “accelerated courses” to regularize uncertified teachers, but attendance at them was often hindered by economic problems, as municipal administrations were not always willing to grant teachers a subsidy that would enable them to reach the locations where these conferences were organized and to stay there for the necessary period. The shortage of primary teachers was still strongly felt in 1864: that year, Minister Matteucci’s inquiry into the conditions of public education in the Kingdom of Italy revealed that there were only 41 normal schools nationwide, and that, facing a demand for teachers of around 50,000 units, the Kingdom had only 16,770. Furthermore, a common element across all regions was the still high percentage of ecclesiastical teachers, who constituted about two-thirds of the entire teaching class¹⁹¹.

A decade later, the Scialoja inquiry into male and female secondary education (1872-75)¹⁹² highlighted an extremely significant phenomenon in the development of normal education in Italy: the constant increase in enrollments in female normal schools in contrast to the declining number of students in male normal schools – a trend that, as we will see, would persist for the rest of the century and become very evident on the beginning of the twentieth century. The strong influx into female normal schools was essentially due to the lack of other educational and employment opportunities for young women, while boys could prefer more secure and profitable professions to the precarious and often difficult job of a primary teacher, especially since at the end of primary school they could enter technical schools (*scuole tecniche*) or gymnasiums (*ginnasio*). This trend would inevitably lead to a greater availability of female recruits, which was decidedly advantageous for municipal coffers: indeed, the salaries stipulated by the Casati Law for female teachers were significantly lower than those for their male colleagues; and municipal expenses for education would be even further reduced if young licenced women were sent to teach in remote rural schools, which were often still inactive due to the lack of teachers or run by improvised and barely literate schoolmasters¹⁹³.

However, as the ministerial inspector Scavia had already noted during the V Italian Pedagogical Congress held in Genoa in 1868, women educated and raised in urban contexts rarely and unwillingly agreed to teach in rural areas. Therefore, it was necessary to ensure that country schools had female teachers who would be content with very meager salaries and who were willing to spend their lives “benefiting those rough and poor populations with their educational work” (“*beneficiando con l’opera educativa quelle rozze e povere popolazioni*”)¹⁹⁴. With a circular addressed to the Prefects in 1875¹⁹⁵, Minister Bonghi invited the provincial school councils to use every possible leniency in admission exams towards those who, “born and raised in small communes” (“*nati e cresciuti in piccoli comuni*”), were willing “to return there as teachers undertaking as far as possible a formal commitment” (“*a tornarvi come insegnanti, assumendone al possibile un impegno formale*”)¹⁹⁶. Regarding female normal schools, he particularly prescribed that the internal life of their annexed boarding houses should be kept “on the most modest terms” (“*nei più modesti termini*”), so that the

¹⁹⁰ C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, op. cit., p. 26.

¹⁹¹ G. Talamo, *La scuola dalla legge Casati all’inchiesta del 1864*, cit., p. 60.

¹⁹² L. Monteverchi, M. Raicich (eds.), *L’inchiesta Scialoja sulla istruzione secondaria maschile e femminile 1872-1875*. Fonti per la Storia della Scuola. Vol. IV, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali. Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, Rome 1995.

¹⁹³ S. Ulivieri, *I maestri*, cit., p. 174.

¹⁹⁴ *Atti del V congresso pedagogico italiano tenuto in Genova nel settembre 1868, a spese della città di Genova*, 1868, pp. 124-125 (citato in C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, op. cit., p. 27).

¹⁹⁵ C.M. July 6, 1875, no. 442, *Sussidi agli alunni agli alunni delle scuole normali*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», 1874 1875, pp. 657-659.

¹⁹⁶ Ivi, p. 658.

young women would learn the “duties reserved for women in a family of modest means” (*“uffici riservati alla donna in una famiglia di poca agiata condizione”*), would not be enticed “to city life” (*“alla vita cittadina”*), and would predispose themselves “to stay quietly in poor country places” (*“a starsene quiete nei poveri luoghi di campagna”*). Such provisions, however, were not particularly effective, and the refusal of normal school students to go and teach in disadvantaged locations was still denounced by Minister Coppino in the report accompanying the draft law on compulsory schooling, approved by Royal Decree no. 3861 on July 15, 1877. The Minister noted, among other things, the difficulty for “city” female teachers to integrate with the local population, due to the fact that, should they agree to work in those places, they brought with them “demands, clothes, fashions that made them hated or ridiculed” (*“esigenze, vesti, mode che le rendevano odiate o derise”*)¹⁹⁷. In order to face these difficulties, also highlighted by Girolamo Buonazia in an inquiry on compulsory schooling published in 1878, emphasis was placed on the establishment of teacher training schools (*scuole magistrali*) in areas with the greatest shortage of teachers – essentially rural ones – so that aspiring female teachers from those places would not have to move to cities to complete their studies and thus avoid the aforementioned inconveniences. These schools, which allowed one to obtain a lower-grade license and to teach in the lower two-year cycle of primary schools, were not a new invention. They had already been foreseen by article 370 of the Casati Law, which had established their opening at the expense of Provinces and Communes according to necessity, regulated by the Mamiani decree of 1860, which had defined their duration as 10 months, and reiterated by the aforementioned Coppino Law on compulsory schooling of 1877, which had also allocated government subsidies (art. 13) to Communes most notable for increasing the number of teachers. Royal Decree of April 24, 1879, no. 4866, contributed to specifying the organization of these *scuole magistrali*, establishing that they should be run by at least two teachers: one tasked with giving lessons and serving as director, the other to maintain the model school for the completion of practical training. These teachers were to be paid salaries of 1700 lire and 1200 lire respectively, and the schools were to receive an annual subsidy of 300 lire.

2.2. The Historical Left’s era: normal schools between reforms and conservatism

The reforms that affected normal education between the 1870s and 1880s were a consequence of the consolidation, also in Italy, of positivist-inspired currents, leading to the abandonment of educational models focused on a prescriptive and moralizing herbartian approach, and promoting a scientific evolution of teaching practices. Before then, the teaching of pedagogy in normal schools had not been treated with great scruple: combined with the teaching of morality and sacred history, it was often entrusted to a priest, justifying this choice with the difficulty of finding lay people with experience in the educational field¹⁹⁸. Still in 1867, the instructions and programs for normal schools signed by Minister Coppino¹⁹⁹ insisted on the “moral” intentionality that had to characterize the formative action of these institutes, and consequently it was believed that pedagogy lessons could be

¹⁹⁷ G. Bini, *La maestra nella letteratura: uno specchio della realtà*, in Soldani (ed.), *L’educazione delle donne. Scuola e modelli di vita femminile nell’Italia dell’Ottocento*, Franco Angeli, Milan 1989, p. 343.

¹⁹⁸ R. Gentili, *L’insegnamento della pedagogia nelle scuole normali italiane fino alla riforma del ministro Gianturco*, in «Studi di storia dell’educazione», 1984, 4, no. 1, p. 11; A. Arcomano, *Pedagogia, istruzione ed educazione in Italia (1860-1873)*, Edizioni Libreria Sapere, Naples 1986; R. Sani, A. Tedde, *Maestri e istruzione popolare in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, cit.

¹⁹⁹ R.D. October 10, 1867, no. 3943, *Istruzioni e programmi per le scuole normali*.

“conveniently given by the religion professor” (“*date convenientemente dal professore di religione*”), who, by teaching future teachers “to distribute the bread of knowledge” (“*a spezzare il pane dell’ intelletto*”), would also give them “the nourishment of virtue” (“*il nutrimento della virtù*”)²⁰⁰.

Already in 1868, during the aforementioned Pedagogical Congress in Genoa, the need was felt to reorganize the teacher conferences (*conferenze magistrali*) so that they might become more fruitful, useful, and aligned with new trends in the educational and didactic fields²⁰¹. The necessity for a decisive scientific renewal of pedagogical studies in normal schools would be raised shortly thereafter, within the Scialoja inquiry of the early 1870s. However, on that occasion, Pasquale Villari had observed such “a general contempt for pedagogy” (“*un disprezzo per la pedagogia così generale*”) that to say someone studied it “would cause laughter” (“*veniva da ridere*”)²⁰², highlighting how deep and conditioning was the cultural prejudice that prevented its reconversion into a rational and scientific key²⁰³.

The need to make teacher training less fragmented and approximate, and to provide them with adequate methodological-didactic training, would become more pressing in the last quarter of the century. This led Minister Coppino to observe, in a circular dated January 29, 1878, that normal schools should not limit themselves to fostering the intellectual and moral education of future teachers, but that they should “proceed hand in hand with the instruction being imparted to children in elementary schools and be conducted with the same practical and experimental method” (“*procedere di pari passo con l’insegnamento che si [veniva] impartendo ai fanciulli della scuola elementare e condursi con lo stesso metodo pratico e sperimentale*”)²⁰⁴. At that time, in fact, discoveries derived from the study of child cognitive development and learning processes pushed for a redefinition of pedagogical theories and educational practices, replacing abstract methodological formulas with the objective method (*metodo oggettivo*), based on observation and the idea that knowledge should come through experience.

The echo of this new cultural sensibility was reflected in the minutes of pedagogical conferences, which from the 1880s gained new scientific depth in Italy. They saw some of the most illustrious exponents of the intellectual landscape of the time (including Gabelli, Villari, Angiulli, Ardigò, Siciliani, De Dominicis, Labriola) debate issues such as the relationship between religion, philosophy, and science, between education, public morality, and economic development. They also addressed

²⁰⁰ A. Santoni Rugiu, *Ideologia e programmi nelle scuole elementari e magistrali dal 1859 al 1955*, cit., p. 145. Minister Coppino’s intention to give the teaching of religion a non-dogmatic character, and the very fact that this had receded into the background in State schools compared to the teaching of Italian and arithmetic (considered priorities in a Country still largely illiterate and resistant to abandoning the many locally adopted units of measurement in favor of the decimal metric system), had aroused considerable perplexity within the clergy. Consequently, the tolerance towards the commingling of pedagogy with the teaching of religion and morality in government normal schools plausibly constituted a compromise solution, a concession by the State to the still strong hegemonic claims of the Church in the field of educational and school institutions.

²⁰¹ *Atti del V congresso pedagogico italiano tenuto in Genova nel settembre 1868*, cit., p. 43.

²⁰² M. Raicich, *La polemica sugli studi classici intorno al 1870. L’inchiesta Scialoja*, in «Belfagor», XVIII, 5, 1963, p. 266.

²⁰³ Evidence of such discredit also appears in the 1885 short novel *Scuola normale femminile*, in which Matilde Serao described a very unsatisfactory schooling experience, portraying the pedagogy professor as a skillful “talker” (“*parlatore*”), “more versatile than profound” (“*più versatile che profondo*”), who disparaged the content of his own teaching and his very assignment: “Già nella prima lezione, egli aveva sbalordito le sue alunne spiegando loro l’inutilità della pedagogia: e quello scetticismo amabile persisteva in tutte le spiegazioni: a proposito di tutto, del metodo di lettura, dei sistemi froebeliani, a proposito di Pestalozzi e di Ferrante Aporti, egli improvvisava un discorso brioso o sentimentale che partiva dalla pedagogia e arrivava chissà dove, Goethe, Pulcinella, a Beaumarchais”. M. Serao, *Scuola normale femminile*, in S. Bruni (ed.), *Il romanzo della fanciulla*, Liguori, Naples 1985, p. 158.

²⁰⁴ C.M. January 29, 1878, no. 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.

decidedly novel questions, compared to the most widespread pedagogical common sense, raised by the physiology and psychology of education, and the necessity of introducing rigorously scientific methodologies into teaching practice²⁰⁵.

Among the most debated aspects was the preference for “practical” competencies for normal school students, particularly emphasizing the importance of practical training (*tirocinio*) to overcome a form of education that until then had been predominantly theoretical, mnemonic, and based on rote learning. In 1883, Gabelli underscored the necessity for normal schools to be “a school of method, a professional school where above all the art of teaching was learned, a delicate, very refined art” (“*una scuola di metodo, una scuola professionale in cui si apprendesse soprattutto l’arte di insegnare, un’arte fine, delicatissima*”), which he did not believe could be acquired “by memorizing, as was done almost everywhere, definitions, distinctions, schemes” (“*cacciando a memoria, come si [faceva] quasi dappertutto, definizioni, distinzioni, schemi*”)²⁰⁶; and five years later, Labriola would argue that there could be no “substitute of titles or equivalents” (“*ripiego di titoli o di equipollenti*”), and that the aspiring teacher, only after having given good proof of himself/herself by practicing in the school as an intern, should acquire “a formal and perfect degree of teacher” (“*grado formale e perfetto di insegnante*”)²⁰⁷.

Italian educational legislation in the 1880s also reflected the new expectations that had matured within civil society, which had become more sensitive to international battles for the achievement of literacy as a universal right and for access to subsequent levels of education. The “parliamentary revolution” of 1876 had decreed the end of the Historical Right in government, which for two decades, from Cavour to Minghetti, had dominated the national political scene, and initiated the political season of the Historical Left, oriented towards broadening spaces for participation within the liberal State (in 1882, the electoral reform would extend voting rights to all literate male citizens).

It was within that climate of reform and popular and bourgeois struggles for the attainment of social and political rights that Minister De Sanctis acceded to the request of Italian women, particularly those belonging to the middle class, to be able to pursue higher education. With a Royal Decree of December 16, 1878, no. 4684/ter, he established higher female teacher training schools (*Scuole superiori femminili di magistero*) in the cities of Rome and Florence, with a four-year duration. However, a strong controversy arose regarding the status of these institutes, preceding their establishment and lasting for about a decade, ultimately leading to the conclusion that they should in no way be equated with universities. Proof of this inferior status, as was precisely noted by Dina Bertoni Jovine, lay in the fact that access to *Scuole superiori di magistero* did not require completion of classical studies, a prerequisite for admission to university faculties, instead, a normal school diploma sufficed; moreover, the educational offering was somewhat inferior to that of universities, consisting of extremely fragmented teaching programs, for both literary and scientific subjects²⁰⁸.

The lower cultural level of these institutions and the less stringent admission requirements, besides responding to plausibly corporative logics that intended to reserve higher education of greater intellectual and scientific depth for men, were also dictated by the cultural level of the candidates coming from a normal school training pathway, who represented their natural recruitment base.

²⁰⁵ C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, op. cit., p. 31.

²⁰⁶ A. Gabelli, *Le riforme urgenti nell’istruzione*, in «Nuova Antologia», February 1, 1883, pp. 474-492, ripubblicato in Id., *Educazione positiva e riforma della società*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1972, p. 196.

²⁰⁷ A. Labriola, *Della scuola popolare. Conferenza tenuta nell’aula magna dell’Università, domenica 22 gennaio 1888, dal prof. A. Labriola*, Tipi fratelli Centenari, Rome 1888, ripubblicato in Id., *Scritti di pedagogia e di politica scolastica*, Editori riuniti, Rome 1974, p. 253.

²⁰⁸ 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, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1964, p. 269.

Moreover, the difficulty in recruiting female students who possessed a decent entry cultural level was an obstacle that already occurred at the point of admission to normal schools; this was mainly due to the time gap between the last year of primary school and access to normal school, which frequently led to the loss of what had been learned during the elementary course. In order to raise the educational level of young female candidates, Minister De Sanctis, with Royal Decree of September 30, 1880, no. 5666²⁰⁹, established a two-year “preparatory course” (“*corso preparatorio*”) at each normal school, which served to partially fill the aforementioned educational gap and prevent the phenomenon of relapse into illiteracy.

The regulation approved with the same decree, while on the one hand making admission exams to normal schools more difficult and selective, on the other hand reiterated the emphasis on methodological-didactic training. It abolished semi-annual exams, deeming them an unnecessary effort that subtracted valuable time from lessons and practical training exercises, which instead assumed a central role within the curricular pathway²¹⁰. The number of written tests was reduced to those for Italian, arithmetic, calligraphy, and drawing, while a practical lesson experiment was added to the oral exams. Furthermore, students who had achieved an average of 7/10 during the year were exempted from promotion exams. In every normal school, a “teachers council” (“*collegio degli insegnanti*”) was established, presided over by the director, with the task of ensuring compliance with laws, discussing and approving each teacher’s curricula, choosing textbooks, and setting the lesson schedule. Attached to the regulation were the curricula for male and female normal schools, from which it is interesting to note that the teaching of religion and ethics was replaced by the teaching of the rights and duties of citizens (*diritti e doveri del cittadino*)²¹¹, that the teaching of subjects was organized based on the objective and experimental method (*metodo oggettivo e sperimentale*), and that greater importance was attributed to the study of natural sciences²¹².

2.3. Curriculum reductions, exam regulations, and the introduction of “coeducation”

From the mid-1880s until the early twentieth century, the educational measures implemented by the Kingdom of Italy followed contradictory programmatic lines, largely reflecting the social and political tensions produced by the great economic crisis at the end of the century, the consequent peasant and worker insurrections, and the fear of the Italian bourgeoisie that the popular classes had been allowed to educate themselves more than was conducive to public order. Normal schools felt the impact of these tensions: if, on the one hand, the necessity of investing in the didactic and methodological quality of teachers was by then fully recognized, on the other hand, there was a fear that the increased cultural depth of the teaching class would itself constitute one of the causes of the politicization of the masses, especially as the first professional teachers’ associations had emerged, many of which openly supported proletarian emancipation movements.

²⁰⁹ R.D. September 30, 1880, no. 5666, *Regolamento per le scuole normali e per gli esami di patente dei maestri elementari*, in «Gazzetta ufficiale del Regno d’Italia», October 18-21, 1880, pp. 2361-2366.

²¹⁰ D. Maccario (ed.), *Insegnare a insegnare. Il tirocinio nella formazione dei docenti. Il caso di Torino*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2015, p. 19.

²¹¹ In the primary school curricula, this substitution had already occurred with the Coppino Law on compulsory education, Law July 15, 1877, no. 3961, where religion was not foreseen but rather the basic notions of the duties of man and citizen. The issue was the subject of a bitter discussion between secularists and Catholics: according to the latter, since the norms provided for the teaching of religion in the Casati Law had not been explicitly abrogated, it could not be considered abolished.

²¹² C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, op. cit., p. 48.

This first and foremost led to more active state control over the training pathway of future teachers, which led Minister Baccelli, with Royal Decree of June 21, 1883, no. 1590²¹³, to introduce into normal schools the same governance criteria and examination procedures already adopted for other educational institutes, and to subject the *scuole magistrali*, which changed their name to “lower normal schools” (“*scuole normali inferiori*”), to more assiduous supervision by provincial school authorities. This measure was justified by the intention to invest more effectively in teacher training: in a circular dated October 1 of the same year²¹⁴, which offered “clarifications” regarding the aforementioned decree, Baccelli argued, in fact, that the Government was no longer concerned that “many” teachers should emerge from normal schools, but that “good” (“*buoni*”), “cultured” (“*colti*”), and “well-prepared for the noble function” (“*ben preparati al nobile ministero*”) ones should. This intention would also become manifest in the choice to give pedagogical conferences a definitive structure, establishing, with a specific regulation in 1883²¹⁵, that they should take place annually on topics proposed by school superintendents and submitted for the Ministry’s approval, and also in the choice to give an organic structure to the *Scuole superiori femminili di magistero*²¹⁶. For the latter, however, their non-university nature was reaffirmed, believing that a university degree would be superfluous for those future teachers, as they were exclusively intended to replace the male teaching staff in female normal schools²¹⁷.

This denoted the tendency of the political class of the time to respond, albeit with “moderate” choices, not only to the ongoing battles for the improvement of the teaching profession’s conditions²¹⁸, but also to those advocating for female advancement in higher education. While allowing women further training in the field of teaching, care was therefore taken to maintain differentiated and limited curricula for them, and to restrict their employment opportunities to the field of female education and instruction, moreover, continuing to propose the most traditional gender stereotypes. Regarding the women who were to be trained in the *Scuole di magistero* and assigned to teach in female normal schools, it was indeed emphasized that, to be “worthy of their name” (“*degne del loro nome*”), they should possess “the necessary qualities of a good mother” (“*le qualità necessarie in una buona madre*”) ²¹⁹, in accordance with the “teacher-governess” model that continued to prevail in the regulations and programs intended for future female teachers²²⁰.

²¹³ R.D. June 21, 1883, no. 1590, *Che approva il regolamento per l’ordinamento delle scuole normali e magistrali e per gli esami di magistero*.

²¹⁴ C.M. October 1, 1883, no. 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.

²¹⁵ C.M. June 22, 1883, no. 706, *Circolare e regolamento sulle conferenze pedagogiche*, in C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, op. cit., p. 208.

²¹⁶ *Relazione al re premessa al r.d. 19 novembre 1882*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», 1882, pp. 1001-1003.

²¹⁷ M. Raicich, *Liceo, università, professioni: un percorso difficile per le donne*, in Id., *Di grammatica in retorica. Lingua, scuola, editoria nella terza Italia*, Archivio Guido Izzi, Rome 1996, p. 167.

²¹⁸ Among the measures aimed at improving the economic conditions and legal protection of the teaching profession, those of Minister Coppino are noteworthy (Law March 1, 1885, no. 2986, *Che sanziona le disposizioni pel pagamento degli stipendi e dei sussidi, per la nomina e per il licenziamento dei maestri elementari*; Law April 11, 1886, no. 3798, *Che eleva gli stipendi dei maestri elementari proporzionalmente al minimo fissato dall’unita tabella*).

²¹⁹ F. Airoli, *Gli istituti superiori di magistero femminile*, Tipografia cooperativa, Florence 1894, p. 17.

²²⁰ The idea that a good teacher should primarily possess the qualities of a “good mother” predominated in the *Regolamento per le scuole normali e per gli esami di patente magistrale* issued by Minister Boselli in 1889 (Royal Decree September 14, 1889, no. 6493). In this regulation, much emphasis was given to the practical demonstration of “women’s work” (“*lavori donneschi*”), in which candidates had to show that they had acquired special skill in cutting or preparing linen items and be questioned about how to teach sewing in primary classes (art. 169). The persistence of these gender ideals was also evident in the organization of the boarding school, which stipulated that female students should take part in kitchen work, perform all household services, learn to raise silkworms, bees, chickens, pigeons, cultivate flowers and plants, prepare fruit, preserves, etc. (art. 133). In the *Istruzioni e Programmi per le scuole normali* of 1890 (Royal Decree

Among the necessary interventions to facilitate women's teaching career path was to fully bridge the gap between primary school and normal school. This was achieved with Minister Boselli's Royal Decree of September 14, 1889, no. 6493²²¹, which sanctioned the extension of the preparatory course to three years, from its previous two-year duration²²². The instruction provided in the preparatory course, now spread over a three-year period and thus better organized, came to constitute a completion of primary studies, intended for those who wished to strengthen their preparation regardless of their intention to continue studies in normal school. The preparatory courses would later be suppressed in male normal schools (Royal Decree of August 6, 1893, no. 477), which had long suffered from a scarcity of enrolments; however, they garnered great success among girls, so much so that with Royal Decree of November 24, 1895, no. 704, changing their name to "complementary courses" ("*corsi complementari*"), they would effectively constitute female middle schools, aiming to offer the general culture necessary "for the noble duties of women in the family and society" ("*ai nobili uffici della donna nella famiglia e nella società*")²²³.

In contrast to the apparent liberality of the aforementioned provisions, the same years saw a tendency to reduce the cultural breadth of teaching subjects in normal schools, especially scientific ones, and to emphasize the practical and professional vocation of teacher training studies. With the Royal Decree of September 11, 1892, no. 689, Minister Martini had indeed intervened on the curricula for normal schools previously approved in 1890, deeming those in mathematics and natural sciences too extensive, more suited to high school students than to future primary teachers, and considering it more useful to increase the number of primary classes for internship²²⁴. Further important reforms led to the definitive separation of pedagogy from ethics, providing separate curricula and timetables for the two subjects (Royal Decree November 24, 1895, no. 704, by Minister Baccelli)²²⁵, to the abolition of the lower-grade teaching license, which had long fallen into disrepute (Law July 12, 1896, no. 293, by Minister Gianturco)²²⁶, and to the introduction of an enrolment fee in normal and complementary schools, as was already the case in gymnasiums and technical schools (also decreed by Gianturco's law of 1896). At the same time, the ministerial reception of some of the main European trends in pedagogy and didactics was evident in the initiation of Froebelian courses for the training of "kindergarten teachers" at normal schools for women (Royal Decree December 3, 1896, no. 592, by

September 17, 1890, no. 7143), the predestination of women to be "mothers or educators of good mothers" ("*madri di famiglia o educatrici di buone madri di famiglia*") was reiterated once again, claiming that the teaching of women's work should be given "the right importance also from an educational point of view" ("*una giusta importanza anche sotto l'aspetto educativo*"), since it offered "female students the opportunity to remember their destiny" ("*l'occasione alle alunne di ricordare la loro destinazione*").

²²¹ R.D. September 14, 1889, no. 6493, *Regolamento per le scuole normali e per gli esami di patente magistrale*.

²²² C.M. November 20, 1889, no. 910, *Regolamento per le scuole normali e per gli esami di patente*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», 1889, pp. 1751-1755.

²²³ *Relazione al re premessa al r.d. 24 novembre 1895*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione» 1896, pp. 22-24.

²²⁴ *Relazione al re premessa al r.d. 11 settembre 1892*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione» 1892, p. 1638.

²²⁵ R.D. November 24, 1895, no. 704, *Programmi per i corsi complementari femminili e per le scuole normali maschili e femminili*.

²²⁶ A proposal already advanced by Minister Martini in 1893, who had noted how the lower normal schools (formerly *scuole magistrali*), which qualified teachers to teach in the lower cycle of primary schools, were poorly attended, and that few took the exams for the lower license at the end of the second year of normal schools.

Minister Gianturco)²²⁷ and in the decision to make “manual labor” compulsory in both male and female normal schools (Royal Decree October 19, 1897, no. 460, by Minister Codronchi)²²⁸.

The cultural deprivation of teachers, however, seemed to be a problem still persistent in the Italian school system at the turn of the two centuries. If, on the one hand, Vittore Ravà’s inquiry into primary education in the 1897-1898 school year denounced the still high evasion of teachers from normal schools²²⁹, on the other hand, Minister Gallo noted that the facilitations granted by decrees and circulars in past years, to cope with the shortage of teaching staff, had deprived promotion and normal license exams of their value and effectiveness, preferring the criterion “of indulgence” (“*dell’indulgenza*”) to that “of just severity” (“*della giusta severità*”)²³⁰.

The regulation of examination procedures would be at the center of subsequent provisions, which oscillated between the tendency to reassert their regularity, with some exceptions if students excelled in certain disciplines, and the tendency to bypass them based on simple “suitability”. With Royal Decree of August 23, 1900, no. 317, Minister Gallo indeed repealed all those provisions that exempted from promotion exams to subsequent classes and from normal license exams those who obtained a simple pass in the final assessments, allowing such exemption only for subjects in which a score of not less than 8/10 was achieved in the final assessment²³¹. However, Minister Nasi’s decree of June 12, 1902, no. 175, reaffirmed the teachers’ council’s discretion in granting promotions and licenses without examination (art. 1), reiterating in a circular of the same year that this should not apply only to the best students but be “the rule” (“*la regola*”) for all those who were deserving based on their “daily proofs of diligence and progress” (“*quotidiane prove di diligenza e di profitto*”)²³².

In the years that followed, the problem of promotions without exams, far from being resolved, 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 provisions concerning

²²⁷ To earn this special diploma, candidates needed to already hold a normal school license. They also had to attend classes for one year at the kindergartens established within the female normal schools. Finally, they had to pass a practical examination in the presence of the school’s director, the pedagogy professor, and the kindergarten teacher. R.D. December 3, 1896, no. 592, *Che approva il Regolamento per le scuole normali e complementari*.

²²⁸ The introduction of “educational” manual labor in Italian primary schools, considered “the most suitable means for acquiring certain manual skills [...]; to interrupt the monotony of teaching with a healthy exercise of the body; to awaken and educate the spirit of observation; to strengthen the will” (“*il mezzo più acconcio per fare acquistare certe abilità di mano [...]; a interrompere la monotonia dell’insegnamento con un sano esercizio del corpo; a destare e educare lo spirito di osservazione; a rafforzare la volontà*”), was first debated during the VII Pedagogical Congress held in Naples in 1871. Subject of ministerial inquiries and comparative studies, it was sometimes experimented with locally, and once made compulsory, it took the form of “useful” work, connected to agricultural or artisanal activities typical of the territories and adapted to gender. While the teaching of agricultural concepts was common in male normal schools and characteristic of rural elementary schools (often with attached “school fields” – “*campicelli scolastici*”), the instruction of women’s work, consisting of knitting and sewing, had always been compulsory in female primary schools and included in the curriculum for aspiring female teachers. Then there was drawing instruction, which was compulsory in both male and female schools: it allowed students to apply their learning of the decimal metric system and develop skills useful for working in small industries.

²²⁹ *L’istruzione elementare nell’anno scolastico 1897-98. Relazione a S.E. il Ministro*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del Ministero dell’Istruzione Pubblica», vol. II, 1900 (v. C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, op. cit., pp. 28-29); 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*, ETS, Pisa 1982, p. 130; G. Spampini, *Storia e cultura materiale della scuola italiana tra Otto e Novecento* [doctoral thesis], Università di Firenze, 2014/2017, p. 66.

²³⁰ *Relazione al re premessa al r.d. 23 agosto 1900, no. 317*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», 1900, pp. 1544-1547.

²³¹ C.M. August 31, 1900, no. 68, *Esami di licenza normale e complementare*, in «Bollettino ufficiale Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», 1900, 1548-1549.

²³² C.M. June 14, 1902, no. 43, *Sugli esami di ammissione, di promozione e di dirigenza nelle scuole secondarie classiche, tecniche, normale complementari*, in «Bollettino ufficiale del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», 1902, pp. 1007-1009.

exams in primary schools, secondary schools (classical, technical, normal, and complementary), and special schools reporting to the Ministry of Public Instruction²³³. A new regulation, launched with Royal Decree of October 13, 1904, no. 598²³⁴, again gave greater credence to final evaluations, adding a written mathematics test to the exams for complementary and normal schools, and also making the exam for obtaining the kindergarten teacher diploma more complex by adding a written and oral pedagogy test, oral tests on all subjects taught, and practical tests of froebelian work to the already required practical lesson. The same regulation established that normal school students who achieved a passing grade in teaching aptitude could obtain the qualification without undertaking the year of practical training, which remained compulsory for candidates from private or paternal schools.

At the same time, the problem of male normal schools came to ministerial attention, as they had long been short of students and were threatened with closure. Minister Martini had already proposed reducing their number to 14 (one per region) with an 1893 decree-law that was, however, rejected. This would be followed, in 1909, by Minister Rava's proposal to experiment with "promiscuity" (*"promiscuità"*), meaning to make under-attended male normal schools accessible to women and, conversely, to make female ones in the same condition accessible to men. The proposal was approved with the law of July 19, 1909, no. 525, which authorized the Government to declare normal and complementary schools with a scarcity of students as mixed-sex, and to implement this Minister Credaro issued a specific regulation with Royal Decree of April 10, 1910, no. 278. Pursuant to this regulation, a prerequisite for the issuance of the royal decree declaring a school mixed-sex was that the school superintendent (*provveditore agli studi*), the provincial medical officer, the chief civil engineer, or his delegate would inspect the school premises to ascertain that they met the necessary requirements to accommodate students of both sexes (arts. 2, 7)²³⁵; furthermore, it would be the responsibility of the institute's director to send an annual report on scholastic and disciplinary conduct to the superintendent (art. 10), which the superintendent in turn would have to send to the Ministry with his own observations.

Aware that such measures were not sufficient to cover the needs of an expanding mass education system, on December 14, 1910, Minister Credaro again brought the problem of the teacher crisis to the Parliament and proposed that even gymnasiums, many of which were located in small towns and villages lacking normal schools, should be used for the training of new teachers, providing "one or two years of pedagogical studies and experimental practical training" (*"un anno o due di studi pedagogici e di tirocinio sperimentale"*)²³⁶. Following this proposal, the law of May 25, 1913, empowered the Government to proceed with the total or partial transformation of colleges, conservatories, boarding schools for girls, and other educational institutions, including gymnasiums, into complementary and normal schools, depending on the local need for primary teachers²³⁷.

²³³ «Bollettino ufficiale Ministero Pubblica Istruzione», 1904, pp. 1546-1547 (see C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, op. cit., p. 56).

²³⁴ R.D. October 13, 1904, no. 598, *Che approva e contiene il regolamento per gli esami nelle scuole medie ed elementari*.

²³⁵ For a female normal school to also accept male student, it was necessary to set up male primary classes there for practical training. Similarly, for a male normal school to be declared mixed-sex, it was necessary to establish a kindergarten and primary schools there for the practical training of female student (art. 2). Furthermore, 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 of one sex were not allowed to attend theoretical or practical lessons exclusively reserved for the other sex (art. 7). R.D. April 10, 1910, no. 278, *Che approva l'annesso regolamento per la esecuzione dell'art. 2 della legge 19 luglio 1909, no. 525*.

²³⁶ «Bollettino ufficiale Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», 1910, p. 3660 (see C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, op. cit., p. 57).

²³⁷ The proposals for transformation were, as a rule, within the competence of the Ministry, but could also originate from local authorities. Once the urgent need for primary teachers was resolved, the normal schools, at the request of the Communes themselves, could be converted into middle schools that better responded to local needs. Law of May 25, 1913, no. 517, *Concernente la trasformazione di Istituti di istruzione e di educazione*.

In just over 50 years since Italy's Unification, the number of normal schools significantly increased: from just 41 schools in the 1863-64 school year²³⁸, they jumped to 150 by 1916-17 (130 state-run and 20 accredited), with the addition, in that same year, of 115 complementary schools (92 state-run and 23 accredited)²³⁹. Despite the recognized need to invest in the specific training of these aspiring primary teachers, the idea of a very broad and in-depth education for them was consistently rejected, believing that an overly extensive training was wasteful, if not downright risky. Such was the caution in an Italian context that had to contend with the cultural and economic realities of a South of the country still predominantly agricultural and peasant, but also, on the other hand, with the upheavals resulting from the incipient industrial advancement in other areas of the Country²⁴⁰. The role of primary teachers in 19th and early 20th-century Italy, along with their training and gradual professionalization, must therefore be placed within specific boundaries that marked them as agents of socialization and homogenization for the masses, avoiding the risk of their becoming instigators of social unrest. These parameters largely remained unchanged until the Gentile reform of 1923²⁴¹.

2.4. Beyond official rhetoric: the compromise of female knowledge

When analyzing the evolution of the institutional identity of normal schools in Italy, the phenomenon of their feminization must be considered a relevant aspect. While female enrollment initially began with a slight disadvantage, the number of female students started to surpass male students between the 1870s and 1880s, becoming increasingly decisive towards the end of the century.

A quick look at the figures reveals the extent of this phenomenon: in 1861-62, the student population in normal schools totaled 2.947 males and 2.795 females; by 1875-76, this shifted to 1.248 males and 5.227 females; in 1881-82, there were 1.238 males and 7.482 females; by 1899-1900, males numbered 1.323, while females reached a significant 19.864²⁴². Consequently, the proportion of female students grew from 49% in 1861-62 to 94% in 1899-1900.

An explanation for such developments (and the consequent feminization of the profession) must be sought in the social, economic, and cultural structures of a Country that offered women rare educational opportunities beyond basic instruction, whether they sought cultural emancipation or aimed at improving their socio-economic conditions.

In post-unification Italy, perhaps more evidently than in other contexts, a kind of “pedagogical injunction” emerged regarding women who intended to pursue education beyond the elementary level²⁴³. In an almost unanimous manner, from both secular and Catholic perspectives, it was reiterated that the type of education directed at women should aim at improving their capacity to fulfill the maternal mission, or at performing professions that represented an extension of their natural self-sacrificing nature towards education and social care.

At the fourth pedagogical congress held in Florence in 1864, Raffaello Lambruschini expressed the undisputed connection between “women” and “education”, declaring their aptitudes “for patience,

²³⁸ V. Schirripa, *Insegnare ai bambini. Una storia di maestre e maestri in Italia*, Carocci, Rome 2022, p. 30.

²³⁹ *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, Società poligrafica italiana, Rome 1921, p. X (v. C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, op. cit., p. 27).

²⁴⁰ R. Fornaca, *Scuola e politica nell'Italia liberale*, in G. Quazza (ed.), *Scuola e politica dall'unità ad oggi*, Stampatori, Turin 1977, p. 58.

²⁴¹ C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, op. cit., p. 33.

²⁴² 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*, De Donato, Bari 1982, p. 15.

²⁴³ C. Covato, *Maestre d'Italia. Uno sguardo sull'età liberale*, in «Storia delle donne», 8(2012), p. 165-166. Vedi anche: A. Santoni Rugiu, *Maestre e maestri. La difficile storia degli insegnanti elementari*, Carocci, Rome 2006.

self-abnegation, meekness that overcomes others' pride and anger, compassion that feels everyone's suffering, generosity that aids them [...]" (*"di pazienza, di abnegazione di sé, di mansuetudine che acquista le priorie e le ire altrui, di compassione che sente i mali di tutti, di generosità che li soccorre [...]"*)²⁴⁴. Therefore, to the ruling class and intellectuals of the time, women appeared to be the most "suitable" subjects to perform the educational function, into a perspective which attributed the same sacredness to the teaching vocation as to the maternal role, within a vision that sought to safeguard moral order and social hierarchies²⁴⁵.

In the post-unification policies aimed at shaping the teaching profession, we can identify a sort of "compromise of knowledge", that limited women from exceeding a certain level of education, clearly highlighting the constraints under which female normal schools offered access to further cultural advancement and forms of emancipation. The remnants of this compromise are evident in the vast pedagogical literature of the time. This literature sought to define how the "woman-mother" should be educated, pervading school curricula, textbooks, philosophical and religious thought, and, in the last decades of the century, even positivistic medical and anthropological texts.

Evidence of this compromise can be found in the organization of the study pathways. By distancing themselves as much as possible from the content and objectives of higher education intended for the exercise of particular powers, these pathways confined the training of female teachers within the boundaries of knowledge deemed most "suitable" for the female gender, along with a rigid definition of their employment prospects²⁴⁶. This was demonstrated by the fact that preparatory courses for teaching in kindergartens were reserved exclusively for women, based on a model that presumed them best suited for early childhood education and care. It was also shown by the fact that women were only permitted to teach in the lower grades of male primary schools, as it was believed they could not bring an example of strength and virility to the upper primary classes²⁴⁷.

While the normal school served as an entirely exceptional channel within the Italian educational system, bestowing upon women a crucial role in the Country's social development and guaranteeing them a professional outlet (especially considering that until then women had been barred from public office and access to *ginnasi, licei*, and technical schools remained virtually non-existent for them until the early 20th century)²⁴⁸, it also, conversely, exhibited a tendency to simplify scientific curricula and perpetuate educational models that emphasized modesty, humility, self-denial, and decorum befitting a "good mother"; this reveals how far normal schools were from truly fostering emancipation and equal opportunities for women.

It is plausible to hypothesize that behind the apparent liberality of the provision that allowed the "promiscuity" (co-education), adopted at a time when the study path was almost entirely feminized, resided corporative motivations aimed at preserving a patriarchal conception of the destinies of men and women²⁴⁹. Furthermore, it is possible that the very concession to continue studies in the *Scuole superiori di magistero* was conceived to channel the aspirations of middle-class women to ascend to higher levels of education, but also, at the same time, meant to ward off excessive demands in other fields of knowledge and professions (for women to obtain a proper university degree from those

²⁴⁴ *Atti del quarto congresso pedagogico italiano, tenuto in Firenze nel settembre del 1864, pubblicati per cura della Società pedagogica italiana*, Tipografia di Domenico Salvi e C., Milan 1864, p. 23.

²⁴⁵ C. Covato, *Maestre d'Italia*, cit., p. 167.

²⁴⁶ M. Raicich, *Liceo, università, professioni*, cit., pp. 163-200.

²⁴⁷ M. Dei, *Colletto bianco, grembiule nero. Gli insegnanti elementari italiani tra l'inizio del secolo e il secondo dopoguerra*, il Mulino, Bologna 1994.

²⁴⁸ 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, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1964, p. 269.

²⁴⁹ C. Covato, A.M. Sorge, op. cit., p. 19. Vedi anche: C. Covato, *Un'identità divisa. Diventare maestra in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, Archivio Guido Izzì, Rome 1996, p. 58; A. Buttafuoco, *"In servitù regime". Educazione ed emancipazione nella stampa politica femminile*, in Soldani (ed.), *L'educazione delle donne*, cit., pp. 363-391; S. Soldani, *La fortunosa conquista di un'istruzione secondaria da parte delle donne*, in E. Bruni, P. Foglia, M. Messina (eds.), *La donna in Italia, 1848-1914. Unite per unire*, Silvana, Cinisello Balsamo 2011, pp. 15-26.

institutes would, moreover, have seemed unnecessary, if not outright “imprudent” and “insane” – “*imprudente*” e “*folle*”) ²⁵⁰.

Subject to strict moral rules and often victims of the population’s reluctance, Italian female teachers took their first steps toward emancipation in a cultural climate that offered them no economic or social protection, yet at least made them socially “tolerated”. In contrast, women’s aspirations for higher professions were harshly stigmatized ²⁵¹, producing a stark dissonance between the official rhetoric celebrating women’s education and professionalization as a factor of modernity, and a social, political, and cultural reality marked by severe forms of obstructionism, which until 1877 prohibited women from testifying in public acts, which until 1919 deemed them naturally subject to marital authority, and which until 1945 would have denied them the right to vote ²⁵².

The growing number of female normalist students and female teachers, driven by the development of two closely related educational institutions (the popular primary school and the normal school), intersected with the biographical experiences of many Italian women around the turn of the two centuries ²⁵³. The path of teacher training and career, lauded by pedagogical thought in a sweetened and abstract version, represented an unprecedented opportunity for these women to access a socially fragile profession. This path deserves to be investigated in its material and daily dimensions, critically and comprehensively approaching the evolution of the institutions dedicated to it, to understand their potential and formal constraints, their relationships with institutions and communities, and their concrete and diverse achievements at the local level. The study that will be presented in the following pages, conducted in the Catania area, primarily aims to investigate the contribution made by the “Giuseppina Turrisi-Colonna” Female Normale School to teacher training; secondly, it tries to trace some of these teachers in the primary schools of the Province and to gather the most significant elements regarding the material and moral conditions in which they practiced their profession.

²⁵⁰ M. Raichich, *Liceo, università, professioni: un percorso difficile per le donne*, in Id., *Di grammatica in retorica. Lingua, scuola, editoria nella terza Italia*, Archivio Guido Izzi, Rome 1996, p. 167.

²⁵¹ C. Covato, *Maestre d'Italia*, cit., p. 168.

²⁵² An emblematic example of such obstructionism in accessing professions – alongside the more widely known case of Lidia Poët (1855-1949), the first woman to practice law in Italy, whose request for enrollment in the Turin Bar Association had been strongly opposed – is that of Giacomina Gerbino. In 1907, she became the first university-educated female director of the Municipal Library of Caltagirone, a record almost certainly for Sicily and probably for the whole of Italy at the time. Her professional journey was not without difficulties: during the competition for the directorship, despite being evaluated as meritorious, her appointment was initially suspended by the Municipal Council for “defects in form” (“*difetti di forma*”), behind the proposal of an opposing political faction. Only thanks to the decisive intervention of pro-mayor Luigi Sturzo, who, with “arguments of law” (“*argomentazioni di diritto*”), managed to overturn the decision and secure her appointment with 23 out of 31 votes, could Gerbino assume the position. For further details, see: A. Criscenti, *L'ingresso delle donne nella professione. Giacomina Gerbino direttrice laureata della Biblioteca di Caltagirone (1907)*, in A. Cagnolati, C. Petruzzì (eds.), *E la regina morì... Ricordando Angela Articoni*, Tab edizioni, Rome 2024, pp. 251-298.

²⁵³ R. Certini, *Bambini e scolari nelle memorie e nei diari di maestri e maestre: tra biografia e racconto*, in C. Covato, S. Ulivieri (eds.), *Itinerari nella storia dell'infanzia. Bambine e bambini, modelli pedagogici e stili educativi*, Unicopli, Milan 2001, pp. 197-229; G. Bini, *La maestra nella letteratura: uno specchio della realtà*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 1989, pp. 331-362.

3. Women's schooling and female teaching careers in the Province of Catania between opportunities and obstacles

3.1. The difficult beginning of female literacy in post-unification Sicily's educational landscape. Communal neglect, teacher shortages, and resistance to state instruction

The extension of the Casati Law's educational system to sicilian territory occurred with provisional dictator Mordini's decree of October 17, 1860, no. 263²⁵⁴. This decree mandated the opening, at the expense of the Municipalities, of compulsory and free primary schools for boys (day and evening schools) and primary schools for girls (arts. 25-30). On December 31, 1860, a few months after the annexation of the sicilian Provinces to the nascent Kingdom of Italy (sanctioned by the plebiscite of October 21), the Governor of the District of Catania, Vincenzo Tedeschi, extolled public education, "this most interesting branch that civilizes nations and elevates them to the eminent degree of dictating laws, and spreads fruitful ideas of science in Europe" ("*questo ramo tanto interessante che civilizza le nazioni, e le innalza all'eminente grado di dettare leggi, e sparge idee fecondatrici di scienza in Europa*"), as a primary element of popular emancipation and an indispensable factor in the moral and material progress of the Nation, inviting "every good citizen" ("*ogni buon cittadino*") to work "diligently and assiduously" ("*alacrememente e con solerzia*") to "educate that part of the people who most needed it" ("*istruire quella parte di popolo che più [avesse] bisogno*")²⁵⁵.

However, in the aftermath of Unification, the landscape of primary education in Sicily proved to be quite desolate, not only for the Province of Catania but across the entire Island. The Statistics of municipal elementary schools in the sicilian provinces for the 1861-62 school year revealed a profound discrepancy between the schools mandated by law and those actually active: in the province of Palermo, with a population of 516.146 inhabitants, 183 schools were active out of the 321 required by law; in the province of Catania, with a population of 396.355 inhabitants, 166 schools were enumerated out of the 249 prescribed; in the province of Trapani, with 200.004 inhabitants, 38 schools out of 119; in the province of Girgenti, with 316.284 inhabitants, 93 schools out of 188; in the province of Caltanissetta, with 183.974 inhabitants, 77 schools out of 129; in the province of Messina, with 381.021 inhabitants, 182 schools out of 423; in the province of Noto, with 252,994 inhabitants, 93 schools out of 154²⁵⁶.

Even more dramatic was the picture for female education: in the province of Palermo, only 27 lower-level girls' schools were recorded out of 81 mandated by law, and just 2 upper-level girls' schools out of 32; in the province of Catania, there were 3 lower-level girls' schools out of 64, and 1 upper-level girls' school out of 26; Trapani province had 12 lower-level girls' schools out of 27, and no upper-level girls' schools out of 18; in Girgenti province, there were 20 lower-level girls' schools out

* An anticipation of this section of the research was recently published in the first of two volumes dedicated to the dissemination of the results of the aforementioned PRIN-2017 Project on education and development in Southern Italy from Unification to the Giolitti era, in which the undersigned participated as a research fellow from 2020 to 2022: G. Denaro, *La Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania tra Otto e Novecento, e il suo impegno per un rinnovamento didattico e metodologico*, in S. Lentini, F. Pruneri, B. Serpe, C. Sindoni (eds.), *L'istruzione elementare e normale nel Sud Italia dall'Unità al periodo giolittiano (1861-1914)*, Tomo I, Pensa MultiMedia, Lecce 2024, pp. 407-440.

²⁵⁴ *Collezione delle leggi, decreti e disposizioni governative compilate dall'avvocato Nicolò Porcelli, Anno III, parte seconda*, Stabilimento Tipografico Carini, Palermo 1860, p. 9.

²⁵⁵ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 286 (277 ex), V. Tedeschi, Governatore della Provincia di Catania, *Sull'istruzione pubblica*, December 31, 1860.

²⁵⁶ ASPA, Ministero e Segreteria – Ripartimento interno, b. 3174, *Statistica delle scuole elementari comunali delle provincie siciliane A.S. 1861/1862*.

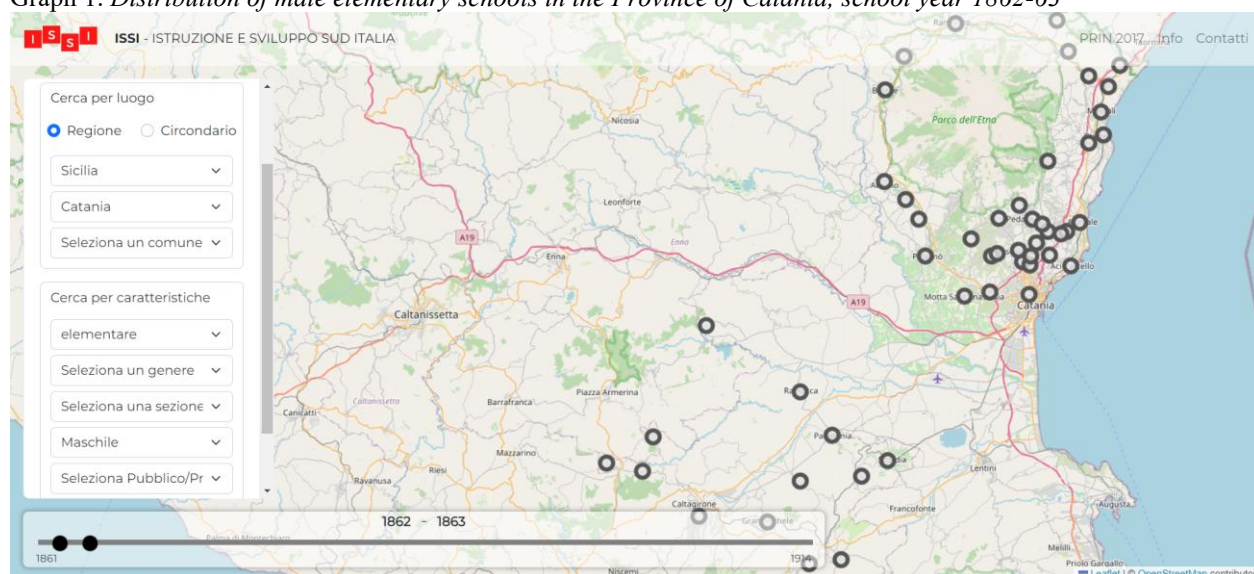
of 45, and no upper-level girls' schools out of 25; Caltanissetta province had 6 lower-level girls' schools out of 31, and 5 upper-level girls' schools out of 16; in Messina province, 22 lower-level girls' schools existed out of 135, and no upper-level girls' schools out of 14; finally, in Noto province, there were 16 lower-level girls' schools out of 37, and 1 upper-level girls' school out of 20²⁵⁷.

Even in Catania, a provincial capital city marked by strong urban dynamism and a notable drive toward modernization since the first half of the century²⁵⁸, primary education was quite neglected, and the situation for female education, in particular, was exceedingly critical. In 1860, the City had 4 primary schools for boys (three lower-grade and one upper-grade), but completely lacked any primary schools for girls. The aforementioned Statistics for the 1861-62 school year announced the opening of 12 additional schools in the city by May: three lower-grade day schools for boys, one upper-grade day school for boys, one evening school, six Sunday schools, and one school for girls with two teachers. However, by the 1862-63 school year, only 10 schools were actually operating in Catania: 3 lower-grade for boys, 3 upper-grade for boys, and 4 evening schools, with no girls' schools having been established, as can be seen in Graph 2²⁵⁹.

Table 1. *Comparative state of elementary schools mandated by law versus active elementary schools in the sicilian provinces, school year 1861-62*²⁶⁰

Province	Population	Number of schools to be implemented according to the law						Number of existing schools					
		Day low. M	Even. low. M	Day low. F	Day upp. M	Day upp. F	Tot.	Day low. M	Even. low. M	Day low. F	Day upp. M	Day upp. F	Tot.
Palermo	516.146	88	81	81	39	32	321	101	24	27	27	4	183
Catania	396.355	66	64	64	29	29	249	79	52	3	33	1	166
Trapani	200.004	31	24	27	21	18	119	17	6	12	3	0	38
Girgenti	316.284	46	45	45	27	25	188	42	10	20	21	0	93
Caltanissetta	183.974	33	31	31	31	16	129	29	13	6	24	5	77
Messina	381.021	143	110	135	21	14	423	136	13	22	11	0	182
Noto	252.994	38	38	37	21	20	154	33	23	16	20	1	93

Graph 1. *Distribution of male elementary schools in the Province of Catania, school year 1862-63*²⁶¹



²⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

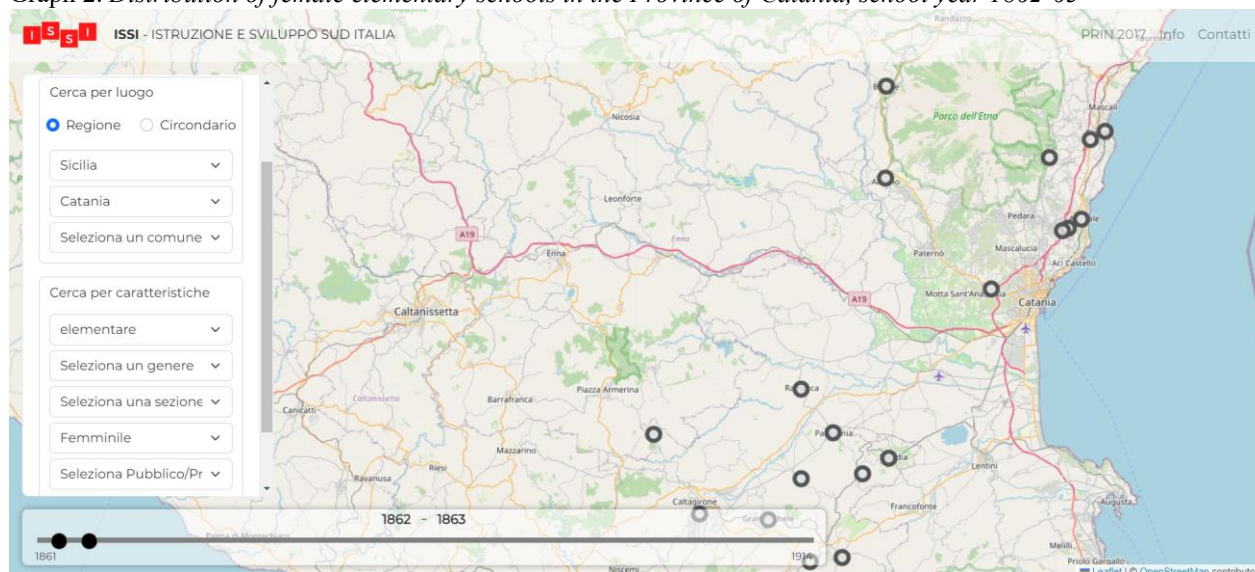
²⁵⁸ G. Giarrizzo, *Catania*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1986.

²⁵⁹ S. Lentini, *L'istruzione elementare a Catania dall'unità all'età giolittiana. Mappa ragionata*, Prefazione di Antonia Criscenti, Aracne, Rome 2024, p. 71.

²⁶⁰ Re-elaboration of the *Statistica delle scuole elementari comunali delle provincie siciliane A.S. 1861/1862*, cit.

²⁶¹ Map extracted by ISSI – ISTRUZIONE E SVILUPPO SUD ITALIA website (the schools of the municipalities now belonging to the provincial administration of Enna are excluded). <https://issi-prin2017.it/Mappa/> (accessed 30 June 2025)

Graph 2. *Distribution of female elementary schools in the Province of Catania, school year 1862-63*²⁶²



The spread of basic education was primarily hindered by the cultural, social, and political classism of local powers, who seemed to prefer the establishment of new “elite” schools over the opening of schools for the common people. This tendency in the Province of Catania was reinforced by a document drafted in 1861 by Governor Tedeschi himself, which stipulated that the former Jesuit colleges should be specifically allocated for use as gymnasiums and lyceums²⁶³. This was despite the General Lieutenancy of the King in the Sicilian Provinces having previously urged the Governor to prioritize elementary schools, with a notice from the Ministry of Public Instruction stating that “[...] no Lyceum or Gymnasium would be utilized for Communes that had not fulfilled the obligations imposed on them by law for the aforementioned schools, both of the lower and upper grades” (“[...] *non [sarebbe stato] utilizzato Liceo né Ginnasio pei Comuni che non [avessero] adempiuto gli obblighi che la legge impone[va] loro per le scuole suddette, tanto del grado inferiore che del superiore*”)²⁶⁴.

At the same time, the decisive launch of the schooling process was also hampered by the scarce availability of qualified teachers who could be assigned to the newly established elementary schools. In 1861, in a region with a population of 2.223.000 inhabitants, the number of male teachers amounted to just 657, while female teachers were a mere 81, mostly belonging to the clergy or religious orders, and often coming from the old Bourbon schools²⁶⁵. Even in 1864, the shortage of teachers remained

²⁶² *Ibidem*.

²⁶³ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 286 (277 ex), V. Tedeschi, Governatore della Provincia di Catania, *Sulle scuole ginnasiali e liceali*, 1861. This also applied to various other former monastic building complexes, including the Benedictine Monastery in the city of Catania, which became the seat of the “Nicola Spedalieri” Lyceum and the “Carlo Gemellaro” Technical Institute. See: G. Baldacci, *L'istruzione nell'Italia pre e post unitaria. Il caso Catania*, in «Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale» Anno CV, 2009, serie II, p. 307.

²⁶⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 289 (280 ex), Luogotenenza Generale del Re nelle Provincie Siciliane. Dicastero della Istruzione Pubblica, *Per l'istituzione delle scuole elementari*, 1861.

²⁶⁵ Sante Giuffrida, a renowned pedagogue who served as the general director of Catania's municipal schools from 1862 to 1876 and as a full professor of Pedagogy and Ethics in the Complementary classes from 1901 to 1907, bore witness to this for the Province of Catania. Speaking at the first teacher conference held in Catania in August 1861, he noted the following: “[...] I was almost dazzled by the sight of so many black cassocks: the old teachers were all priests, save for a very few. A priest, Roscio, a Piedmontese, also sat at the desk: a withered old man, prosperous and ruddy, who knew all of Rayner's methodology by heart, but nothing more. I won't tell you how much effort it took for me to keep up with the rigid and stark formalism of that good priest [...]. The Conferences lasted a good two months, and something useful came of them: a nuanced idea of the new methods was gained. Exams were held, and there was not a dunce who did not pass” (“[...] *fui quasi abbagliato alla vista di tante sottane nere: i vecchi maestri erano tutti preti, tranne pochissimi. Sulla cattedra sedeva pure un prete, Roscio, piemontese: un vecchietto interito, prosperoso e rubizzo, che sapeva per lo senno*”).

a pressing issue within the Sicilian and Catanian school systems. This led the Royal Inspector and Superintendent of Studies to reiterate that, to provide elementary instruction for all classes of the people, “[...] a principal condition for the moral existence of free nations” ([...] *condizione precipua per l’esistenza morale delle nazioni libere*”), merely establishing schools was not enough, but it was also essential to have “certified teachers in whom the public, the Municipalities, and the school authorities could place their trust” (“*maestri patentati ne’ quali [far riposare] la fiducia del pubblico, de’ Municipi e delle Autorità scolastiche*”)²⁶⁶. To address this shortage, emergency measures were implemented, such as the organization of teacher conferences (*conferenze magistrali*), primarily aimed at regularizing unlicensed practicing teachers, and the recruitment of female teachers from other Italian regions, particularly from the North and Center, to fill staffing gaps. This interregional mobility, however, was not without its challenges: these teachers often faced geographical marginalization, cultural isolation, and distrust from local communities; their behavioral customs and even their accents could generate suspicion and disorientation, influencing how their work was received. At the same time, they represented an element of discontinuity from established cultural and social conventions, especially in rural contexts, that were largely resistant to female schooling. Documentation preserved in the State Archive of Catania confirms the presence of several non-Sicilian women assigned to schools in the Province. Their integration was likely made possible by their willingness to serve in peripheral areas, but also by the State’s desire to accelerate cultural and linguistic unification through the hiring of women from mainland Italy (“*continentali*”), because they were considered the best incarnation of the model of a patriotic and secular female teacher²⁶⁷. Sometimes, these teachers arrived in Sicily with the promise of obtaining prestigious positions, as in the case of Margherita Balangero from Pinerolo (Piedmont), which had been promised a post in the primary schools of the municipality of Catania and the directorship of one of the two existing

a memoria tutta la metodica del Rayneri, senza più. Non istò a dirvi che fatica mi fosse il tener dietro a quel formalismo duro e stecchito di quel buon prete [...]. Le Conferenze durarono due mesi vantaggiati, e se ne trasse qualche costrutto: si ebbe un’idea sfumata dei nuovi metodi. Si fecero gli esami e non vi fu asino che non ottenesse l’idoneità”). S. Giuffrida, *Sulla educazione della donna. Conferenza letta la terza domenica di aprile 1897 nel gran ridotto Teatro Massimo*, Giannotta, Catania 1898, pp. 23–25 e *passim* (testo citato in S. Lentini, op. cit., p. 66). For more on the figure of Sante Giuffrida, see: L. Todaro, *Sante Giuffrida e il rinnovamento educativo nell’Italia unita*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2015. On the state of elementary education in Sicily during the Bourbon period, see: S. Agresta, C. Sindoni, *Scuole maestri e metodi nella Sicilia Borbonica (1817-1860)*, cit.

²⁶⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 498 (473ex), *Intervento alle Conferenze magistrali*, 1864.

²⁶⁷ Approximately seventy female teachers who obtained their qualifications outside Sicily operated in the Province of Catania between 1861 and 1914. Their records are found in the *Provveditorato agli Studi* (Superintendency of Studies) archives at the State Archive of Catania. These include: Maria Addamo (patente conseguita a Nizza Monferrato nel 1895); Maria Andreoli (Genoa 1882); Francesca Anfuso Musso (Turin 1864); Carolina Arnoldi (Mantua 1885); Teresa Aschieri (Turin 1865); Eugenia Badini (Turin 1885); Paolina Baglioni (Macerata 1862); Luigia Bardina (Genoa 1881); Claudia Barsega (Turin 1893); Orsola Benedetti (Turin 1863); Zoè Bianchi (Genoa 1880); Giuseppa Blandini (Salerno 1865); Carolina Boeris (Turin 1865); Giustina Boero (Turin 1890); Vincenzina Boero (Vercelli 1861); Emilia Bonaiuti (Florence 1864); Maria Borello (Pavia 1875); Teresa Borghetti (Turin 1872); Giuseppina Ada Borsani (Milan 1862); Elena Brigati (Treviglio 1881); Luigia Caglieri (Mondovì 1865); Filomena Camilli (Pisa 1865); Maria Campeggi (Pesaro 1868); Isabella Canzi (Bergamo 1869); Anna Caterina Castelli (Mondovì 1879); Angela Cattaneo (Milan 1865); Cristina Catone (Naples 1888); Giuseppa Cermelli (Novara 1853); Carolina Cioni (Modena 1873); Carolina Corti (Milan 1866); Cornelia Corso (Rome 1902); Beatrice Costamagna (Genoa 1888); Anna Costanzo (Nizza Monferrato 1904); Maddalena Cuneis (Genoa 1882); Rosa Daghero (Genoa 1879); Angela Maria De Ciesco (Ancona 1885); Marianna De Donato (Campobasso 1880); Luisa Duca (Genoa 1882); Artemisia Elli (Milan 1857); Concetta Epifania (Bari 1872); Lucrezia Fanelli (Bari 1876); Elisa Ferri (Bergamo 1864); Angela Fumagalli (Turin 1888); Benedetta Garelli (Turin 1869); Maria Giacotti (Turin 1872); Delfina Giavelli (Alessandria 1865); Santina Granata (Cosenza 1912); Maria Grasso (Turin 1894); Rosina Guzzardi (Pavia 1873); Giovanna Isola (Nizza Monferrato 1912); Aurelia Malinverni (Piacenza 1871); Elisa Nanni (Rome 1906); Maddalena Novelli (Parma 1877); Rosa Nascimbene (Pavia 1874); Maria Pasquali (Naples 1894); Rosa Picco (Parma 1877); Assunta Rossi (Alessandria/Casale 1865); Caterina Schiavetti (Vicenza 1883); Giulia Silenzi (Ascoli Piceno 1885); Rosalia Silva (Turin 1866); Argia Solaroli (Padua 1878); Amalia Spampinato (Vicenza 1886); Agnese Stuardi (Turin 1888); Alessandra Tachini (Mondovì 1869); Carolina Tesei (Camerino 1885); Annunziata Violini (Florence 1882). ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, class. A3 – Fascicoli personali insegnanti elementari e asili infantili del Comune di Catania e provincia, bb. 1-43.

kindergartens there. Ms. Balangero, however, found herself having to settle for teaching in the school of Agira and being appointed to the Garibaldi kindergarten with the simple title of teacher; moreover, in 1869, she received a government subsidy to supplement her meager salary, which the Ministry emphasized was being granted exceptionally, as it was the Municipality's responsibility to pay her²⁶⁸. Elisabetta Miaglia, also from Piedmont, was one of the first teachers to get her certification in Catania, attending teacher conference (*conferenze magistrali*) held in the city in 1861, and earning a lower-grade license. Teaching in Castiglione in 1867, she was housed by the Municipality in a sparsely furnished home, and, as her salary was delayed, she complained of considerable hardship due to her status as a "foreigner" (*"forestiera"*), asking for more punctual payment or, alternatively, to be "transferred to a more precise and courteous commune in its promises" (*"traslocata in un comune più esatto nelle sue promesse ed anche più cortese"*)²⁶⁹. Her living and working conditions did not improve in 1878: employed at the school in Gagliano Castelferrato, she taught in an "eminently unsuitable" (*"eminentemente disadatta"*) classroom, was housed by the Municipality in a cramped monastic cell, and had to support herself and her daughter on a meager salary of 600 lire²⁷⁰. In 1864, Ms. Giuseppina Scuto Costa, already a teacher in the Municipality of Calatabiano, also took advantage of the *conferenze magistrali* to qualify for teaching. In September, Giuseppina Costa went to Catania to attend the second cycle of conferences being held in the city, however, as the tax collector insisted on not paying her due salary, she submitted her resignation from the Mascali school in November of the same year. While it is impossible to determine how much the irregular salary influenced her decision to leave the position, it is plausible that obtaining her license encouraged the teacher to leave an economically precarious working condition, hoping to compete for a position with better remuneration guarantees²⁷¹.

On the other hand, the tendency to retain "unqualified teachers, unknown or unapproved by the Provincial School Council" (*"maestri non patentati, ignoti o non approvati dal Consiglio Scolastico Provinciale"*) often allowed for the justification of assigning salaries below the legal minimum; Inspector Vigo, in November 1865, denounced this as a frequent practice among many municipal administrations (*"Essi [Sindaci e Tesorieri Comunali] scambiano la libertà con la licenza: l'una è concessa, l'altra ai Municipii è negata"* – "They [Mayors and Municipal Treasurers] confuse liberty with license: one is granted, the other is denied to the Municipalities")²⁷². In April of that year, a case of discretion and favoritism in appointments occurred once again in the Municipality of Mascali, where the Municipal School Council had decided to appoint Ms. Rosaria Mercurio as a teacher. She, lacking a certificate of qualification, being the daughter of the municipal secretary and wife of the vice-secretary, was approved with 7 votes in favor and 5 against, omitting to proceed with the voting of other candidates who "could, by preference, merit unanimity" (*"potevano appreferenza meritare la unanimità"*). This appointment, which "was made in the shadiest way, because not according to the terms of law and justice, [...]" (*"si fece in modo il più tenebroso, perché non ai termini di legge e di giustizia, [...]"*), was annulled following appeals from Mr. Pietro Colantoni from Mascali²⁷³ and

²⁶⁸ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 2, *Ill.mo Signor Provveditore*, Agira, July 9, 1869.

²⁶⁹ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 152, *Ill.mo Signore*, Castiglione, July 14, 1867.

²⁷⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 9, Regno d'Italia, Provincia di Catania, Regio Ispettorato Scolastico del Circondario di Nicosia, *Gagliano Castelferrato – Istanza Miaglia per sussidio*, Nicosia, March 18, 1878.

²⁷¹ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 60, Prefettura della Provincia di Catania, *Per la Maestra di Calatabiano*, Catania, December 2, 1864. We will find the name Costa Giuseppa among the teachers of Agira in the 1880s (ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, bb. 12, 32); however, we do not have sufficient evidence to confirm that it was the same person.

²⁷² ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 96, Ispezione degli Studii del Circondario di Acireale, *Illegalità dei pagamenti dei soldi a' maestri elementari*, October 23, 1865.

²⁷³ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 96, *Al Signor Sottoprefetto del Circondario di Acireale*, Acireale, April 10, 1865.

Mr. Salvatore Nicolosi from Acireale²⁷⁴. An aggravating factor was also the neglect to raise the teacher's salary from 127.50 lire to 156 lire, as requested by the Provincial School Council, which, according to the Sub-Prefect, amounted "to a tacit refusal by the Municipality to submit to the observance of the provisions of Article 341 of the law on public education" ("*ad un tacito rifiuto di sottomettersi il Comune all'osservanza delle disposizioni dell'art. 341 della legge sulla pubblica istruzione*")²⁷⁵.

Although lack of funds was often the reason given by the Municipalities, in some cases, the municipal administrations were "stubbornly and unreasonably unwilling to fulfill their duty regarding public education" ("*ostinatamente e irragionevolmente negare all'adempimento del proprio dovere quanto a pubblica istruzione*"), and not solely due to their disastrous treasuries²⁷⁶. The new secular, State-run school system had to contend not only with the financial difficulties of the Municipalities in opening schools and paying teachers, but also with the profound resistance of a territory still strongly tied to pre-existing educational traditions. Female education, in particular, was dominated by institutions managed by private individuals, affiliated with public benefit bodies or religious congregations. Contravening legal obligations, municipal administrations neglected the establishment of girls' schools²⁷⁷, often delegating the education of young girls to these institutions, which enjoyed a long history and solid reputation, but whose activity was limited to learning rules of good conduct, practicing domestic work, and minimal instruction. The monopoly they exercised, combined with widespread social reticence towards education that went beyond mere rudiments, represented a further obstacle to the initiation of female literacy. In 1865, the Royal Inspector and Superintendent of Studies lamented the deplorable condition of primary education in the Province, confessing that the Municipalities had provided for it "too sparingly" ("*troppo scarsamente*") or "ostensibly, with only schools for female handicrafts" ("*in apparenza, con sole scuole di scuole di lavori femminili*")²⁷⁸. Presuming its social uselessness, it was natural to entrust the education and instruction of young girls to illiterate or semi-illiterate women, deeming it sufficient for a female teacher to serve as a 'model' of female education, and thus, that she merely needed to be of "very regular moral conduct, endowed with [...] intelligence and skilled in women's work" ("*regolarissima condotta morale, dotata di [...] intelligenza ed abile in lavori donneschi*")²⁷⁹.

A problem heavily lamented by district inspectors was the difficulty of inspecting institutions managed by religious congregations. Although the Government had deemed it convenient for schools operating within some of these institutions to remain active, provided they were reorganized according to current law and adapted to new methods, these institutions were not always willing to submit to governmental school authorities; and, among the most reluctant, particularly those that had

²⁷⁴ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 96, *Signor Sotto Prefetto del Mandamento di Acireale*, Acireale, April 13, 1865.

²⁷⁵ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 96, *Il Sottoprefetto*, [decreto di sospensione di esecuzione della deliberazione del 4 aprile del Consiglio Comunale di Mascali, con la quale si eleggeva a maestra Rosaria Mercurio], Acireale, April 19, 1865.

²⁷⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 289 (280 ex), Ispezione di Studi di prima classe per la Provincia di Catania, *Sulla renitenza delle Comuni ad ordinare le Scuole elementari*, Catania, February 8, 1862. On the critical issues encountered in some municipal areas of the Province of Catania regarding the opening of elementary schools in rural and urban contexts, please refer to: G. Denaro, *La sfida dell'alfabetizzazione di massa nella Sicilia postunitaria. Testimonianze dall'Archivio di Stato di Catania (1861-66)*, in «Rivista di Storia dell'Educazione», 7(1), 2020, pp. 59-70.

²⁷⁷ "Ella non ignorerà certamente come per gli art. 05 e 07 del decreto prodittoriale del 17 ottobre 1860 e per lo art. 319 della legge Casati 13 novembre 1859 i Comuni hanno l'obbligo di istituire fra le altre scuole anche quella elementare femminile [...]" – "You will certainly not ignore how, by articles 5 and 7 of the pro-dictatorial decree of October 17, 1860, and by article 319 of the Casati Law of November 13, 1859, the Municipalities are obliged to establish, among other schools, also the elementary female one [...]". ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 289 (280 ex), Prefettura della Provincia di Catania, *Scuole elementari femminili Catenanuova, Centuripe, Cerami, Gagliano*, 1865.

²⁷⁸ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 289 (280 ex), Ufficio del R. Ispettore e Provveditore agli Studi della Provincia di Catania, *Scuole Femminili*, 1865.

²⁷⁹ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 298 (288 ex), *Istituto di ragazze gestito dalla sign.ra Priviale*, Giarre 1861.

traditionally overseen female education, were the *Collegi di Maria*²⁸⁰. An example of this was the Collegio of Aci S. Antonio, which in 1864 denied entry to the Inspector of the Acireale District, Lionardo Vigo, who was visiting the Commune's schools. Despite the Ministry of Grace, Justice, and Cults assuring the cooperation of Father Francesco Di Grazia, who sponsored the institution, Inspector Vigo reminded the Sub-Prefect of the Province that the prelate, with his "famous *non possumus*" ("famoso *non possumus*"), had prevented "that Establishment from effectively contributing to public welfare" ("[*si avviasse*] *utilmente al pubblico benessere quello Stabilimento*"). Vigo also noted that not permitting inspection by the governmental school authority contravened what was prescribed by ministerial circular no. 6046 of December 28, 1863, so he urged swift intervention, compelling the Municipality to appoint certified teachers, assign them salaries, and equip the Establishment with the necessary school furnishings²⁸¹.

However, even when qualified teachers were introduced, their presence alone was not enough to guarantee good educational outcomes. In the 1869-70 scholastic year, Inspector Antonio Bruni, visiting schools in the Districts of Catania, Caltagirone, and Acireale, noted that these institutions rarely aligned with governmental educational objectives: even when elementary classes were entrusted to certified teachers, instruction was mostly limited to female handicrafts, and they often separated "internal" and "external" pupils. Examples include the schools located in the *Collegio di Maria* of Trecastagni and the *Collegio di Maria* of Misterbianco: in Trecastagni, despite having a qualified teacher, she was not fully perform her duties because she was "too inclined to humor the wishes of the nuns" ("*troppo inclinevole a secondare i desideri delle monache*") and forced to provide "double instruction" ("*doppio insegnamento*") due to the separation of pupils, at the expense of their progress in studies²⁸²; in Misterbianco, the teacher, also qualified, focused exclusively on female handicrafts, leaving the girls "as illiterate as when they entered" ("*analfabete come vi entrarono*")²⁸³. Conversely, in a significant district capital city like Caltagirone, which that year had an "overwhelming and unexpected number of pupils" ("*un numero d'alunne strabocchevole e fuori d'ogni aspettativa*"), the *Collegio di Maria* continued to operate with uncertified teachers: the Inspector urged that provisions be made for the improvement of the active schools in that establishment "before the rapidly succeeding young generations lost precious time and before enthusiasm cooled" ("*pria che alle giovani generazioni che celermente si avvicenda[vano] si facesse perdere tempo prezioso e pria che l'entusiasmo si raffreddasse*")²⁸⁴.

In the Municipality of Acireale too, female education was almost exclusively the prerogative of Colleges, Recluses (*Reclusori*), and Conservatories (*Conservatori*), as well as in the hands of

²⁸⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 293, R. Ispettorato e Provveditorato degli Studi della Provincia di Catania, *Relazione sullo stato della istruzione della Provincia nel primo trimestre del corrente anno scolastico*, Catania, February 13, 1864.

²⁸¹ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 60, Ispezione degli Studii del Circondario di Acireale, *Collegio di Maria in Aci S. Antonio*, Acireale, May 28, 1864.

²⁸² As Inspector Vigo had experienced previously, Bruni also found it difficult to assess the educational progress of the students when visiting the Collegio di Trecastagni, due to the fact that those pupils were kept "cloistered" ("*chiuse a modo claustrale*") and this prevented him from "hearing a sample of their instruction" ("*sentir un saggio della loro istruzione*"). ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, R. Ispettorato Scolastico dei circondari di Catania, Caltagirone e Acireale, *Relazione sullo stato dell'istruzione in Trecastagni*, Catania, June 30, 1870.

²⁸³ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, R. Ispettorato Scolastico dei Circondari di Catania, Caltagirone e Acireale, *Relazione sullo stato dell'istruzione in Misterbianco e in Motta*, Catania, June 30, 1870.

²⁸⁴ Inspector Bruni reminded teachers Di Gregorio and Fernandez of their obligation to obtain certification, under penalty of removal from their positions. He also ordered teacher Anfuso to "stop speaking in dialect" ("*dismettere il dialetto*"). Finally, he deemed it absolutely essential to remedy the "serious inconvenience" ("*grave sconcio*") of two teachers teaching "130 pupils in a single small room [...] creating a babelic confusion" ("*a 130 alunni in una sola stanzuccia [...] creandovi una confusione babelica*"). ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, R. Ispezione Scolastica dei Circondari di Catania, Caltagirone e Acireale, *Relazione sulle scuole elementari del mandamento e Comune di Caltagirone*, Caltagirone, June 2, 1870.

eminently unsuitable teaching staff²⁸⁵. The influence exerted by the local clerical apparatus was considerable even on the Municipality's decisions regarding the opening and management of communal public schools²⁸⁶. In 1866, the urban girls' schools were "ordered against the law" (*"ordinate contro legge"*), both due to the insalubrity of the premises and the number and quality of the teachers: there should have been four female teachers, but there was only one, and she, being illiterate, could teach nothing beyond domestic work²⁸⁷. An equally disheartening picture, in 1872, was found in the rural areas of Acireale: the schools in the hamlet of Linera, run by uncertified teachers, had only one room "where the male teacher held the day school in the morning hours, and the female teacher taught domestic work in an adjoining small room. The female teacher held the girls' school there in the afternoon hours, and the male teacher then held the evening school" (*"dove il Maestro nelle ore a.m. faceva la scuola diurna, mentre la Maestra in una cameretta attigua insegnava i lavori donneschi. La Maestra nelle ore del pomeriggio vi faceva la Scuola Femminile e il Maestro poi alla sera la serale"*); meanwhile, schools for girls had not yet been established in the hamlets of Mangano and Santa Tecla²⁸⁸.

The situation emerging from inspection visits in other districts and municipalities of the Province did not differ much. The public's scant attention to popular education, especially female education, and the difficulty of recruiting qualified teaching staff willing to teach in rural areas, meant that the education of young girls was still frequently entrusted to poorly literate and unmethodical teachers. In the 1868-69 school year, "the schoolmistress elected [by the Municipality of Raddusa] had neither suitability nor certification at all", so for that "unfortunate youth [it seemed to be] destined to remain always in ignorance" (*"la maestrina voluta [dal Comune di Raddusa] non aveva affatto idoneità né patente"*, sicché per quella *"disgraziata gioventù [pareva essere] destino restare sempre*

²⁸⁵ The *Collegio di Maria* was "entrusted to sisters of charity without any qualification" (*"affidato a sorelle di carità senza titolo alcuno"*), and "very little and mechanically" (*"pochissimo e meccanicamente"*) was taught. The Inspector believed that, for the many poor girls interned there, "it would certainly be better if part of the money spent on providing them with special religious functions [...], were used to provide them with what was needed for the School" (*"sarebbe [stato] certo meglio che parte del denaro che si spende[va] nel provvederle di apposite funzioni religiose [...], venisse utilizzato in provvederle dell'occorrente per la Scuola"*). In the *Collegio Santo Nocito*, primarily dedicated to orphans, a certified female teacher and a nun without qualifications taught, who "knew very little and, due to the unhappiness of the teaching method, assuming they had a method, knew very little how to obtain results" (*"ben poco [sapevano] e, per l'infelicità del metodo d'insegnamento, se metodo [avevano], ben poco [sapevano] ottenere"*). In the *Conservatorio dello Spirito Santo*, the communal teacher, Ms. Granata, gave two hours of lessons a day "in a shabby room [...] cluttered with beds and looms" (*"in una cameraccia [...] ingombra di letti e di telai"*): the Inspector hoped that "a suitable Teacher [would be introduced there] who would give lessons every day marked on the School Calendar" (*"una apposita Maestra che desse lezione tutt'i giorni segnati dal Calendario Scolastico"*). In the *Conservatorio delle Vergini*, the teaching progress seemed to be slightly better, "due to the greater cooperation of the Nuns and the Honorable [Provincial] Deputation" (*"per la maggior cooperazione delle Monache e dell'Onor.e Deputazione [Provinciale]"*). ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 236, R. Ispettorato Scolastico di Catania, Caltagirone ed Acireale, *Condizioni dell'Istruzione Elementare e proposte di provvedimenti in Acireale*, Catania, September 9, 1872.

²⁸⁶ In 1866, the School Commission of Acireale found itself "in open contradiction with the Inspector, even preventing teachers from corresponding with the governmental school authority" (*"in aperta contraddizione con l'Ispettore, sino ad impedire che i maestri corrispondessero con l'autorità scolastica governativa"*). The cause of the "deplorable" (*"deploratissimo"*) state of education in the Municipality was attributed to the Oratorian Fathers, whom seemed to influence the decisions of the School Commission through two devoted members: Messrs. Leonardo Leonardi and Carlo Carpinati. ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 300, R. Ispettorato e Provveditorato degli Studi della Provincia di Catania, *Provvedimenti urgentissimi per il Municipio di Acireale*, [...] 1866.

²⁸⁷ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 116, Prefettura della Provincia di Catania, *Istruzione pubblica Acireale*, Catania, February 27, 1866.

²⁸⁸ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 236, R. Ispettorato Scolastico di Catania, Caltagirone ed Acireale, *Condizioni dell'Istruzione Elementare e proposte di provvedimenti in Acireale*, Catania, September 9, 1872.

nell'ignoranza)”²⁸⁹. In 1869-70, the school in Palagonia had been open for only a few days “with an assistant who only knew female handicrafts” (“*con una assistente la quale sa[peva] soltanto di lavori femminili*”) ²⁹⁰; that in Ramacca was run by a provisional teacher who “was as skilled in handicrafts as she was unexperienced in teaching” (“*quanto [era] abile nei lavori di mano [era] altrettanto poco esperta nello insegnamento*”) ²⁹¹; the teacher in Scordia “knew only about handicrafts, but she had no instruction” (“*non [sapeva] che di lavori, ma non [aveva] nessuna istruzione*”) ²⁹², like the one in Mirabella, who “promised to get her certification” (“*prometteva di patentarsi*”) ²⁹³. In 1872, in Fiumefreddo, the primary school for girls was entrusted to a teacher who “had no qualification for teaching and was a true incompetent in every respect” (“*non [aveva] titolo alcuno all'insegnamento ed [era] una vera nullità in tutto e per tutto*”) ²⁹⁴; in the same year, the girls’ school in the hamlet of Macchia (Municipality of Giarre) was entrusted to an unqualified teacher, as was the one in the hamlet of Dagala, whose teacher had only attended the first three primary grades²⁹⁵.

Even though the lack of certified female teachers was a genuine emergency in the first post-unification decades, it could also plausibly serve as a convenient “justification” for Municipalities less inclined to open and maintain communal schools. In Assoro, in 1871, only a first-grade primary class for girls was recorded, but it was not operating “because no teacher had been found” (“*non essendovi trovata una maestra*”) ²⁹⁶; in the same year, in Calatabiano, the Mayor reported that he had made no provisions for female education “due to a lack of certified personnel” (“*per difetto di personale patentato*”) ²⁹⁷; in 1873, in Aci Bonaccorsi, it was reported that “no teacher existed” (“*maestra [...] non ne esisteva*”) ²⁹⁸. Entrusting female education to private individuals or civic/religious organizations was a great advantage for municipal finances, allowing them to relieve the burden of expenses for maintaining schools and teachers. The aforementioned school in the hamlet of Macchia in Giarre, for example, had been activated thanks to the “pious bequests” (“*lasciti pii*”) of an archpriest, and these funds were used to pay the teacher²⁹⁹; even in Aci S. Antonio, where in December 1873 the need to open new girls’ schools could no longer be postponed “since that of the Collegio di Maria could not suffice, nor was it in a condition to be valid as an exemption from the communal obligation to provide for it” (“*giacché quella del Collegio di Maria non [poteva] bastare,*

²⁸⁹ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 18, b. 118, Provincia di Catania, Circondario di Caltagirone, *Invio di verbale in doppia copia di questo Consiglio Comunale inerentemente a nomina di Maestrina in persona di Maria Arena*, Raddusa, August 25, 1869.

²⁹⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, R. Ispezione Scolastica dei Circondari di Catania, Caltagirone e Acireale, *Relazione sullo stato delle scuole nel mandamento di Palagonia*, Palagonia, May 28, 1870.

²⁹¹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, R. Ispezione Scolastica dei Circondari di Catania, Caltagirone e Acireale, *Relazione sulle scuole elementari del Mandamento di Ramacca*, Ramacca, May 27, 1870.

²⁹² ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, R. Ispettorato Scolastico dei Circondari di Catania, Caltagirone e Acireale, *Relazione sullo stato dell'istruzione nel mandamento di Scordia*, Scordia, June 9, 1870.

²⁹³ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, R. Ispezione Scolastica dei Circondari di Catania, Caltagirone e Acireale, *Relazione sullo stato dell'istruzione nel mandamento di Mirabella*, Mirabella, May 29, 1870.

²⁹⁴ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 219, R. ispettorato Scolastico di Catania, Caltagirone ed Acireale, *Condizione dell'Istruzione e proposte di provvedimenti in Fiumefreddo*, Catania, June 24, 1872.

²⁹⁵ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 236, R. Ispettorato Scolastico di Catania, *Condizioni dell'istruzione e proposta di provvedimenti in Giarre*, Catania, March 30, 1872.

²⁹⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 4, Ufficio del provveditorato di Catania, *Avviso di emissione di Buoni su Mandati a disposizione per essere pagati fuori del capoluogo di provincia*, April 20, 1872.

²⁹⁷ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 236, Municipio di Calatabiano, *Istruzione Pubblica*, Calatabiano, October 11, 1871.

²⁹⁸ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 258, Regno d'Italia, Provincia di Catania, Circondario di Acireale, Comune di Aci Bonaccorsi, *Maestri Elementari*, Aci Bonaccorsi, May 31, 1873.

²⁹⁹ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 236, R. Ispettorato Scolastico di Catania, *Condizioni dell'istruzione e proposta di provvedimenti in Giarre*, cit.

né [era] in condizioni di poter valere ad esonero dell'obbligo comunale di provvedervi")³⁰⁰, it was agreed to appoint a lower-grade teacher, whose salary was borne by the Collegio di Maria³⁰¹.

A further disincentive to opening schools was likely the fear of municipal administrations that they'd have to operate classes with few or no attendees. Given the poor compliance with compulsory education, it was not uncommon for teachers to find themselves giving lessons to only about ten pupils or even fewer. Regarding the necessity of establishing third and fourth grades in Giarre's urban schools, the Inspector, perhaps agitated by a hint of irritation at the resistance he knew the Municipality would pose, expressed himself to the Sub-Prefect as follows: "I understand that for the first year there will be the usual excuse, that no pupils can be found: but the school must be open, and the pupils will be found" ("*capisco che per il primo anno vi sarà la solita scusa, che non si trovano alunne: ma si aprà la Scuola e le alunne si troveranno*")³⁰².

The establishment of the *Scuola Normale Femminile* of Catania largely boosted the albeit slow spread of female education in the Province. It helped increase the number and attendance of girls in primary schools, succeeding (except in the Acireale district) in combating the private and especially religious monopoly on women's education, and managing to transform "some *Collegi di Maria* into real schools with certified teachers, adding lay teachers of proven experience to the *collegine*" ("*in scuole vere con maestre patentate alcuni collegi di Maria, aggiungendo alle collegine maestre laiche di provata esperienza*")³⁰³.

3.2. The Female Normal School of Catania as a driver of social mobility for aspiring teachers.

The Institute's student target

In an effort to expand primary education in the sicilian provinces, in accordance with the Casati Law, the aforementioned pro-dictatorial decree of October 17, 1860, no. 263, also aimed to train the necessary teaching staff. Article 30 of the decree mandated the establishment of normal schools in the cities of Palermo, Catania, and Messina. The State would cover the cost of scientific materials and professors' salaries, while the Provinces would be responsible for the remaining expenses.

Since these provisions had not been acted upon, the General Secretary for Public Education, in a letter dated August 10, 1861, asked the Governor of the Province of Catania if the provincial capital city was ready to provide suitable premises for the *Scuola Normale* and cover the costs for furnishings, otherwise, the Government would prefer to establish "that institution of such great utility" ("*quello istituto di tanta utilità*") in another city³⁰⁴. Mayor Giacomo Gravina responded affirmatively, stating that the Municipality was "voluntarily ready to provide the building and furnishings for the establishment of the aforementioned school, as well as to contribute with all means to the establishment of any institution concerning public education" ("*volontariamente pronto a fornire la*

³⁰⁰ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 236, R. Ispettorato Scolastico di Catania, Caltagirone ed Acireale, *Condizioni dell'istruzione e proposte di provvedimenti in Aci Sant'Antonio*, Catania, September 16, 1872.

³⁰¹ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 258, Provincia di Catania, Circondario di Acireale, Comune di Aci Sant'Antonio, *Delibera del Consiglio Comunale*, September 14, 1873.

³⁰² ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 236, R. Ispettorato Scolastico di Catania, *Condizioni dell'istruzione e proposta di provvedimenti in Giarre*, cit.

³⁰³ *Documenti sulla istruzione elementare nel Regno d'Italia. Parte seconda*, Tipografia Eredi Botta, Florence 1870, p. XVI.

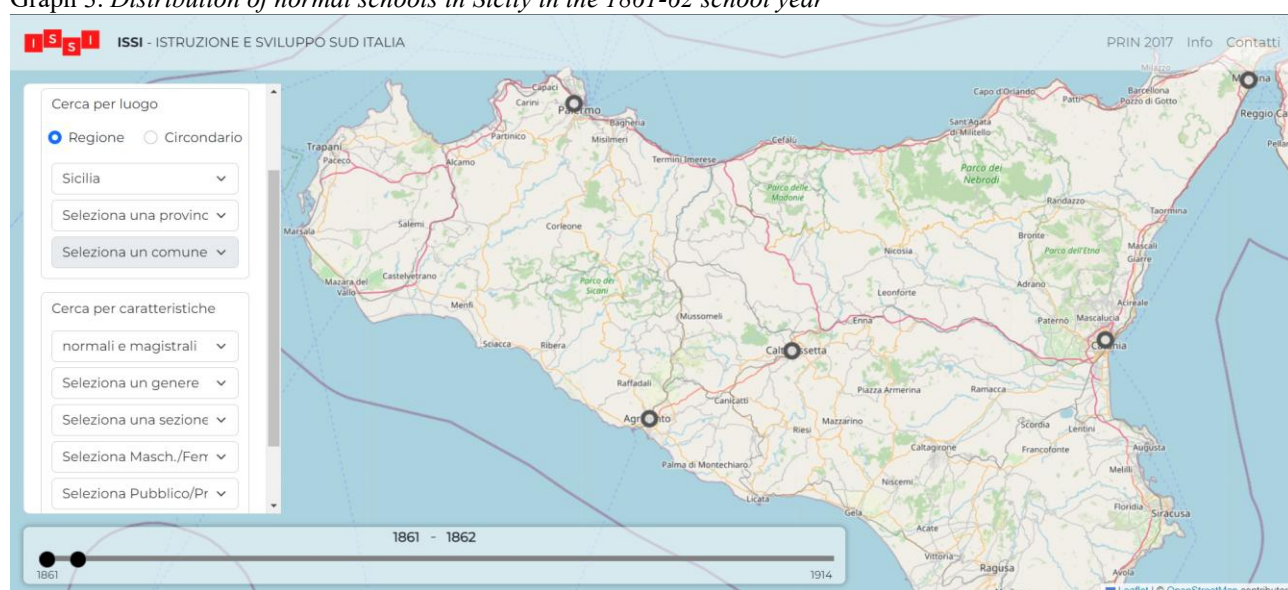
³⁰⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 308, Luogotenenza generale del Re nelle Provincie siciliane, dicastero dell'Istruzione Pubblica, *Scuola Normale*, Palermo, August 10, 1861.

*casa e gli arredi per la istituzione della cennata scuola, come altresì a concorrere con tutti i mezzi allo stabilimento di qualunque Istituzione che riguarda[sse] la pubblica istruzione”*³⁰⁵.

The Normal School’s premises needed to include three distinct classrooms for lessons (one for each course), a room for the administration, and a custodian’s office. The Municipality was also responsible for providing: “1. A suitable number of school desks. 2. Three large blackboards with stands. 3. Three tables with lockable drawers. 4. Three high chairs. 5. Three crucifixes and portraits of the King. 6. One clock. 7. One bell for entry and exit signals. 8. One large atlas complete with geographical maps. 9. One globe and one armillary sphere. 10. One wall chart of metric measurements with conversion tables. 11. Three quills and three desk bells. 12. Large rulers and set squares for the blackboard. 13. A collection of geometric solids. 14. Furnishings for the administration room. 15. Furnishings for the custodian’s office”³⁰⁶.

The decree by Minister De Sanctis on October 2, 1861, stipulated that the normal schools in Palermo and Messina were to be used for the training of male aspiring teachers, while those in Catania and Girgenti (the latter being a newly established institution) were for the training of female aspiring teachers³⁰⁷. It was also established that male and female students from the provinces of Palermo, Trapani, Girgenti and Caltanissetta would attend the normal schools in Palermo and Girgenti, respectively. Conversely, male and female students from the provinces of Catania, Messina, and Noto (today the province of Syracuse) would attend the normal schools in Messina and Catania, respectively.

Graph 3. *Distribution of normal schools in Sicily in the 1861-62 school year*³⁰⁸



³⁰⁵ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 308, Municipio della città di Catania, *Istruzione Pubblica*, Catania, August 19, 1861.

³⁰⁶ “1. *Un conveniente numero di banchi per le scuole.* 2. *Tre lavagne grandi col piede.* 3. *Tre tavole col cassetto a chiave.* 4. *Tre seggioloni.* 5. *Tre Crocifissi e ritratti del Re.* 6. *Un orologio.* 7. *Una campana per segni di entrata ed uscita.* 8. *Un Atlante grande completo di carte geografiche.* 9. *Un Globo e una sfera armillare.* 10. *Un quadro murale delle misure metriche colle tavole di ragguglio.* 11. *Tre calami e tre campanelli da tavolo.* 12. *Righe grandi e squadre per la lavagna.* 13. *Una raccolta di solidi geometrici.* 14. *Gli arredi per la sala di Direzione.* 15. *Gli arredi pel gabinetto del Bidello*”. ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 308, Luogotenenza generale del Re nelle Province siciliane, dicastero dell’Istruzione Pubblica, *Al Signor Governatore della provincia di Catania*, Palermo, September 5, 1861.

³⁰⁷ R.D. October 2, 1861, *Disposizioni relative alle scuole normali di Sicilia*, in *Raccolta Delle Leggi, Decreti, Rescritti, Regolamenti Circolari Ed Istruzioni*, tip. Fodratti, Florence 1870, p. 798.

³⁰⁸ Map extracted by ISSI – ISTRUZIONE E SVILUPPO SUD ITALIA website <https://issi-prin2017.it/Mappa/> (accessed 30 June 2025)

A manifesto dated December 6, 1861, signed by Father Giorgio Lamborizio, the first director of the Institute, and Inspector Salvatore Majorana, announced to citizens that “cultured and civilized Catania, too, [had seen] a noble educational institution rise within its walls, by means of which the common women [would acquire] ideas and habits of civilization and sound morals for their own and others’ improvement” (“*anco la colta e civile Catania [aveva visto] sorgere fra le sue mura un nobile istituto di educazione, per mezzo del quale la donna del popolo [avrebbe acquistato] idee ed abiti di civiltà e di sana morale pel proprio e per l’altrui perfezionamento*”). Considering the state of popular education in the affected provinces, the *Consiglio direttivo* had simplified the curriculum for the entrance exams: the written test consisted of “an easy Italian composition by imitation” (“*una facile composizione italiana per imitazione*”); the oral exam, however, focused on the Catechism, facts from Sacred History, and the reading and explanation “of a book suitable for common intelligence” (“*d’un libro adatto alla comune intelligenza*”)³⁰⁹.

In the same announcement, it was declared that the Government had established a considerable number of free places to be awarded to the “most deserving aspirants [belonging to] those classes of society [...] placed in less fortunate economic conditions” (“*aspiranti più meritevoli [appartenenti] a quelle classi della società [...] collocate in meno felici condizioni economiche*”), who otherwise would not have been able to “take advantage of the great benefit [except] at the cost of very serious sacrifices” (“*avvantaggiarsi del grande beneficio [se non] a costo di gravissimi sacrificii*”)³¹⁰. According to the ministerial decree of December 31, 1861³¹¹, out of 88 government subsidies, 21 were allocated to female aspiring teachers from the provinces of Catania, Messina, and Noto to attend the Normal School of Catania. The general secretary, expressing satisfaction with “the high interest” (“*dell’alto interesse*”) shown by the Government in spreading education among the “most numerous classes” (“*classi più numerose*”), invited “all those who cared about the progress of [those] provinces” (“*tutti coloro cui [stesse] a cuore il progresso di [quelle] provincie*”) to contribute to making “those new Institutions profitable” (“*proficui quei nuovi Istituti*”). He also urged the Prefect to “work with the Provincial and Municipal Councils, so that their zeal might aid governmental action” (“*adoperarsi presso i Consigli Provinciali e Comunali, perché il loro zelo venisse in aiuto dell’azione governativa*”) and add more subsidies to those established by the Minister³¹².

Opened on February 7, 1862, the Normal School began its activities with 19 students, in a private house belonging to the Marquis of S. Giuliano, at via del Corso 293 (today via Vittorio Emanuele)³¹³. However, at the time of its activation, a boarding school had not yet been annexed: this was deemed necessary to accommodate those girls who would have to leave their parental home to undertake their studies, as demonstrated by the request for information on it by the Inspector of Studies of the Province of Messina, Tommaso Marino³¹⁴. The female boarding school was established by a resolution on December 6 of the same year, at the expense of the Province of Catania. Its purpose

³⁰⁹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 19, *Concittadini!*, Catania, December 6, 1861.

³¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹¹ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 293, *Specchio dei sussidi governativi per allievi ed allieve delle scuole normali di Sicilia*, December 31, 1861.

³¹² ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 308, *Luogotenenza generale del Re nelle provincie siciliane*. Dicastero dell’Istruzione Pubblica, Palermo, November 9, 1861.

³¹³ F. Impallomeni, op. cit., p. 18. The teaching staff, appointed by R.D. October 10, 1861, was thus composed: Father Giorgio Lamborizio, Director and professor of Pedagogy and Morals; Father Giuseppe Merlo, 3rd class professor; Canon Francesco Castro, professor of Religion; Luigi Gazzone, professor of History and Geography; Giovanni Percolla, professor of Calligraphy; Marietta Guerrini, assistant teacher. *Annuario del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione per l’anno scolastico 1861-62*, Tip. Seb. Franco e Figli, Turin, p. 535.

³¹⁴ The letter from Inspector Tommaso Marino of the province of Messina, dated January 20, 1862, asked if such an institution “which should gather the aspiring teachers to live together under the direction of distinguished Directresses” (“*che raccogliere deve le alunne maestre per convivere insieme sotto la direzione di distinte Direttrici*”) was already open and functioning in Catania, “so that when a student arrives there, she can find accommodation” (“*in modo che giungendo un’allieva costì possa trovarvi alloggio*”). ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *Ispezione degli Studi della provincia di Messina, Pel Convitto delle alunne di cotesta Scuola Normale Femminile*, Messina, January 20, 1862.

was to accommodate, upon payment of a monthly fee of 30 or 25 lire, “not only the students who wished to follow the normal course [...], but also [those] who, without such a purpose, wished to be educated and instructed” (“*non solo le allieve che [volessero] seguire il corso normale [...], ma anche [coloro] che senza cotale scopo [volessero] educarsi ed istruirsi*”). The boarding school’s regulations, approved by the Provincial Council in an extraordinary session on April 22, 1863³¹⁵, stipulated that girls could be admitted from as young as 7 years old (access to the normal school, it should be remembered, required reaching the age of 15), provided they could read and write (art. 2) and were equipped with a uniform set of linen and clothing (art. 9)³¹⁶. The education provided to the boarders was aimed at pursuing “the perfection of the mind and heart” (“*il perfezionamento della mente e del cuore*”) as well as “the knowledge and practice of domestic and social life [informed by] principles of economy and civilization” (“*la conoscenza e la pratica della vita domestica e sociale [informate] alle massime di economia e di civiltà*”) (art. 3). According to the provisions of Minister De Sanctis’s decree of November 9, 1861, the moral and disciplinary direction of the boarding school belonged to the Normal School’s Executive Board (art. 12), while the immediate supervision of the boarders was entrusted to a directress, who received instructions from the School Director regarding the intellectual, moral and civic guidance to be given to them (art. 13).

Even though the boarding school aimed to welcome a broader group than just aspiring teachers, there was no doubt the most pressing need was to activate it as quickly as possible for young women intending to pursue teaching studies. In December 1864, Livia Magheri was appointed as the directress, and Augusta Solaini as the sub-directress³¹⁷. In August of that same year, a document from Inspector Giuseppe Melodia of the Noto province to the Prefect of Catania province would attest to its great utility for “out-of-town” students. Melodia reported that he had used “every means to encourage fathers to send their daughters to that Normal School” (“*ogni mezzo, per invogliare i padri di famiglia a mandare le figlie a codesta Scuola Normale*”) but he had been “frustrated in all his intentions” (“*frustrato in ogni sua intenzione*”) until then. At the same time, the Inspector expressed conviction that, thanks to the newly established boarding school, “the most powerful obstacle, namely that parents had no one to entrust their girl-students to, could be considered removed” (“*poteva dirsi rimosso il più potente ostacolo, di non avere cioè i parenti persone a chi affidare le ragazze-allieve*”)³¹⁸.

In the 1863-64 scholastic year, when Professor Lamborizio was succeeded by Domenico De Rossi as director, there were 31 students enrolled at the Catania’s Normal School: 12 in the first year, 14 in the second, and 5 in the third. This number would jump to 106 the very next year, following the opening of the Normal School’s “preparatory course” (“*corso preparatorio*”), which alone had 85 enrollees³¹⁹. This data suggests that the initial low enrollment was not due to a lack of interest in the

³¹⁵ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *Atti del Consiglio provinciale di Catania, Sessione Straordinaria di aprile 1863*, pp. 22-25.

³¹⁶ The items that students had to be equipped with to reside at the boarding school were as follows: 6 sheets; 8 smocks; 10 pairs of socks; 12 handkerchiefs; 6 skirts; 8 pairs of underwear; 4 napkins; 4 towels; 2 bed covers; 1 wool blanket; 4 pillowcases; 4 nightcaps; 2 uniform wool dresses, one dark with a matching cape for winter, and one grey with a matching cape for summer; 10 dresses for winter and no more; they could be of any style as long as they were decent and not silk; 1 winter hat without flowers; 1 straw hat for summer without flowers; 1 simple black veil; 1 slippers; 1 silk umbrella; 1 white metal cutlery set with engraved name; 1 personal hygiene box with all necessary items and brush for clothes and shoes; 2 combs, one wide and one narrow with respective brush; 1 sewing box with key and necessary items for female handicrafts, such as needle case, needles, scissors, thimble, net, cotton of various colours. S. Lentini, *Tra i banchi della Real Scuola Normale di Catania Appunti per una storia delle allieve-maestre del “Turrisi Colonna” (1861-1923)*, in «Gli Argonauti. Rivista di Studi storico-educativi e Pedagogici», III (1-2), 2023, p. 35.

³¹⁷ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *Deputazione Provinciale di Catania, Seduta del 30 Dicembre 1864*.

³¹⁸ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 293, R. Ispezione su gli studi nella Provincia di Noto, *Si chiedono notizie sul Convitto Normale*, Noto, August 25, 1864.

³¹⁹ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 18, b. 118, *Riassunto comparativo della statistica elementare e normale pubblica della Provincia di Catania per gli anni scolastici 1863-64 - 1864-65*, Catania, October 5, 1865.

new educational institution, but rather to the limited number of aspiring students who met the knowledge requirements for direct entry into the first year of the normal school.

Meanwhile, to ensure a more appropriate distribution of government subsidies to deserving, impoverished students, Minister Bianchi, in accordance with the General Accounting Regulation of December 13, 1863, exercised his authority to open lines of credit for delegated officials, recognizing that those officials, “due to their proximity and specific knowledge of the various local institutions maintained or subsidized by the State, could be better able to provide for their needs” (“*per la vicinanza e la particolare conoscenza dei varii istituti locali mantenuti o sussidiati dallo Stato [potessero] esser meglio in grado di provvedere ai loro bisogni*”)³²⁰. In the 1864-65 scholastic year, 13 students at the Catania’s Normal School received government subsidies: 8 from the province of Catania, 4 from the province of Noto, and 1 from the province of Messina. The number of subsidized places at the Institute would rise to 20 the following year, distributed among 8 students from the province of Catania, 5 from the province of Syracuse, and 7 from the province of Messina³²¹.

These financial benefits transformed the Normal School into an extraordinary opportunity for professionalization and social mobility for many sicilian women. As a result, the Institute was attended not only by the daughters of the nobility and upper bourgeoisie³²² but also by girls from more humble social backgrounds³²³; many of these were admitted to subsidized places because they were orphans or daughters of artisans, laborers, or small merchants, lacking the means to cover the costs of books, fees, and the uniform required for boarding students. Numerous requests for government-sponsored free places, dated between 1871 and 1873, document the heterogeneity of the student body: Maddalena Lo Sauro, a future teacher in Assoro, was the daughter of a notary; Giovannina Naselli, later a teacher in Regalbuto, was the daughter of a tax collector; Marietta Failla, for whom it is unknown if or where she took up service, was the daughter of a landowner. We also learn that Grazia Nicolosi, a future teacher in Catania, was the daughter of a coachman³²⁴; Rosa Condorelli, later a teacher in Misterbianco and Catania, was the daughter of a tailor; Carmela Falsaperla, also a future teacher in Catania, was the daughter of a shoemaker³²⁵. Among the students with parents of humble status, we can also mention Gaetana Cataldo, daughter of a rope maker, and Santa Squillaci, daughter of a farmer³²⁶.

Reading the applications submitted by aspiring or current female teachers reveals that behind their ambition to become educators often lay the desire and necessity to escape dire socio-economic conditions or to benefit their families. For instance, the aforementioned Carmela Falsaperla, in the 1873-74 scholastic year, requested admission to subsidized positions because her parents were ill and

³²⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 13 b. 91, Regno d’Italia, Ministero della istruzione pubblica, Turin, January 31, 1865.

³²¹ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 13 b. 91, *Anno Scolastico 1864-65. Stato di presenza delle allieve della Scuola Normale femminile di Catania per la prima quindicina di Agosto 1865*, Catania, August 14, 1865; Id., *Stato di presenza delle allieve della Scuola Normale femminile di Catania per la seconda quindicina di Ottobre e per i mesi di Novembre e Dicembre 1866*, Catania, January 12, 1866.

³²² Among these were: Giovanna Trigona, daughter of Ruggero, Duke of Misterbianco; Anna Paternò Castello, of the Princes of Biscari; Concetta Asmundo, of a noble family; Marianna and Agata De Roberto, nieces of the writer Federico; Chiara Marletta, daughter of the mathematician Giuseppe; Chieretta Deni, niece of the poetess Cecilia Deni; Teresa and Clementina Sada, daughters of the architect Carlo; Clara, Benedetta and Carmela Boggio Lera, daughters of the scientist Enrico; Giovanna D’Emanuele, daughter of the painter Gaetano; Ida Prampolini, daughter of the publisher Giuseppe; Maria Galatola, daughter of the publisher Francesco. F. Impallomeni, op. cit., p. 18.

³²³ The Prefettura archive deposited at the State Archive of Catania contains extensive documentation regarding requests for and obtainment of government and provincial subsidies by aspiring teachers; and at the historical archive of the “G. Turrisi Colonna” High School in Catania, there are 68 registers (1890-1960) relating to admission exams for complementary and normal courses, license exams, and kindergarten teacher certification exams.

³²⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *Istanza della alunna Grazia Nicolosi*, Catania, November 19, 1872.

³²⁵ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *Ill.mo Signor Presidente del Consiglio Provinciale Scolastico di Catania*, Catania, October 16, 1873.

³²⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, various papers, August- November 1873.

“in the harshest and most severe poverty” (“*nella più dura e stretta povertà*”)³²⁷; Giuseppa Micalizie, who later became a teacher in Motta Sant’Anastasia, was listed among the subsidized students in the 1871-72 scholastic year due to the need to relieve her mother, who had to support four children³²⁸. Giuseppina Di Grazia, a future teacher in Troina and Militello, received a ministerial subsidy of 70 lire in 1879 and 50 lire in 1880 because she lacked the necessary funds to buy books and shoes for school, being fatherless and with “no other help than that of a poor mother who worked day and night to support herself and her daughter” (*senza “altro aiuto che quello di una povera madre che lavorava di e notte per mantenere se stessa e la figlia”*)³²⁹.

These financial supports were granted, in particular, to students who showed greater aptitude for their studies, as indicated by the School Director for their irreproachable conduct, diligence and performance in fulfilling their school obligations. Among these, there was Antonietta Mazzone, who received an extraordinary subsidy of 70 lire in 1879 and 100 lire in 1880³³⁰: thanks to her diligence, she was able to obtain the higher-grade certification, and, once she became a teacher in Catania, Antonietta received “merit” subsidies (*sussidi per “merito”*) from the Province³³¹. Teresa Martone, a future teacher in Calatabiano, also demonstrated “great love for study” (“*grande amore allo studio*”) during her years as a normal school student, and, in 1884-85, she requested an extraordinary subsidy so she wouldn’t have to abandon “the beloved books” (“*i libri prediletti*”)³³².

In some cases, the aspiration to attend the Institute was so strong that it led to requests for age exemptions for admission. This was the case for Mariastella Tamburino, who, being underage and unable to take the government subsidy exams, requested half of the subsidy from the government, while the Municipality of Militello, considering “the supplicant’s intelligence and progress in elementary studies” (“*l’intelligenza ed il progresso della supplicante negli studi elementari*”), had promised to pay the other half, so that she could be admitted to the normal boarding school and “succeed as a teacher, which the commune so desired” (“*riuscire una maestra che tanto il comune*”).

³²⁷ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *Ill.mo Signor Presidente del Consiglio Provinciale Scolastico di Catania*, Catania, October 16, 1873.

³²⁸ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, various papers, October 1871.

³²⁹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 9, various papers, November 1878- January 1879; Id., b. 10, Regno d’Italia, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Provveditorato centrale per l’istruzione primaria e popolare, *Sussidio alla giovane Di Grazia*, Rome, June 26, 1880.

³³⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 9, various papers, 1879; Id., b. 10, February 1880.

³³¹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 19, Ufficio Amministrativo Provinciale di Catania, *Elenco dei mandati di pagamento per sussidio straordinario a taluni maestri distinti per merito*, 1881.

³³² ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, various papers, December 1884 - April 1885.

Among the other students who were able to attend the Normal School with government subsidies, we find: Marianna Guzzardi Borzi, who received a subsidy in the 1864-65 scholastic year and later became a teacher in Catania; Ida Ingui, subsidized in 1885-86, who also became a teacher in Catania; Maria Giuffrida, subsidized in 1866-67, who taught in S. Gregorio and then in Gagliano and S. Pietro Clarenza; Carmela Ferrara, subsidized in both 1865-66 and 1866-67, teacher in Aci Castello and then in Adernò; Ester Ferrara, subsidized in 1884-85, teacher in Catania; Carmela Leotta, subsidized in 1884-85, teacher in Acireale; Maria Naselli, subsidized in 1888-89, teacher in Regalbuto; Maria Zinno, subsidized in 1888-89, teacher in Nicosia; Filippa Sortino, paying in 1888-89 but subsidized in 1890-91 and 1891-92, later a teacher in Mirabella; Annetta Caudullo, subsidized in 1890-91 and 1891-92, teacher in Catania; Giuseppina Giuffrida, also subsidized in 1890-91 and 1891-92, teacher in Misterbianco and then in Catania; and Venera Bonaventura, subsidized in 1872-73, teacher in Catania. ASCT, Pref. serie I, el. 13, b. 91, *Anno scolastico 1865-66, Stato di presenza delle Allieve della scuola Normale femminile di Catania pel mese di luglio e la prima quindicina di agosto*; Id., *Stato di presenza delle Allieve della scuola Normale femminile di Catania per la seconda quindicina di Ottobre e per i mesi di Novembre e Dicembre 1866*; Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 19, *Elenco dei Maestri che godono sussidio provinciale per aumento di stipendio anno Scolastico 1877-78*; Id., *Elenco di maestri e delle maestre che godono il sussidio per aumento di stipendio. Anno scolastico 1878-79*; Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, Regia Scuola Norm.e Femm.e Sup.e di Catania. Anno Scolastico 1885-86, *Esami di concorso ai sussidi governativi per la Provincia di Catania*, November 28, 1885; Amm. Prov., Cat. X, b. 8, *Elenco delle alunne sussidiate nell’anno scolastico 1884-85*, Catania, January 6, 1884; Id., *Convitto della Allieve-Maestre in Catania. Debito per retta dovuta a tutto il I bimestre 1889*, Catania, January 26, 1889; Id., Direzione del Convitto Provinciale per le allieve-maestre di Catania, *Elenco convittrici anno scolastico 1890-91*, Catania, November 17, 1890.

desiderava”)³³³. Just like Mariastella Tamburino, Anna Pace from Bronte was also supported at the Normal School at the Municipality’s expense, later returning there as a teacher³³⁴. Meanwhile, among those who received provincial subsidies to attend the Normal School, there were: Pasqualina Cirnigliano, in 1879-80, who would later serve in Militello schools³³⁵; Adelina Previtera, in 1883-84, who became a teacher in Giarre schools³³⁶; and Concetta Bugliarello, in 1884-85, who later taught in the municipalities of Trecastagni and Motta Sant’Anastasia³³⁷.

However, not all students completed the entire training program. Sometimes, the urgency to return to their hometowns and begin working prompted them to settle for the lower-grade certification, abandoning the Normal School before completing the three-year course. An example of this tendency is that of Rosaria Chindemi from Noto, recipient of government subsidy in the two-year period 1864-1866, who, having obtained the lower-grade license, gave up the subsidy for the third year to quickly go back to where she come from: in fact we find her as a teacher in the primary school of Pachino (Municipality of the District of Noto) in the school year 1866-67³³⁸. Such is also the case of Serafina Falco from Nicosia, who, having obtained her lower-grade certification in 1870, had already taken up service in her own Municipality’s schools by 1871³³⁹.

Certainly, the meager amount of subsidies often contributed to early withdrawal, if not outright abandonment, of studies, as these funds were not always enough to support the students. This is illustrated by the 1879 plea from Pasquale Maugeri, a primary teacher: despite his strong desire for his daughter Giuseppa, a preparatory course student, to continue her studies, he was constrained by the very limited means provided by the Municipality of San Giovanni Galermo to support her in Catania³⁴⁰. Similarly, the impoverished father of Grazia Ragonesi from Acireale, having devoted “all the little he had at his disposal” (“*tutto quel poco di che poteva disporre*”) to his daughter’s education, begged the Superintendent for further financial aid, hoping not to “abandon what he had gained with so much toil and sacrifice” (*sperando di non “abbandonare ciò che [aveva] raccolto in tanti sudori e sacrifice*”), especially since his daughter “was showing great promise” (“*faceva di sè bene sperare*”) and was close to obtaining her teaching certificate³⁴¹. In other instances, students had to interrupt their studies to get married. This was the case for Agatina Perino, who, in 1871-72, gave up her subsidized position for family reasons; the Provincial Council decided not to grant her the subsidy a second time,

³³³ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *Ill.mo Signor Prefetto*, October 23, 1873. Before the 1883 regulation, which stipulated that the provincial school board could not grant an age waiver of more than one year (art. 86), there was no set age for admission to the preparatory course, leading to students as young as 11 or 12 years old. Unable to enter the normal course before age 15, these students were obliged to repeat the preparatory course until they reached the prescribed age (ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, R. Scuola Normale Femminile Superiore di Catania, *Dessi Teresa*, Catania, January 9, 1886).

³³⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *Ill.mo Signor Provveditore*, Catania, October 25, 1873. Besides the schools in Bronte, Anna Pace also served in those of Giarre and Caltagirone (ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, bb. 30, 31).

³³⁵ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 19, [senza titolo], Catania, December 5, 1879; Pref. serie II, el. 2, b. 10, various papers, May- December 1880.

³³⁶ The extraordinary provincial subsidy of 175 lire in 1883-84, obtained for entry into the boarding school and to attend the first year of the preparatory course, was followed in 1884-85 by an extraordinary subsidy of 60 lire from the Ministry. In 1885-86, Previtera received the government subsidy for entry into the first normal course. ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, Regno d’Italia, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, divisione per l’Istruzione Primaria e Popolare, *Sussidio alla giovane Previtera Adelina*, Rome, April 22, 1885; Id., Regia Scuola Norm.e Femm.e Sup.e di Catania. Anno Scolastico 1885-86, *Esami di concorso ai sussidi governativi per la Provincia di Catania*, November 28, 1885.

³³⁷ ASCT, Amm. Prov., Cat. X, b. 8, *Elenco delle alunne sussidiate nell’anno scolastico 1884-85*, Catania, January 6, 1884.

³³⁸ On the experiences of Rosaria Childemi, along with those of other aspiring female teachers from the Scuola Normale Femminile of Catania originating from the province of Syracuse, S. Lentini has written: *Tra i banchi della Real Scuola Normale di Catania. Appunti per una storia delle allieve-maestre del “Turrisi Colonna” (1861-1923)*, in R. L. Cardullo, S. Lentini, P. Militello, E. Rapisarda, C. Sindoni (eds.), op. cit., in press.

³³⁹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, b. 3, Regno d’Italia, Prefettura di Catania, Consiglio Scolastico della Provincia, *Notizie statistiche*, April 12, 1871.

³⁴⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 19, Catania, December 9, 1879.

³⁴¹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 10, *Signor Provveditore degli studii dalla provincia di Catania*, Acireale 1880.

understanding that the reason for her withdrawal was that she had married and could no longer reside in the boarding school³⁴².

3.3. From traditional didactics to “new pedagogy”. Adapting the educational offering to the new challenges of the Italian school

Right from its early years, the Women’s Normal School of Catania followed the directives set by the ruling class of the time for these educational institutes: to train a contingent of male and female teachers to undertake the arduous and ambitious task of “making Italians”. This entailed building a shared memory – a sort of “national autobiography” (*“autobiografia della nazione”*) – and establishing a shared heritage of “values” and “examples” intended to define the Nation’s character and identity³⁴³.

Consistent with the instructions and curricula set by Minister Coppino in 1867, which emphasized the moral education to be imparted to future teachers³⁴⁴, a strong “prescriptive” and “moralizing” focus can also be found in the educational activities of the Catania’s Normal School. This is particularly evident in the reports drafted by some teachers at the conclusion of the 1867-68 scholastic year. During this period, the School and its boarding facility had been relocated from the premises on Via del Corso to the former Trinity Monastery (*ex-Monastero della Trinità*) (expropriated by the State following the law of July 7, 1866), which also housed the “Regina Margherita” finishing school for noble girls (*Educandato per nobili fanciulle “Regina Margherita”*).

The professor of religion and morals, canon Salvatore Patti, drawing inspiration from herbartian and anti-rousseauvian theories on the value of moral education in relation to civil society, reported that he had worked to ensure students understood “what is meant by moral science [and] how the state of society is necessary for man” (*“cosa s’intende per scienza morale [e] come lo stato di società sia necessario all’uomo”*) through sacred history narratives; once this understanding was established, the professor then spoke “of the family and civil society, descending then to the knowledge of law in general, and the right to property [...] and the civil rights recognized by the Statute of the Kingdom of Italy” (*“della famiglia e della società civile, scendendo poi alla conoscenza del diritto in genere, e del diritto di proprietà [...] e dei diritti civili riconosciuti dallo statuto del Regno d’Italia”*)³⁴⁵.

A moralizing tone also appeared in the report of the choral singing professor, Gandolfi Antonino: he stated that he had dedicated the first year to learning musical notation and precise reading of notes and intervals, the second year to intonation exercises and initial vocal solfeggio, and finally concluded the third year, dedicated to graduated vocalizations in different tempos and the practice of singing in concert, with students performing classical pieces or pieces composed by the professor himself based

³⁴² ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, various papers, June–November 1872.

³⁴³ A. Ascenzi, *Tra educazione etico-civile e costruzione dell’identità nazionale. L’insegnamento della storia nelle scuole italiane dell’Ottocento*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2004, p. XIV; G. Chiosso, *Nazionalità ed educazione degli Italiani nel secondo Ottocento*, in «Pedagogia e Vita», n.4, 1987, pp. 421-440; B. Tobia, *Una patria per gli italiani*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1998; S. Soldani, G. Turi (eds.), *Fare gli italiani*, cit.; M.C. Morandini, *Scuola e nazione. Maestri e istruzione popolare nella costruzione dello Stato unitario (1848-1861)*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2003.

³⁴⁴ R.D. October 10, 1867, no. 3943 - *Istruzioni e programmi per le scuole normali*. It was the De Sanctis regulation of November 9, 1861 (R.D. November 9, 1861, no. 315) that added “morals” (*“morale”*) and “religion” (*“religione”*) to the subjects taught under the Casati Law. Only in 1880, with the curricula for male and female normal schools annexed to the De Sanctis regulation (R.D. September 30, 1880, no. 5666), would the teaching of religion and morals be replaced by the teaching of “rights and duties of the citizen” (*“diritti e doveri del cittadino”*). This substitution occurred a few years earlier in primary school curricula with the Coppino law on compulsory elementary education (Law of July 15, 1877, no. 3961).

³⁴⁵ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *Relazione del Can. Salvatore Patti Prof.re di Religione e Morale*, Catania, July 22, 1868.

on “moral poems” (“*morali poesie*”)³⁴⁶. A similar rhetorical approach can also be found in the method adopted by the calligraphy professor, Giovanni Percolla: in his lessons, various stroke exercises were followed by writing the entire alphabet, and then forming capital letters “combined into a few moral maxims” (“*combinare in alquante massime morali*”)³⁴⁷.

Finally, the report by professor Federico Dassi revealed a pedantic memorization-based approach in teaching history, consisting of studying and repeating 27 “biographies of illustrious Italians” (“*biografie d’illustri Italiani*”)³⁴⁸; meanwhile, director De Rossi emphasized the correct use of the Italian language, even in students’ “familiar confessions” (“*famigliari confessioni*”), in order to educate them in “correct pronunciation” (“*retta pronuncia*”)³⁴⁹.

Soon after, this predominantly intellectualist teaching approach in the Catania’s Normal School, with its associated mechanical and rote learning, became the subject of ministerial complaints, indeed, in a letter dated May 19, 1870³⁵⁰, Minister Cesare Correnti expressed dissatisfaction with the teaching outcomes. He found “embarrassing errors in syntax and spelling” (“*sconci errori di sintassi e ortografia*”) and an “insufficiently developed power of reasoning” (una “*potenza ragionativa [non] sufficientemente svolta*”) in the Italian language essay, which he deemed inappropriate “for young women who neither have nor can have breadth or depth in rhetorical studies” (“*a giovanette che non hanno né possono avere né larghezza né profondità di studi rettorici*”). Similarly, the arithmetic essay, based on extracting the square root, was judged unsuitable for future teachers who needed “more practical and basic knowledge” (“*cognizioni più pratiche e basilari*”) and to “understand the reasons behind the operations they perform” (“*rendersi ragione delle operazioni che fanno*”).

The pedagogy essays showed a tendency among students to “recycle” professor lectures or theories read from textbooks: since these were not “learned in a way that made them truly their own, so that they could freely rethink them, add to them, or subtract from them” (non erano “*imparate in modo da appropriarsele veramente sicché [potessero] con libertà ripensarle e aggiungervi e togliervi*”), there was no hope they would be “retained for long” (“*a lungo ritenute*”); to that end, it was hoped that the focus would shift “more to practice than to abstract discussions” (“*più alla pratica che alle astratte disquisizioni*”). The same defect was found in compositions on physical sciences: about them, it was noted that the professor should “not present a complete scientific system in these schools” (non dovesse “*in queste scuole esporre un compiuto sistema scientifico*”), but rather “ensure that science comes to the aid of his students [in acquiring] a reasoned understanding of the phenomena found in the natural order” (“*procurare che la scienza [venisse] in aiuto ai suoi scolari [nell’acquistare] una ragionata cognizione de’ fenomeni che si hanno nell’ordine naturale*”).

The history essay, though not judged inappropriate, was thought to be presentable “by some students with less ‘bombast’, by others with more care, and by still others with greater breadth” (“*da alcune alunne con minor ‘gonfiezza’, da altre con più cura, da altre ancora con maggiore ampiezza*”). In sacred history compositions, even weaker students did “something better, as that was a subject that had been studied and memorized since early years” (“*qualcosa di meglio, essendo quella una materia che fin dai primi anni [era] studiata e imparata a mente*”). Nevertheless, in many assignments, “spelling, syntax, and meaning were lacking” (“*mancava l’ortografia, la sintassi, il senso*”), so, in this case too, it was reiterated that it was not enough to ask for a bare exposition of facts, but rather to evaluate the students’ ability to deduce “consequences ordered toward a religious or moral aim” (“*delle conseguenze ordinate ad un fine religioso o morale*”).

³⁴⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *All’Ill.mo Sig. presidente del Consiglio direttivo per la R. Scuola Normale femminile in Catania*, Catania, September 12, 1868.

³⁴⁷ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *Al Sig.r Presidente del Consiglio Direttivo della Scuola Normale femminile di Catania*, Catania, August 3, 1868.

³⁴⁸ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *Illustrissimi Signori Consiglieri*, Catania, August 1, 1868.

³⁴⁹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, *Relazione sullo stato della R. Scuola Normale femminile di Catania. Anno scolastico 1867-68*, August 27, 1868.

³⁵⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, Regno d’Italia, Ministero della istruzione pubblica, *Sulla Scuola normale*, Florence, May 19, 1870.

Regarding bookkeeping exercises (*Computisteria*), there was insufficient clarity and order, making it impossible to judge how much the students knew of this subject, and if they truly understood the main rules for household administration³⁵¹.

The final twenty years of the century saw a significant reform in teaching practices, driven by the spread of positivist ideas in pedagogy and the need to abandon the traditional, rote-based, and fact-heavy approach, in favor of a teaching method founded on observation and sensory knowledge. Coppino's circular of 1878 had called for a redefinition of teacher training in a practical and experimental sense³⁵², the De Sanctis regulation of 1880 further emphasized the importance of practical training³⁵³, and the new programs annexed to it gave more prominence to the natural sciences by grounding them in the objective method.

This new direction clearly emerged in the reports from the teachers of the Catania's Normal School at the end of the 1881-82 school year. Costanza Erminia Borella, a teacher of the first preparatory class, specified that she had taken care to "make teaching enjoyable" (*rendere dilettevole l'insegnamento*) by getting students "accustomed to a completely practical method [...] as experience teaches, drawing the unknown from the known, the difficult from the easy, the rule from the example, the theory from practical application" (*si avvezzassero al metodo tutto pratico [...] come esperienza insegna, traendo l'ignoto dal noto, il difficile dal facile, la regola dall'esempio, la teoria dalla pratica applicazione*)³⁵⁴. In teaching language, although composition exercises and rote memorization were still prominent, the goal was to "exercise memory through some notable poems for their naturalness of imagery and truthfulness of feeling" (*esercitare la memoria attraverso alcune poesie notevoli per naturalezza di immagini e per verità di sentimenti*) and to have composition topics focus "on the description of everyday objects, useful walks, and natural phenomena already observed" (*sulla descrizione di oggetti usuali, di utili passeggiate, di fenomeni naturali già osservati*)³⁵⁵. The study of arithmetic also had to be conducted "using concrete units and choosing examples of everyday problems" (*sopra unità concrete e scegliendo ad esempi problemi di applicazione usuale*), and for teaching history, the teacher had "taken the opportunity of the monuments found in Catania" (*preso occasione dai monumenti che si trova[va]no a Catania*) to stimulate the students' curiosity. This followed the principle of Pestalozzi's "intuitive" method, which aimed to impress the senses, primarily sight, to lead to intellectual comprehension³⁵⁶.

Carolina Cordano, a teacher in the upper preparatory classes, had also dedicated herself to giving "various object lessons, striving to have [the students] see the real object or its image" (*varie lezioni di cose, adoperandosi perché [le allieve] potessero vedere l'oggetto reale o l'immagine di esso*); twice a week she assigned composition topics, and "the subject of these was always descriptions of everyday objects, the weather, some household chores, narratives of private life, letters, and familiar

³⁵¹ In response to the ministerial letter, Director De Rossi attributed the responsibility for the quality of the final exam questions to "the lack of practical experience of the Superintendent of Studies who had chosen them" (*poca pratica del sig. Provveditore agli studi che gli avea scelti*). He stated that the teachers themselves were dismayed and saddened to see "their own students, precisely when the solemnity of the occasion made them most apprehensive, subjected to topics that were either empty, insipid, or the most powerful contradiction of good sense" (*le proprie alunne, proprio quando la solennità del caso le [faceva] essere più trepidanti, assoggettate a trattar temi o vuoti o insulsi o che [erano] la più potente contraddizione del buon senso*). ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, Direzione della R. Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania, *Risposta a nota ministeriale del 19 maggio*, June 10, 1870.

³⁵² C.M. January 29, 1878, no. 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.

³⁵³ R.D. September 30, 1880, no. 5666 - *Regolamento per le scuole normali e per gli esami di patente dei maestri elementari*, in *Gazzetta ufficiale del Regno d'Italia*, October 18-21, 1880, pp. 2361-2366.

³⁵⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, *Relazione Scolastica*, June 28, 1882.

³⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

dialogues [...]” (“*il soggetto della medesima erano sempre descrizioni di oggetti usuali, del tempo, di alcune domestiche, narrazioni di fatti della vita privata, lettere e dialoghi famigliari [...]*”)³⁵⁷. The same method was applied to teaching geography, giving an “idea of a city’s topography, the scale on maps, orientation, and cardinal points” (“*idea della topografia di una città, della scala sulle carte geografiche, dell’orientamento e dei punti cardinali*”), before having them draw the plan of the school, the City, and the Province on the blackboard and on paper, then proceeding to the configuration of Italy, with its rivers, lakes, railway and sea routes, and finally to the position of each ocean and continent³⁵⁸.

In the field of natural sciences, the adoption of the objective method required access to scientific materials to “support” and “complete” the theoretical lessons. The urgency of acquiring such material is clear in the report of Giulio Anguissola, professor of mathematics and natural sciences in the three-year Normal School course. He stated that he had covered the curriculum on mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish in the first year, but had to make do with Bellardi’s tables as the school lacked real specimens. In the same way, the professor declared that he had taught the main physical and chemical phenomena to the second-year students, using all the means at his disposal, and that he had covered zoology, botany, mineralogy, geology, physics and chemistry in the third year, aware that he could not achieve the desired results from his lessons until the physics laboratory was properly equipped³⁵⁹.

Parallel to the evolution in teaching methods, the Institute worked on structural adaptations to support the new methodologies and the practical, observational, and experimental dimensions of training. The need to provide aspiring female teachers with adequate methodological-didactic training had been recognized by the Catania’s Normal School since the late 1860s, when Director De Rossi, in his final report for the 1867-68 school year, called for the annexation of “a complete elementary school course” (“*un compiuto corso di scuole elementari*”) to the Institute, believing that a “skilled teacher” (“*abile maestra*”) could not be obtained “without suitable practical training” (“*senza un conveniente tirocinio*”). In 1870, the Provincial Deputation gave instructions for the adaptation of some rooms in the *Trinità* building to house the four elementary classes³⁶⁰, and the project for building the classrooms was approved in the 1882-83 school year, with the collaboration of the Ministry, which committed to covering a third of the cost by promising a subsidy of 4000 lire (this was more than what was prescribed by article 363 of the Casati Law, which stated that the premises and furnishings of normal schools were entirely the responsibility of the Municipalities)³⁶¹.

However, in the 1883-84 school year, the practical training was still being conducted in a single lower-level elementary school, directed by one teacher and located in a very large room³⁶², while the lack of an upper elementary course (third and fourth grades) was compensated for by having the third-

³⁵⁷ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, *Relazione dell’insegnamento dato durante l’anno scolastico 1881-82 nella Scuola Preparatoria Superiore*, Catania, June 28, 1882.

³⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁵⁹ The professor proposed purchasing the following from the technical engineering and industry society (*società tecnica d’ingegneria ed industria*) of Florence: a botany collection (120 lire), a zoology collection (270 lire), a section of a skull (25 lire), a reproduction of a brain (20 lire), of a breast (25 to 80 lire), of an abdomen (25 to 140 lire), and of the digestive organs (36 lire). For physics experiments, a pneumatic machine was also needed. The professor also insisted that the laboratory be allocated a larger and better-positioned room. ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, Catania, June 1882.

³⁶⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 104, Consiglio Direttivo della Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania, *Proposte relative all’istituzione delle Scuole per il tirocinio*, Catania, July 4, 1870.

³⁶¹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, Regno d’Italia, Ministero della Pubblica istruzione, divisione per l’istruzione primaria e popolare, *Locale della Scuola Normale Femminile*, March 29, 1884; Id., *Promessa di sussidio al comune di Catania*, October 24, 1884.

³⁶² ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, R. Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania, *Risposta a Nota 18 agosto 18p.g. 14663*, Catania, August 31, 1884.

year students conduct their practical exercises in the preparatory course³⁶³. As for the teaching materials, the pedagogical museum of the training school could be described as “barely started” (“*appena iniziato*”): it contained a decent collection of minerals and some boxes for object lessons, but almost nothing in terms of botanical and zoological collections³⁶⁴. Nevertheless, by the end of that school year, the students were doing well in drawing, but only moderately in other subjects and showed little aptitude in practical lessons³⁶⁵, and the Institute also came under new ministerial criticism for a tendency to use a certain “leniency in calculating averages” (“*larghezza nel computare le medie*”). This led to a reprimand to use greater consistency in grading, in line with the ongoing debate about the regulation of promotion and graduation exams, so the Ministry emphasized that preparatory and normal schools were not to be considered “a refuge for the inept and the negligent” (“*un rifugio per le inette e le negligenti*”), and called for “a more careful admission process suited to the nature of the institution” (“*una ammissione più oculata e confacente all’indole dell’istituto*”)³⁶⁶. However, the primary factors compromising the quality of teaching and the effective adoption of the new methods were a lack of scientific equipment and inadequate facilities in terms of structure, hygiene, and sanitation. In August 1884, in response to a ministerial circular asking for details on the material conditions of the Kingdom’s normal schools, the then-director Paolo Vecchia³⁶⁷ reported that while the School’s premises were suitable for their purpose, they were not very spacious; he also complained about the entrance being on a “very poorly maintained street” (“*una strada pessimamente tenuta*”) and the proximity to military barracks latrines, which infested the institute with foul odors; the scientific laboratory, though equipped with some machines, was not sufficient for teaching physics and chemistry, and the room used for drawing lessons, while well-lit and furnished with specific desks, was almost completely lacking in models³⁶⁸. These problems were not unique to the Catania’s Institute but were common among many normal schools across the Kingdom: according to reports received by the Ministry from school directors and inspectors, these schools rarely had adequate buildings with sufficient classrooms to house the preparatory and training classes, or proper furnishings and materials necessary for the smooth running of studies³⁶⁹.

The intent to keep up with scientific advancements and adopt cutting-edge teaching practices emerged strongly in the pedagogy curriculum for the 1884-85 school year, which fully embraced the new direction spurred by positive psychology. It specified that the method of delivering concepts should

³⁶³ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, R. Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania, *Locale per le classi elementari di tirocinio*, February 29, 1884.

³⁶⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, R. Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania, *Risposta a Nota 18 agosto 18p.g. 14663*, Catania, August 31, 1884.

³⁶⁵ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, Regno d’Italia, Ministero della Pubblica istruzione, divisione per l’istruzione primaria e popolare, *Resoconto della adunanza degl’insegnanti*, August 30, 1884.

³⁶⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, Regno d’Italia, Ministero della Pubblica istruzione, divisione per l’istruzione primaria e popolare, *R. Scuola normale adunanze dei professori*, March 6, 1884; Id., *Resoconto della adunanza degl’insegnanti*, August 30, 1884; Id., *Adunanze degli insegnanti*, June 20, 1884.

³⁶⁷ Author of several manuals adopted by the normal schools of the Kingdom, such as *Corso di pedagogia pei maestri di grado inferiore* (1863) and *Pedagogia educativa pei maestri di grado superiore* (1865), Paolo Vecchia had previously directed the male normal schools in Piacenza, Girgenti, Cosenza, and L’Aquila, and the “Regina Margherita” Royal Female Normal School in Palermo. For more on Paolo Vecchia, see: G. Chiosso (ed.), *I periodici scolastici nell’Italia del secondo Ottocento*, La Scuola, Brescia 1992; M.A. D’Arcangeli, *Luigi Credaro e la Rivista Pedagogica (1908-1939)*, Tipolitografia Pioda, Rome 2002; C. Sagliocco, *Manuali scolastici di pedagogia nel secondo Ottocento: Corte, Uttini, Vecchia*, in «Annali di Storia dell’educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», 9, 2002, pp. 257-283; A. Barausse, “Paolo Vecchia”, in Chiosso, G., Sani, R. (eds.), *Dizionario Biografico dell’Educazione 1800-2000*, Vol. II, Editrice Bibliografica, Milan 2013, pp. 633-634.

³⁶⁸ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, R. Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania, *Risposta a Nota 18 agosto 18p.g. 14663*, Catania, August 31, 1884.

³⁶⁹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, Regno d’Italia, Ministero della Pubblica istruzione, divisione per l’istruzione primaria e popolare, *Edificii e materiale scolastico delle Scuole Normali*, August 18, 1884.

be “experimental, limiting itself to presenting students with the facts observed in the sensitive, intellectual, and volitional life of man [...]” (“*sperimentale, restringendosi a presentare alle allieve i fatti che si osservano nella vita sensitiva, intellettuale e volitiva dell’uomo [...]*”), and that, since the nervous system was “the basis of these psychic facts” (“*la base di questi fatti psichici*”), one should begin by “explaining its functions in relation to relational and organic life, and then discuss the stages of psychic life which are named feeling, understanding, and willing [...]” (“*spiegandone le funzioni in rapporto alla vita di relazione e alla vita organica, per discutere poi degli stadi della vita psichica che prendono il nome di sentire, intendere e volere [...]*”)³⁷⁰. The focus on pedagogy in its practical and experimental dimension was also evident in the organization of the course content: the first class included weekly conferences on questions of “practical methodology” (“*metodica pratica*”); the second class covered practical notions related to the didactic, disciplinary, and hygienic management of students, as well as the school’s furnishings and museum for adopting the objective method; the third class involved studying theories of intellectual, moral, and physical education, along with the necessary skills to teach geometry, drawing, geography, national history and natural sciences according to the “new method”, through a critical examination of Froebel’s and Pestalozzi’s works³⁷¹. The introduction of “manual labor” (“*lavoro manuale*”) into the traditional school curriculum, as “the most suitable means to acquire certain manual skills [...]; to break the monotony of teaching [...]; to awaken and educate the spirit of observation” (“*mezzo più acconcio a fare acquistare certe abilità di mano [...]; a interrompere la monotonia dell’insegnamento [...]; a destare ed educare lo spirito di osservazione*”)³⁷², represented a tangible result of Italy’s adoption of innovative European ideas. Although inspired by the “educational” work of kindergartens (folding, weaving, and braiding simple materials like paper, straw, and wire), manual labor in primary schools took the form of “useful” work, adapted by gender and connected to local agricultural or artisanal activities. While it had always been mandatory in female primary and normal schools in the form of “domestic work”, it had previously been optional for male aspiring teachers, for whom it consisted of instruction in bookkeeping, telegraphy, or agricultural concepts. In schools for both sexes, manual labor could also be practiced through the teaching of drawing: this was considered useful for applying the decimal metric system, thereby solidifying otherwise abstract concepts, additionally, it was seen as essential for educating students in a sense of aesthetics and proportion, and for developing the skills needed for small industries³⁷³.

The teaching of drawing gradually gained more importance in the curricula of normal schools, including the Catania’s Normal School for women. As early as the 1881-82 school year, at the director’s request, freehand linear drawing had been introduced in the first preparatory class, and this was taught by the aforementioned teacher Borella, who aimed for the students to acquire the ability to represent the shapes of objects with simple lines³⁷⁴. Meanwhile, students in the second year of the preparatory course were introduced to ornamental drawing by teacher Cordano, who taught them to

³⁷⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, *Programma di pedagogia per l’anno scolastico 1884-85*, Catania, December 1884.

³⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

³⁷² C.M. September 17, 1885, no. 780, *Corsi esemplari di tirocinio e scuole popolari*.

³⁷³ *Nuovo codice della istruzione pubblica. Raccolta delle leggi, decreti, regolamenti, circolari, istruzioni e decisioni ministeriali vigenti nel Regno d’Italia sull’ordinamento della istruzione pubblica e sull’istruzione normale, secondaria classica e tecnica, ed elementare con annotazioni e raffronti approvata dal Ministero della Istruzione Pubblica*, Tip. Fratelli Lobetti-Bodoni, Saluzzo 1870, p. 341. With the advent of the industrial system, a real educational gap became apparent. The artisanal apprenticeship, which had been promoted and regulated by the Statutes of the *Corporazioni d’arti e mestieri* (Guilds of arts and Crafts) until then, had to give way to the urgent need to train a qualified workforce. This task could only be entrusted to the school. A. Santoni Rugiu, *Breve storia dell’educazione artigiana*, Carocci, Rome 2008; Id, *Il braccio e la mente*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1995; G. Zago, *Il lavoro nell’educazione moderna e contemporanea*, CLUEP, Padua 2002.

³⁷⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, *Relazione Scolastica*, June 28, 1882.

trace meanders (greek fret), stars, and concentric circles using templates from Paravia's plates³⁷⁵. In the three-year normal course, taught by Professor Giuseppe Distefani Fierro, drawing instruction was structured with increasing complexity: from freehand line drawing to geometric ornamentation, and from the reproduction of plants and fruits to linear drawing and the composition of polygons for floors and ceilings³⁷⁶. Regarding the introduction of "useful" work, it is also interesting to note that a telegraphy course was activated for the girls of the Catania's Normal School. For this course, the Provincial Administration allocated 300 lire in December 1883, while in previous (unspecified) years, the Municipality had contributed 250 lire annually³⁷⁷.

In the following years, a growing focus on the quality of the educational program also led to greater investment in teaching and scientific materials. This need was also felt at a national level, leading to the 1885 appointment of a commission, chaired by Antonio Labriola, to conduct a thorough examination of the "auxiliary teaching materials" (*"mezzi didattici sussidiari"*) needed for the Kingdom's normal schools and their annexed elementary classes. An aspect on which the commission had placed particular emphasis was that of providing normal schools with a library, which would serve as a "complement" (*"completamento"*) to the scientific laboratories, allowing students and teachers to "keep up with the progress of the sciences being taught" (*"tener dietro ai progressi delle scienze professate"*)³⁷⁸. At the Catania's Normal School, this "provident institution" (*"provvida istituzione"*) had declared itself open as early as February 1883 and had been able to enrich its book collection thanks to an annual provincial allocation of 200 lire³⁷⁹. Although the books purchased in the two years following its opening were mainly on classical authors, Italian history, geography, and natural sciences, with few texts on pedagogy³⁸⁰, the acquisition of works updated with new educational and didactic trends occurred in the 1886-87 school year. During this time, the aforementioned Paolo Vecchia, a supporter of Rosminian ideas but also inclined toward a more scientific and less spiritualist approach, arranged for the purchase of texts by authors such as Perez, Spencer, Compayré, Sergi, Parato, and Bain³⁸¹. By the end of that school year, the Institute's commitment to this pedagogical renewal was also reflected in the topics for the pedagogy essays required for the higher-grade certification: these included the "necessity for a teacher to know the intellect and disposition of her students" (*"necessità che la maestra conosca l'ingegno e l'indole delle proprie alunne"*), "the method of Friedrich Froebel and which of his exercises proposed for the kindergarten could be introduced into elementary schools" (*"il metodo di Federico Froebel e quali degli esercizi da lui proposti pel giardino d'infanzia [si potessero] introdurre nelle scuole elementari"*), and "what a teacher should do for the school to be truly educational" (*"cosa debba fare una maestra perché la scuola riesca veramente educativa"*)³⁸².

However, the high cost of providing the Normal School with constantly updated scientific and educational materials remained a challenge. The Provincial Deputation had, in fact, ruled that starting that year it would no longer cover the expenses for physics experiments, which until then had

³⁷⁵ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, *Relazione dell'insegnamento dato durante l'anno scolastico 1881-82 nella Scuola Preparatoria Superiore*, Catania, June 28, 1882.

³⁷⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, *Signor Direttore*, [...].

³⁷⁷ ASCT, Amm. Prov., Cat. X, b. 31, R. Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania, *Lezioni di Telegrafia*, Catania, December 27, 1883.

³⁷⁸ *Atti della Commissione per la proposta del materiale necessario alle scuole normali*, tip. Bencini, Rome-Florence 1888, pp. 5-9.

³⁷⁹ ASCT, Amm. Prov., Cat. X, b. 27, Direzione della R. Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania, *Biblioteca della Scuola Normale Femminile*, Catania, February 27, 1883.

³⁸⁰ ASCT, Amm. Prov., Cat. X, b. 27, various papers.

³⁸¹ ASCT, Amm. Prov., Cat. X, b. 31, R. Scuola Normale Femminile Superiore di Catania, *Biblioteca della scuola*, Catania, February 20, 1887.

³⁸² ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 105, temi di pedagogia, 1887.

amounted to 100 lire, because by law they were the responsibility of the State³⁸³, and, for the same reasons, it also eliminated the 200 lire fund designated for the purchase of books³⁸⁴. In the session of December 9, 1887, the council of professors appealed to the Province to once again allocate the sum for the annual increase of the library, “which was now scarce in some subjects, and in others was completely lacking in indispensable works for the students, and even more so for the teachers” (*“la quale oramai in alcune materie scarseggia[va], ed in altre addirittura difetta[va] di opere indispensabili alle alunne, e più ancora agli insegnanti”*)³⁸⁵.

Upon noting “a number of existing messes that significantly detracted from the complex function of the school and the fullness of its results” (*“una quantità esistente di scontri che sottraevano non poco alla funzione complessa della scuola e alla pienezza dei risultati”*)³⁸⁶, the new director, Salvatore Colonna³⁸⁷, undertook a comprehensive reorganization of the Institute. In the 1887-88 school year, he reported that he had found the physics laboratory non-functional, with “almost all the instruments rusted on the shelves” (*“quasi tutti gli strumenti irrugginiti negli scaffali”*), meaning the third-year students had been unable to participate in the essential experiments. The drawing room was damp, “[...] during the winter, it was downright glacial, producing [...] such a stiffening of the fingers that it hindered the work of the unfortunate students” (*“[...] durante l’inverno, addirittura glaciale, da produrre [...] tale rattrappimento alle dita da impedire nel lavoro le allieve malcapitate”*). The 1st normal course was “almost lost in an immense hall” (*“quasi sperduto in un immenso salone”*), where the teacher's voice “reached their ears transformed into a confused and indistinct resonance” (*“arrivava agli orecchi trasformata in risonanza confusa e indistinta”*). The 3rd and 4th training classes were merged into a single room, compromising order and discipline. There was also a habit among the boarding students of using an Institute room for private study, “which led to frequent invasions [...], especially on holidays” (*“onde frequenti erano le invasioni [...], specie nei giorni di festa [...]”*), to the point that some teachers found the grades on their registers altered.

With the generous support of the Provincial Administration, Colonna implemented important improvements: the large hall of the 1st normal course became an “extremely elegant drawing room” (*“salone da disegno elegantissimo”*); the room for singing and work was transformed into a physics-chemistry laboratory, to the “delight of the students and the complete satisfaction of the teacher” (*“delizia delle allieve e piena soddisfazione dell’insegnante”*). It was then sufficient to reorganize two rooms of the boarding school for private study, installing gas pipes and arranging 8 desks with two seats in each, to “simultaneously solve problems of order, discipline, supervision, and profit” (*“risolvere contemporaneamente problemi di ordine, disciplina, vigilanza e profitto”*). Two classrooms that had been assigned unnecessarily to janitors and teachers were finally designated for the training classes, which the Director considered not an accessory part, but a “true didactic clinic” (*“vera clinica didattica”*), and were equipped with plastic and figurative material to implement the objective method; manual labor was introduced there, and its production, which ranged from

³⁸³ ASCT, Amm. Prov., Cat. X, b. 27, Ufficio amministrativo provinciale di Catania, *Scuola Normale Femminile. Spese per gli esperimenti di fisica*, November 11, 1885.

³⁸⁴ ASCT, Amm. Prov., Cat. X, b. 31, R. Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania, *Consiglio dei professori. Tornata del 9 Dicembre 1887*.

³⁸⁵ ASCT, Amm. Prov., Cat. X, b. 31, R. Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania, *Consiglio dei professori. Tornata del 9 Dicembre 1887*.

³⁸⁶ ASCT, Amm. Prov., Cat. X, b. 31, R. Scuola Normale Femminile Superiore di Catania, *Relazione generale intorno alla R. Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania per l'anno scolastico 1887-1888*, Catania, December 25, 1888.

³⁸⁷ A former professor of pedagogy and anthropology at the Normal School of Salerno, Salvatore Colonna was the author of several works, including the *Corso di pedagogia elementare* which was adopted by normal schools for a long time. For more on him, see L. Montecchi, “Colonna Salvatore”, in G. Chiosso, R. Sani (eds.), *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione 1800-2000*, vol. I., Editrice Bibliografica, Milan 2013, pp. 376-377.

needlework to calligraphy, from drawing to cartography, was the subject of educational exhibitions and the distribution of prizes, serving as “an incentive to teachers and pupils, igniting everyone in a competition of noble emulation” (“*di eccitamento a docenti e discendi, accendendo tutti in una gara di nobile emulazione*”). Among other initiatives, “Sunday conferences” (“*conferenze domenicali*”) were started to instill in students “the love for science” (“*l’amore per la scienza*”) and to stimulate teachers “to broaden the horizons of knowledge” (“*ad allargare gli orizzonti del sapere*”). Additionally, bimonthly “school outings” (“*passeggiate scolastiche*”) were introduced, having appreciated their evident benefits³⁸⁸. As proof of the success achieved during his directorship, Colonna reported that the student attendance that school year had been so high that the Ministry was asked for an additional section for the 1st preparatory course. He affirmed that the Normal School had “now risen to a great height of public credibility and trust” (“*salita oramai a grande altezza di credito e di fiducia pubblica*”), and that the number of boarding students, 35 that year, could have increased further “if the Honorable Provincial Deputation had not opposed it with the barrier of a restrictive resolution [...]” (“*se l’On. Deputazione provinciale non avesse opposto la diga di una deliberazione restrittiva [...]*”).

Despite the many improvements he made, Director Colonna considered his work unfinished. His most ambitious goal remained in “a state of fervent aspiration” (“*in istato di fervida aspirazione*”): “that of widening [...] the field of practical training by establishing a kindergarten” (“*quello di slargare [...] il campo del tirocinio, facendo sorgere un giardino d’infanzia*”). He expressed his surprise that in a “center of culture and civilization” (“*centro di coltura e di civiltà*”) like Catania, “a committee of generous individuals” (“*un comitato di generosi*”) had not yet formed to found such a crucial institution for “the human development” (“*nella formazione dell’uomo*”). Believing that a kindergarten could only be started through private initiative, the director put himself “at the head of the movement” (“*alla testa del movimento*”), prepared “to endure moral and material sacrifices if necessary” (“*a sostenere, al bisogno, sacrifici morali e materiali*”), and began the procedures with the help of the mayor and the administrators of the *Conservatorio della Purità*.

In 1890, according to the Boselli Law, the Normal School’s preparatory course was expanded with a third class. On January 4, 1891, the School was named after the palermitan poet Giuseppina Turrisi Colonna, a “pioneer” of feminism in sicilian *Risorgimento* (1822-1848). During this period, the Catania’s Normal School was considered “one of the most flourishing and thriving in the Country” (“*una delle più rigogliose e fiorenti dello Stato*”)³⁸⁹. Following the Law of July 12, 1896, on the organization of complementary and normal schools, the Municipality was responsible for annexing a kindergarten to the Normal School for the students’ practical training. That year, Professor Antonino Amore, who had succeeded Colonna as director, took great care to ensure his predecessor’s aspiration could be realized: the kindergarten was established in 1897, after a long process that led to the annexation of the terrace overlooking the garden of the *Educandato Regina Margherita*³⁹⁰; at that time, the “Turrisi Colonna” Normal School was one of the few, in Italy, to boast a froebelian

³⁸⁸ It is said, regarding a visit to the city of Acireale, that “the cheerfulness was the most genuine, the entertainment [...] comforting” (“*l’allegria fu la più schietta, il divertimento [...] confortante*”), and that in the evening the students “returned to the college refreshed and festive, full of well-being and so many beautiful ideas, and in the morning, satisfaction could be read on their joyful faces” (“*rientrarono in collegio ristorate e festanti, piene di benessere e di tante belle idee, e la mattina la soddisfazione si leggeva sui visi giulivi*”). *Relazione generale intorno alla R. Scuola Normale Femminile di Catania per l’anno scolastico 1887-1888*, cit.

³⁸⁹ F. Impallomeni, op. cit., p. 21. P. Militello, *La «Regia Scuola Normale Femminile» di Catania e l’intitolazione del 1891 a Giuseppina Turrisi Colonna (1822-1848)*, in «Gli Argonauti. Rivista di Studi storico-educativi e Pedagogici», III (1-2), 2023, pp. 17-30.

³⁹⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 33, b. 58, Municipio di Catania Ufficio II, *Estimativo per la sistemazione di un giardino d’infanzia nella Scuola Normale femminile*, Catania, February 24, 1897.

course³⁹¹. With a royal decree on November 24, 1895, the name of the preparatory school was changed to the “complementary course” (“*corso complementare*”), becoming an institute of general culture with its own distinct character and purpose: a first-grade female secondary school aimed at offering “sufficient preparation for the noble duties of a woman in the family and in society” (“*preparazione sufficiente ai nobili uffici della donna nella famiglia e nella società*”)³⁹². The following year, a full 400 students were enrolled³⁹³.

In September 1899, the Institute was transferred to the building of the municipal *Scuola Modello* on Viale S. Euplio, and from 1902, under the direction of Domenico Restivo, the student population increased year by year, necessitating the opening of several additional classes and branches³⁹⁴. In the first decade of the century, the “Turrisi Colonna” boasted prominent figures in the cultural landscape of the time among its faculty: the poetess Cecilia Deni, the writer Federico De Roberto, the pedagogue Sante Giuffrida, the mathematicians Giuseppe Marletta and Vincenzo Amato, the historiographer Beatrice Fagioli Vaccalluzzo, the geographer and cartographer Sebastiano Crinò, and Salvatore Santangelo, who from the 1920s was a professor of romance philology at the Royal University of Catania³⁹⁵.

3.4. The introduction of new teaching methods in late-19th-century primary schools, and the profession of female teacher between resistance, enthusiasm, and material hardships

Despite the considerable effort put forth by the Government, the Province, and the Municipality, as well as by school authorities and the various directors, for its establishment and launch, and despite the enthusiasm that accompanied its opening, the Normal School of Catania, in its early years, had struggled to meet the huge demand for female teachers in the provincial territory. It also encountered significant resistance in its attempt to dismantle a consolidated tradition in female instruction and education, one that did not prioritize entrusting girls to qualified teachers but instead focused on their moral education and preparing them for domestic life in view of their future wifely duties. As we have seen, it was only between the 1870s and 1880s that the Institute consolidated and expanded its educational program, reflecting a growing national and local awareness of the importance of teacher training for the Country’s modernization. This process contributed to a shift, even in the Province’s primary schools, from a predominantly notional and mnemonic teaching approach to teaching practices based on observation, direct experience, and attention to the individual abilities of students, in line with the positivist pedagogical currents that had been gaining ground since the 1880s.

Although obtaining a teaching certificate was an essential step for young women, projecting them toward new goals of autonomy and social mobility, the transition from the status of “normalist students” to that of “primary teachers” opened up new and often tougher challenges. These included not only strict control over their moral conduct and private lives, exercised by local communities and school authorities, but also experiences of profound social isolation and significant material difficulties, especially for teachers assigned to schools in rural areas or far from populated centers. School building continued to be affected by numerous problems, and the quality of the scholastic experience was often compromised by the lack of essential teaching materials, the absence of adequate facilities in terms of structure, hygiene and health, and by overcrowded classrooms due to

³⁹¹ Ivi, pp. 21-23.

³⁹² *Relazione al re premessa al r.d. 24 novembre 1895*, in *Bollettino ufficiale del ministero della Pubblica Istruzione* 1896, pp. 22-24.

³⁹³ S. A. Costa, op. cit., p. 273.

³⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁵ F. Impallomeni, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

the custom of combining multiple classes, with a significant impact on student performance and teachers' well-being.

The issues emerging from this complex scenario will be outlined and explored in the following subsections, using biographical notes capable of shedding light to the practical dimension of the teaching profession, as well as on the adaptation and professional development strategies implemented by the women protagonists.

3.4.1. The evolution of female primary education in the Province (1870s/80s-early 20th century) and the adoption of new pedagogy

From June 1872 to January 1873, the periodical «*L'Educatore Siciliano*» published a serialized report by Inspector Giuseppe Perotti on the condition of schools in the districts of Catania, Caltagirone, and Acireale for the 1870-71 school year, drawing the attention of parents, teachers, administrative and school authorities to the deplorable state of popular education in the Province³⁹⁶. The prevalence of agricultural work and widespread daily poverty created a severely depressed economic and socio-cultural environment that discredited education and left school buildings unpopulated³⁹⁷. A necessary condition for improving this situation was the adoption of more robust legislation on compulsory schooling, capable of instilling “in everyone’s conscience the feeling of the duty that falls upon every father to provide for the education of his children” (“*nella coscienza di tutti il sentimento del dovere che incombe ad ogni padre di provvedere all’educazione dei figli*”)³⁹⁸. At the same time, it was crucial to encourage and promote the education of girls, in a cultural system that was still prejudicial toward the female gender and reluctant to support the goals of women’s emancipation in society³⁹⁹. The articles published in the newspaper, which was founded by the teacher Sante Giuffrida (later a professor of pedagogy at the Normal School of Catania), anticipated the urgency of the reform that Minister Coppino would introduce with the law of July 15, 1877, no. 3961.

The teaching norms for the 1877-78 school year (“*Norme didattiche per l’anno scolastico 1877-78*”), issued by Inspector Firmino Borghesio of the Acireale District⁴⁰⁰, fully reflect the government’s intention to give new momentum to the national literacy project, insisting on compulsory education and the consolidation of a free, secular primary school. The inspector urged teachers to fight “in the field of civilization” (“*nel campo della civiltà*”), not by wielding “bayonets, cannons, or machine guns” (“*non le bajonette, non i cannoni, non le mitragliere*”) but by arming themselves with “another means of war – the sanction of the obligation of elementary education” (“*un altro mezzo di guerra – la sanzione all’obbligo dell’istruzione elementare*”). In compliance with the new law in force, the introduction of the first notions of the duties of man and citizen and the rudiments of the decimal metric system was recommended for the lower grades. The document also authorized, where necessary, limiting the hours dedicated to teaching Catechism and Sacred History.

The application of the Coppino reform significantly increased the demand for teaching staff, especially in rural areas, where the extension of mandatory schooling made the opening of new schools urgent. This led to a new wave of “continental” teachers, as can be inferred from the presence

³⁹⁶ G. Perotti, *Relazione sulle condizioni dell’istruzione elementare e popolare nei circondari di Catania, Caltagirone ed Acireale per l’anno scolastico 1870-71*, in «*L'Educatore Siciliano*», no. 7, Catania, June 4, 1872, pp. 105-106; *ivi*, no. 8, Catania, June 15, 1872, pp. 126-127; *ivi*, no. 10, Catania, July 6, 1872, pp. 145-148; *ivi*, no. 11, Catania, July 15, 1872, pp. 164-167; *ivi*, no. 12, Catania, August 3, 1872, pp. 180-182; *ivi*, no. 13, Catania, August 14, 1872, pp. 198-200; *ivi*, no. 16, Catania, September 25, 1872, pp. 244-245; *ivi*, no. 22, Catania, January 26, 1873, pp. 341-346 (see also L. Todaro, *op. cit.*, p. 36).

³⁹⁷ G. Perotti, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

³⁹⁸ G. Pulina, *L’istruzione obbligatoria*, in «*L'Educatore Siciliano*», Catania, February 12, 1873, p. 358.

³⁹⁹ L. C., *La donna siciliana. Lettera alla Direzione*, in «*L'Educatore Siciliano*», Catania, August 3, 1872, pp. 177-180; A. Longo, *Sull’educazione della donna*, in «*L'Educatore Siciliano*», Catania, February 12, 1873, pp. 360-363.

⁴⁰⁰ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 351, R. Ispezione degli Studi del Circondario di Acireale, *Norme didattiche per l’anno scolastico 1877-78 e Collegio per le Figlie degli Insegnanti*, Acireale, October 16, 1877.

in schools in the Province of Catania of numerous female teachers who had obtained their teaching certification outside of Sicily in the last third of the century. The emphasis placed on compulsory schooling began to produce some positive effects, prompting even those municipal administrations that had not yet fulfilled their legal obligations to take action for primary education. Among the municipalities that mobilized in this way was Agira, which had only begun public education in the 1879-80 school year⁴⁰¹. However, in the following year, the shortage of qualified teachers was again cited as a reason for appointing teachers without a license, who were nonetheless deemed suitable based on their demonstrated practical skills⁴⁰².

Despite attempts at regulatory adaptation, low school attendance remained a persistent problem. In Agira, for instance, in March 1885, out of 535 girls of compulsory school age, only 174 attended school, and 90 of these were no longer subject to the obligation due to their age; this was a disproportion that the Inspector of the Nicosia District, Onorio Bersotti, called disheartening, and which municipal authorities attributed to the need for many peasant families to employ child labor in agricultural and domestic work⁴⁰³. The records of the annual inspection visits to schools in the Province show that the case of Agira was not isolated, and that several primary classes were dramatically poor in students, with school attendance sometimes on the verge of irrelevance. For example, in the 1884-85 school year, the teacher Giuseppina Samperi Majoli ran a class in Troina with just 3 regular students⁴⁰⁴; in 1888-89, Elettra Frediani had only 8 students in a second-grade class in Ramacca⁴⁰⁵; and in 1895-96, Angelina Vinciguerra, a teacher in the first, second e third grade at the school of Camporotondo, counted a mere 5 attendees⁴⁰⁶. The scarcity of students would continue to plague some female elementary schools even in the early 20th century: in 1907-08, in the single mixed-gender school of Fiumefreddo, Benedetta Pedalino taught only 7 students⁴⁰⁷; in the same year, Rosalia Marano, in the first and second grades of the mixed-gender school in the Santa Maria La Scala hamlet of Acireale, taught a total of 9 students⁴⁰⁸; in 1908-09, Giuseppina Finocchiaro, a teacher at the single school of the S. Cosimo hamlet of Acireale, had just 4 students⁴⁰⁹; in 1913-14, Annetta Pace, in the second grade of the mixed-gender school in Passopisciaro, a hamlet of Castiglione, counted 6 students⁴¹⁰, while in the first grade of the mixed-gender school in the Sciarra

⁴⁰¹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, bb. 23-30, Anno scolastico 1880-81, *Prospetto delle Scuole Elementari del Comune di Agira*, Agira, December 2, 1880.

⁴⁰² The Mayor of Agira claimed to have appointed these teachers after examining their ability to carry out “practical teaching” (“*insegnamento pratico*”), and that, in that sense, there could be no doubt of their suitability: “*che quando si ricava dai medesimi lo scopo che si pretende da Istitutori legalmente abilitati, chiaramente si distrugge il dubbio del niuno profitto*” (“that when the purpose intended for legally certified teachers is achieved by these same individuals, the doubt of no profit is clearly eliminated”). The Mayor assured the Deputy Prefect of the District of Nicosia that these appointments were in any case provisional, as he was waiting to replace these teachers with young people who were attending the normal school and who, “being subsidized by the Municipality to obtain their certification, will have to satisfy their obligations to it” (“*essendo sussidiati dal Comune per il conseguimento della patente avranno da soddisfare degli obblighi verso lo stesso*”). ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, bb. 23-30, Municipio della Città di Agira, *Pubblica istruzione. Sussidio governativo*, Agira, February 25, 1880.

⁴⁰³ The disparity between attendees and those required to attend was even more striking in the case of boys: 188 out of 608. ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, bb. 23-30, R. Ispettore scolastico del circondario di Nicosia, *Domanda per sussidio a favore della Pubblica Istruzione*, Nicosia, March 31, 1885.

⁴⁰⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 15, Ispettorato del circondario di Nicosia, *Troina. Istanza Majoli per sussidio*, Nicosia, June 30, 1885.

⁴⁰⁵ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 16, *verbale di visita Frediani Elettra*, school year 1888-89.

⁴⁰⁶ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 41, *verbale di visita Vinciguerra Angelina*, school year 1895-96.

⁴⁰⁷ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 32, *verbale di visita Pedalino Benedetta*, school year 1907-08.

⁴⁰⁸ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 25, *verbale di visita Marano Rosalia*, school year 1907-08.

⁴⁰⁹ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 17, *verbale di visita Finocchiaro Giuseppina*, school year 1908-09.

⁴¹⁰ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 31, *verbale di visita Pace Annetta*, school year 1913-14.

hamlet of Giarre, run by the teacher Remigia De Maria, there were only 2 registered⁴¹¹. These figures paint a picture of a state school that was still fragile and marginal, especially in rural and mountainous areas, where access to female education remained discontinuous, precarious, and deeply hampered by the social and economic conditions of the territory.

In reporting the low attendance at schools, the female teachers frequently complained about families' lack of interest in their daughters' education. In the Bongiardo hamlet of the Municipality of Zafferana Etnea, the teacher Aschieri, who taught at a mixed-gender school, noted a continuously decreasing attendance not only among the male students, who were obligated to be absent because they were involved in farm work, but also among the female students, whose families "seemed to consider school a serious expense and a waste of time" (*"pareva la scuola essere grave spesa e perditempo"*)⁴¹². Teacher Grazia Nicolosi, from the mixed-gender school in the Curia section of Catania, also lamented the parents' lack of interest in education: although she had no complaints about the results achieved by her students, she believed they would have been "even better if her diligence had been matched by the industriousness of their families" (*"migliori ancora sarebbero stati, se alla di lei operosità si fosse associata la solerzia delle loro famiglie"*)⁴¹³.

Further testimonies show how the persistent reluctance to send daughters to school was often due to the poverty of a certain segment of the population, which strongly influenced attendance rates. In March 1879, teacher Carmela Rapisarda of the lower-grade female school in S. Giovanni Galermo stated that she was teaching just 10 students, as "no mother thought of having her little girls instructed and educated" (*"nessuna madre pensa[va] di fare istruire ed educare le sue figliuoline"*), while also reporting the case of a girl who, in order to attend school, had asked the teacher to "provide her with the necessary supplies" (*"provvederle il necessario"*)⁴¹⁴. Sometimes, the families' inability to purchase school materials and the municipalities' unwillingness to remedy this with special subsidies caused serious harm to the students' progress. This was the case for the first-grade students in the Municipality of Gravina, who by the end of the 1876-77 school year could barely write because the Municipality had not provided pencils or slates, and "the families had no intention of buying them" (*"le famiglie non [intendevano] affatto comperarle"*)⁴¹⁵.

In other cases, the number of students dwindled throughout the year not only due to parental negligence but also to the absence of the necessary furniture to accommodate them in the school. This was attested to, in the 1877-78 school year, by Sebastiana Nicolosi, a teacher at the school in the S. Cosimo section of Catania, who stated that it was the lack of "desks where such a large student body could sit" that "caused the class to become deserted" (*fu la mancanza di "banchi dove poter sedere una scolaresca così numerosa" a "cagion[are] lo spopolamento della classe"*)⁴¹⁶. The irregular attendance meant that many students were not admitted to exams due to excessive absences or that

⁴¹¹ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 15, *verbale di visita De Maria Remigia*, school year 1913-14.

⁴¹² ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Relazione della scuola di Bongiardo*, Bongiardo, August 16, 1876.

⁴¹³ The teacher complained, in particular, that "throughout the entire school year, she never had the pleasure of seeing a parent who cared to be informed of the conduct and education of their son or daughter" (*"in tutto il corso dell'anno scolastico non ebbe mai il piacere di veder un genitore il quale si desse cura di essere informato della condotta e dell'istruzione del figlio o della figlia"*). ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Ill.mo Sign. Provveditore*, Catania, August 9, 1878.

⁴¹⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, bb. 48-63, *Scuola Unica Femminile di S. Giovanni Galermo*, S. Giovanni Galermo, March 5, 1879.

⁴¹⁵ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Il Sign. Sindaco del Comune di Gravina, Sulle scuole elementari del Comune*, Catania, June 11, 1877.

⁴¹⁶ The teacher was saddened to report that among the students who left the school, "there were some of the best, who could have passed the final exams with a happy outcome" (*"ve ne erano delle migliori, che avrebbero potuto risulter con esito felice agli esami finali"*). ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Scuola elementare del Comune di Catania. Quartiere S. Cosimo. Classe I^a Sez. Inf.^e. Relazione scolastica*, Catania, August 12, 1878.

they did not acquire the necessary knowledge to be promoted, making it difficult to gather a sufficient number to activate the subsequent grades. Consequently, the decision was sometimes made to admit students to higher grades even though they did not meet the requirements: this is shown by the case of teacher Marianna Guzzardi Borzi, who, into the second-grade class of the Borgo section of Catania, received three unpromoted students and eleven who were nearly illiterate, admitted solely out of numerical necessity⁴¹⁷.

Despite numerous challenges, the quality of teaching in primary schools began to show slow signs of evolution. Toward the end of the 1870s, several annual school reports revealed a growing focus on comprehensive education, with clear pestalozzian influences aimed at shaping both “the heart” (*“il cuore”*) and “the intellect” (*“l’intelletto”*)⁴¹⁸. However, these ideas were still frequently accompanied by injunctions with a catechetical and moralistic tone, which continued to give a central role to the teaching of religion and sacred history as the “easiest means to make people hate vice and love virtue” (*“mezzi più facili per far odiare il vizio ed amare la virtù”*)⁴¹⁹. There was no lack of resistance toward an education perceived as excessively emancipatory, detached from the moral dimension and from models considered desirable for young female students. An example is the opinion expressed by Giovannina Grassi, a teacher in a mixed-gender school in the Salette section of Catania, who at the end of the 1877-78 school year argued that a school that did not produce “honest, educated, and virtuous citizens” (*“cittadini onesti, educati e virtuosi”*) was useless, adding that “instruction alone was often more harmful than useful” (*“l’istruzione sola [fosse] molte volte più dannosa che utile”*)⁴²⁰. A similar opinion can be found in the report of teacher Diana Maggio, who taught at the school in the Sant’Agostino section of Catania: declaring herself “highly convinced [...] that the office of teacher entrusted to her was a sublime office” (*“altamente convinta [...] che l’ufficio di maestra a lei conferito era ufficio sublime”*), she emphasized that she had “neglected nothing on her part to unite instruction with education, giving her students a spontaneous greeting as a mother and sister” (*“nulla dal canto suo [aveva] trasandato per congiungere l’istruzione all’educazione, dando alle sue alunne una salutatione spontanea da madre e da sorella”*)⁴²¹.

At the same time, there were significant openings toward the adoption of the practical and experimental method, in line with increasingly scientific teaching approaches. In August 1878, Elisabetta Failla, a teacher at the school in the Angelo Custode section of Catania, declared that she had adopted the “method prescribed and preached by modern Pedagogists” (*“metodo prescritto e predicato dai moderni Pedagogisti”*), training her students “in the practical application of all the subjects already taught, in order to prevent them from being forgotten and to achieve the desired goal: progress” (*“nella applicazione pratica di tutte le materie già insegnate, e ciò per non essere dalle medesime dimenticate e per ottenersi lo scopo desiderato: il progresso”*)⁴²². Just as aligned with modern pedagogy was Filomena D’Amico, a teacher at the school in the S. Marco section of Catania, who, in teaching the decimal metric system, had preferred to train her students “in solving problems” (*“nella soluzione di problemi”*) rather than “in retaining theories” (*“nella ritenzione di teorie”*)⁴²³.

⁴¹⁷ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Relazione Scolastica*, Catania, August 28, 1878.

⁴¹⁸ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, various papers, August- September 1878.

⁴¹⁹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Relazione Scolastica per l’anno 1877-78. Scuola femminile 1^a Inf^e. Mandamento Duomo*, Catania, August 18, 1878.

⁴²⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴²¹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Relazione scolastica finale dell’anno 1877-78 della scuola femminile S. Agostino sez. inferiore Mandamento S. Marco*, Catania, August 15, 1878.

⁴²² ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Scuola femminile unica quartiere Angelo Custode. Relazione anno scolastico 1877-78, [...]*.

⁴²³ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Ill.mo Signor Provveditore*, Catania, September 4, 1878.

The teachers' work was also characterised by significant examples of commitment to educational innovation, and, although they often operated in contexts of considerable material and infrastructural hardship, some of them distinguished themselves with cutting-edge initiatives. An exemplary case was that of Carmela Gangemi, a teacher in Nicolosi, who in 1887 received a certificate of commendable service from the Provincial School Council for having set up a savings bank and a social insurance fund for public accidents in the school, for having created a small teaching museum to apply the objective method, and for having her students take school outings⁴²⁴. Another example was Giuseppa Mangano Caterini, a teacher in Catania in 1912-13, who, at her own expense, created a small school museum to give her teaching a practical focus⁴²⁵.

As evidence of this growing professionalism, between 1900 and 1910, several female teachers enhanced their skills by acquiring additional qualifications beyond their normal license, attending courses on hygiene and child education and courses on educational manual labor. These teachers included: Angelica Russo, a teacher in Zafferana; Remigia De Maria, a teacher in Giarre; Ortensia Pagliaro, a teacher in Aci S. Antonio; Maria Teresa Crea, a teacher in Grammichele and later in Sortino; and Concetta Marano, a teacher in Acireale and Giarre⁴²⁶. Finally, there was no shortage of particular forms of pedagogical proactivity, which led teachers to produce essays and reflections on educational themes. Anna Distefano, a teacher in various locations in Catania, was the author of school booklets (*Storia della Patria, brevi racconti per la 3 classe elementare compilati a norma dei programmi governativi*, pub. G. Marziani, Catania 1903); she also wrote pedagogical reflections that ranged from outlining a female ideal connected to the goals of moralization and civilization (*L'educazione della donna*, published in a collection of sketches titled "*Primizie*", pub. G. Marziani, Catania 1902) to discussing pedagogical empiricism and the application of positive psychology to educational practices (*Educazione positiva e negativa*, pub. G. Marziani, Catania 1907)⁴²⁷. Cesira Tizzoni, a teacher first in Mascali and then in Aci S. Antonio, in her writing *Educazione della memoria* (Catania, pub. G. Galatola 1910), explored the concepts of nature, species, generation, and the physical and social environment: she emphasized the importance of understanding the psychic act and the functions of "conserving, reproducing, recognizing, localizing, and objectifying the various states of consciousness" ("*conservare, riprodurre, riconoscere, localizzare ed obiettivare i vari stati di coscienza*"), before moving on to practice as an act of modification, thus demonstrating an openness to a pedagogy nourished by positive science.⁴²⁸

Toward the end of the 19th century, there was also a more significant entry of certified female teachers into schools run by private individuals or moral entities, most of whom obtained their qualification in the last third of the century⁴²⁹. Despite this, the internal organization and routine of these

⁴²⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 17, *Notizie per la Scuola femminile (Classe unica) diretta dalla maestra Gangemi Carmela*, Nicolosi, April 2, 1887. Despite her own intellectual limitations, teacher Gangemi spared no effort and did everything in her power to improve her teaching, as confirmed by the report of the school inspection for the 1897-98 school year (ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 19, *verbale di visita Gangemi Carmela*, school year 1897-98).

⁴²⁵ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 27, *verbale di visita Mangano Caterini Giuseppa*, school year 1912-13.

⁴²⁶ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, bb. 12, 15, 25, 31, 33, various papers (data available from inspection reports, individual records, and the legal, economic and moral status reports of the teachers).

⁴²⁷ The booklet in question interprets old and new insights of pedagogical thought: from the question of the natural human aptitude for educability, and of person as a "*tabula rasa* on which everything one wants, good or bad, can be written" (*tabula rasa in cui si può scrivere tutto quello che si vuole di buono o di cattivo*), to the discussion of psychological functioning and the importance of enhancing intellectual faculties through practice (the cited printed texts were found at ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 15, *fascicolo della maestra Anna Distefano*).

⁴²⁸ C. Tropea Tizzoni, *Educazione della memoria*, stab. G. Galatola, Catania 1910 (found at ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 39).

⁴²⁹ In the archive of the *Provveditorato agli Studi della Provincia di Catania*, it is possible to find the following certified female teachers at schools run by private institutions or moral entities: Maria Alladio (certification from Nizza Monferrato 1907), teaching at the *Collegio Immacolata* in Trecastagni in 1913-14; Maria Bellino (higher license from Catania 1902), teaching in a private school in Giarre in 1906-07; Concetta Bellomia (certification from Noto 1907), teaching at the

institutions continued to compromise the students' performance. In August 1878, Teresa Maggiulli, a teacher at the school of the *Conservatorio San Vincenzo De Paoli* in Catania, reported that she had done what she could to ensure teaching continuity, having to deal with the "habits of the said pious place" ("*abitudini del detto pio luogo*"), which required students to be absent from school for 3 or 4 consecutive days to dedicate themselves to domestic chores⁴³⁰. In such institutions, which were formally dedicated to female education, the actual possibility of receiving an education was limited by the fact that the prevailing culture was more focused on discipline than on learning. Carmela Gargano, a teacher at the *Reclusorio del Buon Pastore* in Catania, observed that the students' lack of diligence was "caused [...] not by the quantity of schoolwork, but by the habit of studying little" ("*cagionata [...] non dalla quantità dei lavori di scuola, ma dall'abitudine di studiar poco*")⁴³¹. Similarly, Francesca Longo, a teacher at the *Reclusorio delle Vergini al Borgo*, acknowledged that it was "proper in *Reclusori* to dedicate oneself to domestic work rather than to the study of letters" ("*proprio nei Reclusori dedicarsi ai lavori donneschi anziché allo studio delle lettere*")⁴³². However, there were also signs of openness and renewed attention to education in these institutions: in 1872, the teacher of the municipal school in Aci Catena subtracted an hour and a half from the school schedule to teach nine girls from the local *Collegio* who were eager to become literate⁴³³; and in 1880, the *Collegio di Maria* of Viagrande, in light of the excellent results achieved by the second-

Istituto S. Rosalia in Acireale in 1907-08; Rachele Benincasa (certification from Catania 1904), teaching at the *Collegio S. Rosalia* in Acireale in 1910-11; Maria Bonanno (nun) (higher license from Rome 1895), teaching at the *Collegio Buon Pastore* in Acireale in 1907-08; Clara Borello (nun) (lower license s.n.), teaching at the *Collegio S. Giuseppe* in Aci Catena in 1897-98; Giuseppina Busà (nun) (lower license from Catania 1890), teaching at the *Collegio Angelo Raffaele* in Acireale in 1910-11; Grazia Capizzi (certification from Catania 1910), teaching at the *Collegio Buon Pastore* in Acireale in 1910-11; Amalia Capuzzo (lower license s.n.), teaching in a private school in Trecastagni in 1901-02; Angela Carbone Longobardo (certification from Catania 1901), teaching in a private school in Catania in 1907-08; Fede Carlotto (nun) (certification from Turin 1907), teaching at the *Collegio Santo Nocito* in Acireale in 1910-11; Maria Carmela Censabella (certification from Catania 1910), teaching at the *Collegio di Maria* in Leonforte in 1910-11; Barbara Cianciulli (nun) (certification from Avellino 1907), teaching at the *Orfanotrofio S. Luigi* in Caltagirone in 1913-14; Silvia Cornaglia (nun) (certification from Rome 1898), teaching at the *Collegio Addolorata* in Riposto in 1911-12; Vittoria Corno (certification from Alessandria 1900), teaching at the *Collegio Immacolata* in Mascali in 1910-11; Maria De Luis (certification from Nizza Monferrato 1900), teaching at the *Collegio Immacolata* in Mascali in 1908-09; Benedetta Garelli (lower license from Turin 1869), teaching at the *Orfanotrofio Immacolata* in Riposto in 1908-09; Caterina Grillo (higher license from Genoa 1884), teaching at the *Collegio Immacolata* in Mascali in 1888-89; Maria Elvira La Rosa (certification from Catania 1909), teaching at the *Collegio Immacolata* in Giarre in 1910-11; Margherita La Vecchia (higher license s.n. 1897), teaching in a private school on via Cavour in Riposto in 1888-89; Carmela Leotta (higher license from Catania 1887), teaching at the *Collegio S. Giovanni Nepomuceno* in Acireale in 1888-89; Ottavia Maccone (higher license from Turin 1887), teaching in a private school in Mascali in 1905-06; Maria Marino (nun) (lower license from Turin 1870), teaching at the *Collegio S. Giuseppe* in Aci Catena in 1897-98; Caterina Pagliasotti (nun) (higher license from Turin 1887), teaching at the *Collegio Immacolata* in Mascali in 1888-89; Alessina Piretta (higher license s.n. 1894), teaching at the *Conservatorio delle Vergini* in Trecastagni in 1899-1900; Anna Scagliarini (higher license from Genoa 1882), teaching in a private school in the Santa Lucia section of Aci Catena in 1888-89; Giuseppina Sonza Reonda (certification from Turin 1902), teaching at the *Orfanotrofio Addolorata* in Riposto in 1908-09.

⁴³⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Illustrissimi Signori Ispettori*, Catania, August 19, 1878.

⁴³¹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Relazione della scuola di 3^a classe femm.^{le} Recl.^{rio} del Buonpastore. Anno scolastico 1877-78*, Catania, August 28, 1878.

⁴³² ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Scuole elementari del Comune di Catania. Relazione scolastica annuale*, Catania, August 23, 1878.

⁴³³ The reference is likely to the boarders of the *Collegio S. Giuseppe*. Inspector Perotti, while appreciating the initiative, believed it was more appropriate that those young women, if they were truly motivated to learn, should enrol in the municipal school on a regular basis. ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 258, R. Ispettorato Scolastico di Catania, Caltagirone ed Acireale, *Condizioni dell'Istruzione e proposte di provvedimenti in Aci-Catena*, Catania, September 15, 1872.

grade students, made its premises available free of charge to allow for the opening of a higher-level elementary school course⁴³⁴.

3.4.2. Working and living conditions of female teachers in Catania. A picture of difficulty and resilience

Beyond the general norms and declarations of principle, the teaching profession in the province of Catania continued to be practiced in extremely difficult material conditions, subjecting female teachers to daily, severe tests of endurance, both economically and logistically, as well as morally and psychologically. Schools, especially in peripheral and rural contexts, were often in squalid conditions due to unsanitary and inadequate premises, the lack of suitable furniture, and insufficient teaching materials. The teachers' economic conditions were just as precarious, due to chronic payment irregularities and delays, as well as meager pay that most of the time barely met the legal minimum.

Sometimes, these teachers accepted a post only on the promise of a pay supplement. This was the case in 1869 for Domenica Distefano, who was appointed in Mineo with a compensation of only 150 lire: the Mayor begged the Provincial School Council to pay the subsidy she had been granted in addition to her meager salary, since the teacher "would not have come [there] with just the legal salary" ("*non sarebbe [lì] venuta col solo stipendio di legge*")⁴³⁵. A similar situation occurred in 1875 with Grazia Liardo, a teacher in Nicolosi, who had accepted the position only on the promise, which was later broken, of a 200 lire supplement to her 400 lire salary; this prompted her to file a complaint with the Prefect⁴³⁶. In 1882, the Inspector of the Acireale District, referring to a request for a subsidy from teacher Agata Di Bella, who taught in the San Giovanni hamlet of the Municipality of Giarre, stated bitterly that she had to "resign herself to the same fate as so many destitute companions in misfortune" ("*rassegnarsi alla stessa sorte di tanti derelitti compagni di sventura*")⁴³⁷. This demonstrated how critical and widespread the economic problems were among elementary teachers, and how numerous the complaints about their salary situation were.

Particularly arduous working conditions were recorded especially in the village schools, where, to contain costs in the municipal budget, it was common practice to combine multiple classes under the guidance of a single teacher, who thus found herself managing unsustainable numbers, and not always receiving a salary proportional to the service rendered. In the 1880-81 school year, the sisters Teresa and Giulia Lo Presti, teachers in Biancavilla, were forced to run two classes of 80 students each for several months, working during afternoon hours and giving up their daily rest without receiving any remuneration for the additional workload⁴³⁸. In the same year, Giovannina Micalles, a teacher in Ramacca, had to hire an assistant, "paying for her work out of her own pocket" ("*rimunerandone del*

⁴³⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, bb. 48-63, Seduta straordinaria del Consiglio Comunale, Viagrande, August 22, 1880. At the beginning of that same year, the generosity of the Municipality of Viagrande in providing for public education was recognized and praised, earning it a bronze medal from the Ministry (Id., Regno d'Italia, Ministero dell'Istruzione Pubblica, *Medaglia di bronzo al Comune di Viagrande*, Rome, February 9, 1880).

⁴³⁵ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 2, Regno d'Italia, Provincia di Catania, Circondario di Caltagirone, Mandamento di Mineo, Comune di Mineo, *Su sussidio alla Maestra*, Mineo, March 26, 1869.

⁴³⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 6, *Ill.mo Sign. Prefetto della Provincia di Catania*, Catania, March 8, 1875.

⁴³⁷ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 12, R. Ispettorato scolastico pel Circondario di Acireale, *Istanza per sussidio Di Bella Agata – Giarre*, Acireale, August 16, 1882. Teacher Di Bella would obtain a 40 lire subsidy in January 1883 (Id., Regno d'Italia, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Divisione per l'istruzione primaria e popolare, Rome, January 2, 1883).

⁴³⁸ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 15, various papers, August- October 1885.

proprio l'opera”), to manage a first-grade female class with 80 little girls⁴³⁹; and, in that period, Giuseppina Dell’Olio taught in a single holiday school in Acireale with 75 students⁴⁴⁰.

Class overcrowding was often aggravated by the inadequate structural conditions of school buildings, which made teachers work even more difficult. In 1885-86, the Inspector reported that Virginia Ferro, a teacher in Mascalucia, was a “good teacher” (*brava maestra*”), but she had not achieved what she could have, due to the excessively large class of 55 students and the three sections she was managing alone⁴⁴¹. In 1907-08, Francesca Scollo, a teacher in Assoro, was managing 59 students in a room said to be lacking light and air, so that “the crampedness of the classroom and the deficiency of desks prevented the students’ real progress” (*l’angustia dell’aula e la deficienza di banchi impedi[va] il vero profitto delle alunne*)⁴⁴². Similar hardships were found in 1911-12 in Centuripe, where Carmela Scavone managed 60 students in a dark, damp and unsuitable classroom⁴⁴³, and in Trecastagni, where Angelina Puleio taught a class of 76 little girls in a cramped and unsanitary room, which also lacked any teaching materials⁴⁴⁴. In Aci Catena, in the same year, Pasqualina Panebianco was teaching 68 students in a classroom described as “cold and indecent” (*fredda e indecente*”), and the Inspector noted that “the teacher, in impossible conditions of environment and number of students, cannot carry out a program” (*la maestra, in condizioni impossibili di ambiente e di numero di allievi, non [potesse] svolgere un programma*”), and that the academic and educational performance of the students could only be null⁴⁴⁵.

It was not uncommon for these exhausting living and working conditions to end up compromising the teachers’ health. The aforementioned Elisabetta Failla, assigned in December 1877 to the school in Catania’s Angelo Custode section, walked two miles (three kilometers or more) daily to reach the school, performing her duties “at the sacrifice of her health due to the very long walk” (*con sacrificio della salute a cagion del lunghissimo cammino*)⁴⁴⁶. Albina Rusconi, a teacher in Gagliano in 1886, suffered “immensely” (*immensamente*) from “continuous nervous and hysterical attacks”, which required a long course of treatment⁴⁴⁷; later, she would attribute the onset of her deafness to the poor working conditions, caused, she claimed, by the persistent humidity in the classroom⁴⁴⁸. In June 1888, Maria Costantino, a teacher in Misterbianco, was “gravely ill [due to] indefatigable teaching in a very large school [and] continuous forced shouting” (*gravemente ammalata [a causa] dell’infessso insegnamento impartito in una scuola numerosissima [e] della continua vociferazione forzata*); she needed “rigorous treatment and absolute rest [to avoid] a serious chest disease” (*rigorosa cura e d’un assoluto riposo [per evitare] una grave malattia toracica*)⁴⁴⁹. Still in 1894-95, teacher Giuseppina Anfuso, in service in Zafferana, appeared “very discouraged by the hardships she endured

⁴³⁹ The teacher had been in service at the school for 16 years. ASCT, Pref. serie II, el. 2, b. 19, Istanza di Giovannina Micalles in Soldini, Raddusa, September 29, 1876; Id., b. 20, *Condizioni per proposte dei sussidii agl’Insegnanti benemeriti e delle scuole serali del Circondario di Caltagirone*, Caltagirone, August 30, 1881.

⁴⁴⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 20, *Proposta di sussidii governativi in favore degli Insegnanti nelle Scuole serali e festive del Circondario di Acireale per l’anno scolastico 1880-81*.

⁴⁴¹ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 16, *verbale di visita Ferro Virginia*, school year 1885-86.

⁴⁴² ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 36, *verbale di visita Scollo Francesca*, school year 1907-08.

⁴⁴³ The case of teacher Scavone is an interesting one, as she had obtained a diploma in Pedagogy and Morality in 1910 from the *Scuola Superiore Femminile di Magistero* in Rome. ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 35, *verbale di visita Scavone Carmela*, school year 1911-12.

⁴⁴⁴ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 32, *verbale di visita Puleio Angelina*, school year 1910-11.

⁴⁴⁵ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 31, *verbale di visita Panebianco Pasqualina*, school year 1911-12.

⁴⁴⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Scuola femminile unica quartiere Angelo Custode. Relazione anno scolastico 1877-78*, [...].

⁴⁴⁷ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 16, *Ill.mo Signor R. Provveditore agli Studi di Catania*, Gagliano, April 19, 1886.

⁴⁴⁸ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 33, *verbale di visita Rusconi Albina*, school year 1914-15.

⁴⁴⁹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 18, *Ill.mo Sig. Prefetto Presidente il Cons. Prov.le Scolastico*, Misterbianco, June 9, 1888.

to manage such a large group of students” (“*molto avvilita dalle fatiche che sopporta[va] a condurre sì numerosa scolaresca*”), consisting of as many as 85 girls⁴⁵⁰.

In addition to daily toil and financial precariousness, many teachers also experienced a profound sense of social isolation. This stemmed from having to work in sometimes remote locations, under conditions that ended up harming their physical safety and influencing their very perception of their role as fragile and temporary. Giovanna Cavallaro, a teacher in Aci Bonaccorsi in 1880, asked to be transferred to a different residence after an attempted arson at the municipal building and school made her fear “she was not safe in her dwelling” (“*di essere mal sicura nella sua abitazione*”) and prefer to be housed “in a house near others that were inhabited” (“*in una casa vicina ad altre abitate*”)⁴⁵¹.

In some cases, the absence of suitable housing meant that the school space overlapped with the domestic space. The case discovered in December 1876 during an inspection of the school in San Giovanni Galermo is emblematic: it was found that the teacher, having no other place to live, was residing inside the school premises with her husband and her infirm father-in-law⁴⁵²; the Inspector described the environment as a sort of “infirmary” (“*infermeria*”) and, not denying his bewilderment, begged the Mayor to remedy the “unsuitability of keeping beds and other things in a place of respect such as a school” (“*sconvenevolezza di tenere letti ed altro in un luogo di rispetto quale fosse la scuola*”). The case of Agatina Grasso, a teacher in Misterbianco in 1876, who was “forced to resign due to the offenses suffered from some ill-willed individuals in the town” (“*obbligata a dimettersi per le offese sofferte da alcuni malevoli del paese*”), further proves how environmental pressures affected the psychological well-being of the teachers, and even led them to abandon their posts⁴⁵³.

These elements paint a picture of a profession that was both essential and fragile: while it began to embrace new educational models and updated teaching practices, it also continued to expose female teachers to often extreme living conditions, prominently marked by a state of physical and mental exhaustion.

3.4.3. Subsidies for indigent and meritorious teachers. A system of assistance and control

The national popular literacy project, as we have seen, clashed with a critical economic and social context, which was marked by widespread daily poverty and a community not always sensitive to the value of education. In reconstructing the picture of the difficulties that accompanied the spread of public schools in the Province of Catania, one must consider the “economic” dimension of the problem, for which the teaching class also paid the price. The chronic scarcity of resources not only hindered school attendance, failed to provide adequate premises, and fueled family resistance to

⁴⁵⁰ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 1, *verbale di visita Anfuso Giuseppina*, school year 1894-95.

⁴⁵¹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, bb. 23-30, Provincia di Catania, Comune di Aci-Bonaccorsi, *Sussidio per la scuola*, Aci-Bonaccorsi, January 28, 1880.

⁴⁵² “[*Fra i banchi e le panche*] trovavasi un largo letto, o forse due o tre letti riuniti, su assicelle e cavalletti, e sopra questo letto un vecchio, sul quale si vedevano ammucchiate alla rinfusa la coltre e le lenzuola! Questa scena mi fece la più triste impressione quando colla Maestra e quattro scolare, di cui una di 11 anni compiuti, vidi un signore in sulla trentina, che pareva dirigesse i favori di mito di quelle giovani! Seppi poi che il vecchio è il padre del signore, il signore il marito della Maestra, e che Maestra, marito e padre alloggiavano nella scuola, in mancanza d'altro locale” (ASCT, Pref. Serie II, b. 7, R. Ispettorato scolastico del circondario di Acireale, *Relazione sulle condizioni finanziarie e sulla visita alle scuole di alcuni comuni del mandamento di Mascalucia*, December 23, 1876). Teacher Grazia Marino, teaching in Centuripe in 1876-77, had previously taught in the school of S. Giovanni Galermo, complaining about the conditions of the classroom, which was only 5 meters long and just as wide. In addition to lacking the necessary furnishings and teaching materials, it contained two beds and chests, also serving as the teacher's home (ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Al Signor R. Provveditore agli Studj della Provincia*, S. Giovanni Galermo, August 15, 1876).

⁴⁵³ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 19, Consiglio Scolastico Provinciale, *Lire Cento alla Maestra della Scuola mista di Misterbianco, come aumento di stipendio da pagarsi metà in marzo e metà in settembre*, Catania, December 19, 1876.

schooling, but also discouraged teachers from taking up service in schools, especially in rural centers, due to severe structural deficiencies and very low pay.

In this scenario, which was extremely fragile in terms of material resources, the State intervened by providing extraordinary subsidies to support both the maintenance of schools and the financial well-being of male and female teachers⁴⁵⁴. Starting in March 1875, it was recognized that this state intervention needed to be supplemented by a contribution from the Province, which allocated 5.000 lire for the benefit of those municipalities that proved they lacked the necessary means to open and maintain schools, or sufficient resources to increase salaries beyond the legal minimum or to guarantee travel allowances for teachers from distant locations⁴⁵⁵. In the 1877-78 school year, provincial subsidies were assigned to 16 male and female teachers⁴⁵⁶; in 1878-79 to 19⁴⁵⁷; and similar financial aid for the benefit of teachers would also be proposed in the following years⁴⁵⁸.

The system of government and provincial subsidies proved to be a fundamental, if limited, form of economic assistance. It was aimed at both encouraging municipalities to invest more decisively in public education and alleviating the material conditions of the most indigent teachers, especially in contexts where subsistence was at risk and working conditions were penalizing⁴⁵⁹. The numerous petitions submitted by female teachers to obtain these subsidies testify to how the lives of many were exposed to real conditions of misery: the anguished requests, accompanied by “poverty certificates” (“*attestati di povertà*”) intended to prove the legitimacy of the applications, characterize them as decidedly vulnerable individuals, in need of assistance from the authorities to remedy a state of economic and moral hardship. For example, in August 1876, teacher Grazia Marino, who worked at the school in San Giovanni Galermo, addressed her plea to the Education Superintendent (*Provveditore agli Studi*), hoping for a provincial subsidy because her meager communal salary was “not enough to live on” (“*non sufficiente a poter vivere*”)⁴⁶⁰. Another case is that of teacher Marietta D’Amico, who taught in Raddusa, and “dared to hope for [...] those aids which nature was mercilessly

⁴⁵⁴ A first disbursement of government subsidies is documented in 1861, when the State allocated 9.000 lire to the poorest municipalities in the Province. In 1864-65, the Ministry then assigned a sum of 11.044 lire to support the opening of schools and the massive recruitment of elementary teachers, hoping, in the words of the then Inspector Salvatore Majorana, that “the governmental largesse so generously bestowed for the benefit of popular education [would] achieve its very high purpose” (“*le larghezze governative tanto generosamente largite a vantaggio dell’insegnamento popolare [raggiungessero] il loro altissimo scopo*”). A further government subsidy for elementary education in the Province of Catania had been allocated by the Ministry for the 1868-69 school year, in the amount of 6.000 lire. ASCT, Pref. Serie I, el. 1 bis, b. 293, *Sussidio di L. 9000 attribuite nel 1861 dallo stato alle Comuni povere della Provincia di Catania per le scuole serali e domenicali*, 1861; Id., R. Ispettorato e Provveditorato agli studi della Provincia di Catania, *Sussidio governativo 1864-65*, Catania, June 12, 1866; Id., Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 1, *Riporto sulle l. 6000 del sussidio governativo accordato alla Provincia di Catania sul bilancio del 1868 a promuovere l’istruzione elementare*, September 18, 1868.

⁴⁵⁵ It was planned to award eight prizes of 60 lire for the best male teachers in adult male schools and as many for the best female teachers in adult female schools, four prizes of 50 lire to municipal male and female teachers distinguished by merit, in addition to subsidies for teachers engaged in schools for workers, prisoners, and deaf-mutes, provided they were not already subsidized by the government. ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 19, Prefettura della Provincia di Catania. Consiglio Scolastico, Circolare, *Sussidi provinciali*, Catania, March 17, 1875.

⁴⁵⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 19, *Elenco dei Maestri che godono sussidio provinciale per aumento di stipendio anno Scolastico 1877-78*.

⁴⁵⁷ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 19, *Elenco di maestri e delle maestre che godono il sussidio per aumento di stipendio. Anno scolastico 1878-79*.

⁴⁵⁸ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 19, Ufficio Amministrativo Provinciale di Catania, *Elenco dei mandati di pagamento per sussidio straordinario a taluni maestri distinti per merito*, 1881; Id., b. 20, Provincia di Catania, *Anno scolastico 1882-83, Proposta di remunerazioni ai maestri benemeriti delle scuole elementari diurne, scuole serali e festive*.

⁴⁵⁹ As evidence of the importance of these measures, the granting of government, and later provincial, subsidies to schools and teachers occupies a conspicuous portion of the documentation preserved in the Catania Prefecture archives, in the section dedicated to public education, from the first post-unification years until the end of the 1880s (ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, bb. 1-63, 110, 115, various papers).

⁴⁶⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 19, *Al Signor R. provveditore agli studj della provincia di Catania*, S. Giovanni di Galermo, August 7, 1876.

taking away from her” (“*osa[va] sperare [...] quegli aiuti che la natura spietatamente [le] toglie[va]*”)⁴⁶¹.

The subsidy petitions reveal that many female teachers faced heavy family burdens, often due to sick or numerous relatives, which their meager salary was not enough to cover. In 1879, Angela Ferlito, a teacher in San Giovanni La Punta, requested a subsidy to supplement her 550 lire salary “also due to her mother’s illness” (“*causa anche la malattia della propria madre*”) (she would receive a 50 lire subsidy from the Ministry)⁴⁶²; in 1881, Antonietta Ferrara, a teacher in Aci Sant’Antonio, implored for a subsidy to care for her seriously ill brother (she received 50 lire)⁴⁶³; between 1883 and 1885, Maria Giuffrida, a teacher in Gagliano, was married with children and in a “deplorable” (“*deploratissimo*”) state⁴⁶⁴, imploring for help to meet “urgent family needs” (“*bisogni urgenti di famiglia*”) (obtaining a 70 lire subsidy)⁴⁶⁵.

Among the teachers who requested financial support due to difficult family conditions were also Ambrosina Fragale, a teacher in Mirabella in 1885, who shared her 500 lire salary with her sick father and younger sisters⁴⁶⁶, and Rosina Milazzo, a teacher in Mineo in 1886, who, with a “meager annual salary of 513 lire, [had to] provide for her own subsistence and the pressing needs of her parents” (“*il tenue stipendio annuo di l. 513 [doveva] sopperire ai bisogni di sua sussistenza ed alle imperiose esigenze dei propri genitori*”)⁴⁶⁷. In 1887, Rosina Cuccaro, a teacher in Catania, requested a subsidy to cover the long and expensive treatment for her elderly father⁴⁶⁸; in that same year, Concetta Ferro, a teacher in Vizzini and mother of five children, begged for the benevolent charity of the Minister of Public Education “since the poor teacher drew lifeblood from no other source than the school” (“*essendochè da nessuna altra fonte, meno di quella della scuola, la povera maestra attinge[va] acqua*”)⁴⁶⁹. The case of Ester Ferrara is particularly striking: in 1886, the year she obtained her higher-grade license, she lost her parents to a cholera epidemic; finding herself “orphaned and without fortune” (“*orfana e senza beni di fortuna*”), the young woman was taken on to teach in the practice classes of the Normal School, but her monthly salary of 58, 27 lire was not enough to “provide herself with lodging, food, and clothing” (“*provvedere[si] alloggio, vitto, vestiario*”), so she hoped to obtain a subsidy to meet her most urgent needs⁴⁷⁰.

In January 1888, the Ministry had decided to allocate a sum of 288.000 lire in favor of the neediest teachers, to be distributed among the School Councils of the 69 Provinces of the Kingdom⁴⁷¹. Among the first to request access to these grants was Giovanna Micalles, a teacher in Paternò: she was a mother of four unmarried daughters and the wife of an elderly man, and she learned of the allocation through her subscription to the *Unione dei Maestri Elementari d’Italia*. She did not fail to address her desperate prayer to the Superintendent, stating that “if him were to find himself for a moment within

⁴⁶¹ Teacher D’Amico was supplicating for a subsidy because the death of her father, in an asylum in Palermo, and her two brothers, who had departed young, had “thrown her into the most squalid of miseries” (“*gettata nella più squallida delle miserie*”). ASCT, Pref. Serie II, b. 17, *A S. E. Il Ministro dell’Istruzione Pubblica*, Catania, April 29, 1887.

⁴⁶² ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 19, *S. Giovanni La Punta, Istanza di sussidio di Angela Ferlito*, May 2, 1879; Id., b. 9, Regno d’Italia, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Provveditorato centrale per l’istruzione primaria e popolare, *Sussidio alla maestra Ferlito Angela in S. Giovanni La Punta*, Rome, May 23, 1879.

⁴⁶³ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 11, *Aci S. Antonio, Maestra Ferrara sussidio*, April 8, 1881.

⁴⁶⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 13, *All’Ill.mo Sign. Provveditore agli studi della Provincia di Catania*, Catania, April 16, 1883.

⁴⁶⁵ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 15, *Ill.mo Signor R. Provveditore agli Studi di Catania*, Gagliano, June 13, 1885.

⁴⁶⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 15, R. Ispettorato del Circondario di Caltagirone, *Mirabella. Notizie sul conto della maestra Fragale Ambrosina, chiedente sussidio*, August 17, 1885.

⁴⁶⁷ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 17, R. Ispettorato Scolastico del Circondario di Caltagirone, *Mineo. Su d’un’istanza porta per sussidio dalla Maestra Milazzo Rosina*, Caltagirone, September 5, 1886.

⁴⁶⁸ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 18, *A S. E. Il Ministro della P. Istruzione*, Catania, October 4, 1887.

⁴⁶⁹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 21, *A S. E. Il Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione*, Vizzini, June 28, 1887.

⁴⁷⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 18, *Ill.mo Signor Prefetto*, Catania, April 18, 1888.

⁴⁷¹ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, *Estratto dal Bollettino Ufficiale dell’Istruzione, fascicolo di Gennaio 1888, Ripartizione della somma assegnata al Ministero per aiuti straordinari ed urgenti*, Rome, January 21, 1888 (found at ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 18).

the domestic walls of the petitioner, his heart would feel a hand of iron constrict it” (“*se la S. V. Ill.ma si [fosse trovato] per un momento fra le pareti domestiche della supplicante [si sarebbe sentito] stringere il cuore da una mano di ferro*”)⁴⁷². Among the other teachers who requested the subsidy in that same year were Rosalia La Via (teacher in Nicosia), Annunziata Bocchetti (teacher in Scordia), Giuseppa Majoli (teacher in Troina), Anna Scandurra (teacher in Giarre), and Michelina Lorello (teacher in Catania)⁴⁷³.

Female teachers could also obtain subsidies if they distinguished themselves through diligence and aptitude for teaching, as well as for the particular dedication they showed in performing their duties even in the face of difficulties, as they themselves often made a point of specifying in their own petitions. Among the teachers who had graduated from the Normal School of Catania and were recipients of merit-based subsidies in the 1880-81 school year, we find the already-mentioned teacher from the *Reclusorio delle Vergini al Borgo*, along with Antonia Sciuto Santoro, Francesca Saporito, Vincenza Zappalà, Maria Previtera, Diana Maggio (all teachers in Catania), Giuseppa Giuffrida (a teacher in Misterbianco)⁴⁷⁴, and Lucietta Scacco (a teacher in Licodia)⁴⁷⁵. Among the meritorious female teachers of the 1881-82 school year was Rosaria Albanese, a teacher in Catania⁴⁷⁶; among those of the 1882-83 school year, Vincenza Zappalà and Marietta Mollica (teachers in Catania), Virginia Ferro (a teacher in Belpasso), and Angelina Quattrocchi (a teacher in Riposto)⁴⁷⁷. In the 1884-85 school year, Carmela Ardizzone, a teacher in Catania, was recognized for her merit⁴⁷⁸; and in 1885-86, Antonietta Costarelli, a teacher in Acireale, was also recognized⁴⁷⁹.

From the criteria adopted in granting subsidies, it is clear that these monetary “prizes”, in addition to serving as gratification and alleviating the teachers’ subsistence needs, were also a response to logics of control, discipline, and moral selection of the teaching staff entrusted with the schools. The teachers considered “meritorious” (“*benemerite*”) were not only those who showed diligence in teaching, but also those who proved to have an irreproachable conduct and an honest reputation. This powerfully demonstrates the connection between the concept of merit and conformity to a still-dominant educational model that recognized in the female teacher the role of an exemplary mother-woman, exalting virtues such as docility and modesty, sacrifice and self-abnegation. The sources are eloquent in this regard: the aforementioned Angelina Quattrocchi, a teacher in Riposto, was described as “the most docile teacher, very modest, diligent, industrious, and esteemed by all for her good qualities” (“*la più docile maestra, modestissima, diligente, operosa, stimata per le buone doti da tutti*”), and was proposed for a prize of 100 lire⁴⁸⁰. Similarly, Antonietta Costarelli, a teacher in

⁴⁷² ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 18, *Illustrissimo Signor Regio Provveditore agli Studi di Catania*, Paternò, February 7, 1888.

⁴⁷³ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 18, various papers, February-April 1888.

⁴⁷⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 20, *Elenco dei Maestri benemeriti della Provincia di Catania* [anno scolastico 1880-81].

⁴⁷⁵ Teacher Scacco was noted as “very good and very needy” (“*bravissima e assai bisognosa*”). ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 11, *Proposta di gratificazioni circondario di Caltagirone 1880-81*.

⁴⁷⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 20, *Anno Scolastico 1881-82, Provincia di Catania, Proposta di sussidi governativi ai maestri benemeriti delle scuole elementari diurne*.

⁴⁷⁷ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 20, *Anno Scolastico 1882-83, Proposte di remunerazioni ai maestri benemeriti delle scuole elementari diurne*, Catania, August 8, 1883.

⁴⁷⁸ Teacher Ardizzone was a recipient of a ministerial subsidy of 60 lire that year. ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 15, *Prefettura della Provincia di Catania*, June 24, 1885.

⁴⁷⁹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 21, *Anno Scolastico 1885-86, Proposte di sussidio ai Maestri benemeriti della Provincia di Catania*.

⁴⁸⁰ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 20, *Circondario di Acireale, Proposta di premi agli Insegnanti primari che nel corso dell'anno 1882-83 si son segnalati per istudio, per impegno e per condotta*, Acireale, June 30, 1883.

Acireale, was praised “especially for her docility and for the interest she had in improving” (“*specialmente per la docilità di lei e per l’interesse ch’[aveva] di migliorare*”)⁴⁸¹.

The female teachers themselves considered the teaching of modesty, docility, and subordination to be an integral part of their educational function. These qualities were deemed indispensable in the formation of young students and were often emphasized in final reports on the students’ progress. For example, at the end of the 1877-78 school year, Giuseppina Pappalardo, a teacher in Catania’s S. Agostino section, boasted that her students had acquired “the firm and prompt habit of reflecting, reasoning, judging correctly, and speaking with a certain propriety” (“*l’abito fermo e pronto al riflettere, al ragionare, al giudicare rettamente e al discorrere con una certa proprietà*”) combined with that “of docility, respect, and gratitude towards their parents and superiors” (“*della docilità, del rispetto e della gratitudine sia verso i loro genitori che superiori*”)⁴⁸²; and teacher Giovannina Grassi, who taught at the Salette mixed school in Catania, following a common practice of the time, awarded prizes to students who had distinguished themselves for their conduct and diligence (two prizes with medals, three with books, and two with honorable mentions)⁴⁸³.

3.4.4. Social support networks and strategies for remaining in the role

In this context of significant precarity in terms of work, logistics, and social life, the relationship with school authorities and local actors – mayors, school council members, and the community – assumed a crucial importance in determining the fate of many female teachers. These relationships influenced their possibility of being reconfirmed, transferred, or suspended from their position, based on a system of control over their work that was not limited to the didactic plan but also concerned their moral conduct, reputation and ability to integrate positively into the local social fabric. Positive reports could facilitate reconfirmation in their role, while a conduct that compromised the teacher’s public decorum could lead to dismissal from the office.

Such is the case of the disciplinary procedure carried out in 1914 against Virginia Trimarchi, a teacher in the Viscalori hamlet of the Municipality of Viagrande: to the great dismay of the local families and the admonishment of the municipal authorities, she had abandoned the school without notice, also neglecting to order the students’ textbooks, despite many of them having already given the teacher their share; after it became known that a romantic elopement had made her forget “her duties as a young woman and an educator” (“*i suoi doveri di giovinetta e di educatrice*”), the Municipal Council resolved that it was impossible for the teacher to continue teaching in the hamlet, “as she had certainly fallen into public disrepute” (“*essendo caduta certamente nella pubblica disistima*”)⁴⁸⁴.

In parallel, many female teachers were able to earn respect for their commitment to promoting female schooling and building a trusting relationship with families. In 1898, Anna Distefano received a commendation from the mayor of Belpasso, who praised her ability “to educate and form the hearts and minds of those tender creatures” (“*di educare e formare il cuore e le menti di quelle tenere creature*”) and to have earned the admiration of many families⁴⁸⁵. In 1880-81, Francesca Leone was

⁴⁸¹ The Inspector of the Acireale district submitted the case of teacher Costarelli to the Provincial Prefect because she intended to participate in pedagogical conferences, proposing that she receive a subsidy. ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 14, R. Ispettorato scolastico del Circondario di Acireale, *Maestra Costarelli*, Acireale, September 19, 1883.

⁴⁸² ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Ill.mo Signor Provveditore*, Catania, August 10, 1878.

⁴⁸³ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, *Relazione della scuola Mista Salette Sez.^{ne} Inf.^{re} e Supe.^{re}*, Catania, August 27, 1878.

⁴⁸⁴ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 39, Amministrazione Scolastica della Provincia di Catania, Deliberazione della Deputazione Scolastica, Catania, March 12, 1914.

⁴⁸⁵ “*Alunne e genitori rimpiangeranno la perdita di sì buona maestra, che oltre ai meriti didattici che la onorano sa con nobile slancio ed entusiasmo educare e formare il cuore e le menti di quelle tenere creature da rendersi soggetto di ammirazione in tutte le famiglie che ebbero la fortuna di vedere le loro figlie sotto sì buona maestra prosperare nella civiltà e nella istruzione*”. ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 15, Provincia di Catania, Municipio di Belpasso, *Encomio*, Belpasso, July 30, 1898.

cited as “the first teacher who, by earning the trust of the families, had managed to consolidate the Female School in Calatabiano” (“*la prima maestra che, guadagnandosi la fiducia delle famiglie, [aveva] saputo consolidare la Scuola femminile in Calatabiano*”)⁴⁸⁶. Concettina Bugliarello too, in 1888-89, demonstrated great effectiveness in managing the school in Motta Sant’Anastasia, “knowing how to win the esteem of the families” (“*[sapendo] cattivarsi la stima delle famiglie*”)⁴⁸⁷. In many situations, however, material hardship and social isolation were difficult obstacles to overcome, especially for those teachers who were often young and lacked family networks in their places of assignment. In 1913, Angelina Strano, a teacher in Regalbuto originally from Catania, appealed to the Minister of Public Education to request a transfer to the provincial capital for health and family reasons; she complained about the sacrifices required of “a twenty-year-old young lady, devoid of friends and comforts and among people who were not always without venality” (“*una signorina a vent’anni, priva di amicizie e di comforti e presso gente non sempre priva di venalità*”), and the costs incurred to maintain contact with her loved ones⁴⁸⁸. The case of Maria Annino is also significant: she refused the position at the school in the S. Giorgio hamlet of Assoro after enduring an exhausting journey over ravines, rivers, and impassable paths on a sulfur transport cart to reach the place where she was supposed to take up her duties⁴⁸⁹; her decision was reinforced by an encounter with two carabinieri, who offered their opinion that “it was not advisable to leave two women alone in such a place where, given the distance, for all unpredictable events, [...] until the desired help arrived, anything could have happened” (“*non era conveniente lasciar sole due donne in cotal punto ove, attesa la lontananza, per tutti i casi imprevedibile, [...] finché giungesse il desiderato aiuto, avrebbe potuto succedere la qualunque*”)⁴⁹⁰.

The social network thus became a decisive element for obtaining reconfirmations, subsidies, or favorable transfers, and for coping with the hardships caused by poor economic treatment. The protection of an authority or the solidarity of a host family could, in fact, come to the aid of the female teachers, making the difference for their survival and for keeping their positions despite the hardships. Such was the case of Marietta Licari, a victim of serious vexations in the municipality of Cerami, which had refused to pay her back wages to the point that she found herself in poverty⁴⁹¹. From that municipality, which was “accustomed to speculating on the meager salary of those poor teachers” (“*solito speculare sul magro stipendio di quei poveri maestri*”), teacher Licari was paid 476 lire, as opposed to the 533 lire established in the budget. The sum that was withheld was said to be for the teacher’s lodging, which she had never actually lived in, as she instead received room and board from

⁴⁸⁶ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 20, *Proposta di sussidii governativi in favore degli Insegnanti che nel 1880-81 più si distinsero nelle Scuole Elementari diurne del Circondario di Acireale*.

⁴⁸⁷ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 4, *verbale di visita Bugliarello Concetta*, school year 1888-89.

⁴⁸⁸ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 38, *A Sua Eccellenza Il Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione* [delivered on June 24, 1913].

⁴⁸⁹ “*Ricevuti gli ordini della V. S. volai subito ad Assoro accompagnata dai miei genitori. Ma discesa in quella stazione quale non fu il mio stupore non trovando alcuna carrozza che potesse condurmi fin lassù. [...] Fu giocoforza quindi contentarmi d’un carro da trasporto di zolfo che a stento potei avere con la ricompensa di lire cinque. Ma ciò non avrebbe totalmente impressionato l’animo mio. Immensi pericoli mi si offrivano agli occhi: il passaggio d’un fiume, le scosse terribili a causa della strada intransitabile, i continui burroni che rasentavamo colla probabilità d’esservi rovesciati, l’immensa campagna che mi produceva un senso di paura*”. *La maestra seppe durante il tragitto che “S. Giorgio risulta[va] da alquante casette a molta distanza l’una dall’altra, [...] che l’acqua vi difetta[va], che talora per i viveri bisogna[va] scendere fino ad Assoro e per un po’ di carne bovina fino a Leonforte e in ultimo per comunicare o ricevere notizie postali [avrebbe] dovuto ricorrere a Nissoria*”. ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 1, *Sig. Provveditore agli Studi di Catania*, Catania, February 2, 1913.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹¹ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 14, R. Ispettorato Scolastico, *Sussidio per miseria a favore della maestra elem. Licari di Cerami*, Nicosia, March 17, 1884; *Id.*, *Cerami- reclamo della Maestra Licari*, Nicosia, December 9, 1883.

the Bertolo family, who “if it had not been for them, the said teacher would have perished from hunger” (“*se non fosse stato così la detta maestra sarebbe perita dalla fame*”)⁴⁹².

In a system where contractual precariousness and moral evaluations carried decisive weight, the systematic use of letters of recommendation and merit reports was another strategy adopted by female teachers to maintain professional continuity. This material, as obsequious in form as it was powerful in its implications, accompanied and sometimes replaced the formal institutional evaluation, demonstrating the ability of some teachers to rely on a social and relational network, should they have one. Antonietta De Lodi, the daughter of a delegate official who tragically died in 1870 (“*annegatosi volontariamente nelle acque del mare di Catania*” – “voluntarily drowned in the waters of the sea of Catania”), after having served for two years in the schools of Licodia Eubea, requested a transfer to Catania in 1872. She wanted to move closer to her widowed mother, who now lived on her own, and to her two deaf-mute orphans who, “through the charity of the citizens and the local superiors” (“*per opera della carità cittadina e dei superiori locali*”), had found shelter in the *Regio Ospizio di Beneficenza* (Royal Hospice of Charity)⁴⁹³; we find her as a teacher in Catania in the following years. Another heartfelt and explicit request for a recommendation was made by the aforementioned teacher Samperi Majoli from Troina. In 1884, having sacrificed the few objects she possessed “since she could not provide for everything with her meager earnings” (“*giacché non poteva col meschino suo guadagno provvedere a tutto*”), and now finding herself “in a desperate state” (“*in uno stato disperato*”), she hoped to win the competition for a teacher position with an annual salary of 900 lire in Lentini, and she begged the Superintendent to speak a word in her favor to the mayor of that Municipality⁴⁹⁴.

Attempts to protest to the school and administrative authorities about the heavy workload in rural schools with multiple classes and inadequate salaries were not uncommon. In 1876, Lucia Prino, a teacher at the mixed school in the Fleri-Pisano hamlet of the municipality of Zafferana Etnea, with a measured but firm tone, presented her grievances to the Superintendent’s Office about her isolation and the difficulty of procuring what she needed for her own sustenance. While she had never protested the fact that the Municipality had not provided her with the necessary furniture, understanding that “in the Forest where a poor Teacher is confined, she can have nothing, even by paying” (“*nella Foresta in cui una povera Maestra è confinata, nulla può avere, anco pagando*”), what had prompted the teacher to present her complaint was the surprising reduction of her salary, which amounted to only 400 lire annually, including the 100 allocated by the Province, instead of the 600 promised – 500 from the Municipality and 100 from the Province – as confirmed by a previous official note she herself possessed. Appealing to the “high Justice” (“*alta Giustizia*”) of the Superintendent, the teacher Prino asked to be paid the full agreed-upon sum, bitterly emphasizing how difficult it was to find someone who would agree to “exile themselves in such places, wearing out their life in a single and mixed school composed of pupils who were boorish in every sense of the word” (“*esiliarsi in siffatti luoghi, logorandosi la vita in una scuola unica e mista composta di scolari zotici in tutto il senso della parola*”), and what’s more, for compensation that “was not enough even for daily sustenance” (“*non bastava manco pel giornaliero sostentamento*”)⁴⁹⁵.

In some cases, in denouncing their conditions of hardship and marginalization, female teachers strongly emphasized their personal sacrifice, dedication, and professional competence, and they

⁴⁹² ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 14, R. Ispettorato Scolastico, *Cerami- vessazioni alla Maestra Licari*, Nicosia, June 13, 1884.

⁴⁹³ ASCT, Sottoprefettura di Acireale, el. 1, b. 236, various papers, August 1872.

⁴⁹⁴ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 15, *Ill.mo Sign. R. provveditore agli Studi delle Provincia di Catania*, Troina, March 22, 1884.

⁴⁹⁵ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 115, Pisano, April 2, 1876.

demanded a more equitable distribution of subsidies and equal pay for performing work equivalent to their male colleagues. In 1884, Rosaria Parlato Sanfilippo, a teacher for about a decade in the primary schools of Adernò, wrote to the Provincial School Council to denounce the lack of institutional recognition she received, even though she had been simultaneously teaching the third and fourth primary classes for years: “not a year went by – she complained – that I did not see this or that male teacher rewarded by the royal government, who had not borne the burden of two classes and perhaps had not achieved the result that I have, [while] for me alone there have never been any subsidies or titles of merit” (“*non passava un anno che la sottoscritta non vedesse premiato dal real governo questo o quell’altro maestro, il quale non ha sostenuto il peso di due classi e forse non ha dato il risultato che la esponente ha dato, [mentre] per lei sola non si sono mai visti né sussidii, né titoli di benemerenza*”); from this, she requested not to be left “in oblivion” (“*in oblio*”) any longer⁴⁹⁶. In 1887, Maria Giuffrida, a teacher in San Pietro Clarenza, protested against the arbitrary reduction of her salary, which was lowered from 550 to 495.56 lire, despite her rural school including three sections obligating her to a teaching load she unequivocally defined as “triple work” (“*triplice lavoro*”)⁴⁹⁷. In the same year, Maria Costantino, who had been serving for three years in the lower male school of Misterbianco with an annual salary of 440 lire, demanded to be paid the amount stipulated for male teachers by the current regulations, claiming just salary equalization⁴⁹⁸. Other times, female teachers had to contend with deliberate attempts to circumvent their entitlement to job permanence: such was the case of Maria Spampinato, a teacher in Belpasso, who in 1903 reported a measure by the Municipality explicitly aimed at preventing her from acquiring the right to continuity of service. The matter was discussed during a meeting of the Provincial School Council, which confirmed that “the teacher was fired to prevent her from acquiring a stable position” (“*la disdetta alla maestra si [era] data per non farle acquistare diritto alla stabilità*”), precisely in the year that the first three-year period of her mandate was completed⁴⁹⁹. What emerges is a picture of a fragile but conscious professionalism, exercised by women who, despite conditions of material and symbolic subordination, were able to weave networks of support, trust, and recognition around themselves, bringing visibility to their educational work and striving to be active agents in maintaining their own careers.

⁴⁹⁶ ASCT, Pref. serie II, el. 2, b. 19, *All’Onorevole Consiglio Scolastico Provinciale di Catania*, Adernò, March 25, 1884.

⁴⁹⁷ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 17, *A Sua Eccellenza Il Sign. Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione in Roma*, S. Pietro Clarenza, November 10, 1887.

⁴⁹⁸ ASCT, Pref. Serie II, el. 2, b. 17, *Ill.mo Sign. Provveditore*, Misterbianco, August 12, 1887.

⁴⁹⁹ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, b. 38, *Adunanza del Consiglio Scolastico Provinciale*, Catania, June 15, 1903.

Concluding considerations

The present study aimed to examine the development of primary and normal education in Italy during the post-unification period, with a specific focus on the sicilian context, and in particular that of Catania. The investigation began by analyzing the evolution of the European educational landscape in the “long” nineteenth century, framing the teaching profession as a crucial element for the construction of Nation-States through the extension of mass schooling, and exploring the factors contributing to its progressive feminization.

The focus subsequently shifted to the national schooling landscape and the function attributed to mass schooling in the construction of the Italian people’s identity. Simultaneously, the issue of Southern Italy’s difficult alignment with the development of the North of the Peninsula and other European Countries, due to the scarcity of financial resources, families’ resistance to schooling, and the lack of qualified personnel, was intersected.

In the insular South, the Province of Catania, with its deep historical and cultural roots, and its own economic and social demands, served as a privileged observation point for understanding the dynamics involved in the transition of Italian society towards modernity, revealing a rich and layered narrative that accounts for both the openness and the resistance that accompanied the process of primary schooling and the entry of women into the teaching profession.

The picture that emerged from this research fully aligns with the coordinates already traced by the most recent national and European historiography on the female contribution to the development of mass education between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This historiography has repeatedly highlighted how the profession of the primary teacher – marginalized, underpaid, and socially ambiguous – was situated on the border between the public and private spheres, between the welfare task of care and the formative function of instruction, and between a persistent condition of professional minority and the gradual recognition of its social value.

The key results of the case study on the Catania context can be summarized as follows:

1. Firstly, the institutional commitment of the Royal Female Normal School of Catania emerged as an engine of social mobility, having represented, for numerous young women, the possibility of accessing formal education and, through it, public and paid employment. Furthermore, the Institute actively worked to align its educational offer with the new pedagogy, evolving from traditional didactic rote learning towards pedagogical positivism and the objective and experimental method. Some of its students, future teachers in the Province, distinguished themselves as active agents in adapting to the new pedagogical directions in the primary schools where they worked;
2. Secondly, the analysis of archival sources revealed the contrast between innovative impulses in teaching and the chronic scarcity of resources, which made the implementation of educational practices elaborated by official pedagogy difficult in the Catania area. The inspection reports in the Province’s primary schools show how, especially in rural centers,

school premises were often unsuitable and unsanitary, lacking adequate furnishings and sufficient teaching material⁵⁰⁰;

3. Thirdly, the study highlighted how the teaching profession for women was exercised in a state of material and symbolic subordination, in line with gender pay disparities and the experiences of vulnerability found in the European context. The research also revealed the scenario of a fragile yet aware professionalism. In a system where contractual precariousness and moral evaluations held decisive weight, the women teachers were sometimes active agents in maintaining their position, weaving networks of support, trust, and professional recognition, resorting to requests for subsidies due to destitution, protesting against salary disparity or inadequate workloads, but also investing in their own training and increasingly validating their “educational mission” in a professional and scientific sense.

In conclusion, by presenting the case of the Province of Catania, the aim was to illuminate the peculiar path of an area of Southern Italy towards modern European development, offering a contribution to the reconstruction of the social and local history of education. The developments of the Normal School of Catania and the stories of its teachers are intertwined with those of a South which, despite its presumed marginality, gave its contribution to the construction of national citizenship through popular literacy. This was achieved through the employment of a teaching force constituted largely by women, whose profession, lacking guarantees, often resulted in a true itinerant survival. The study of individual stories, through complaints, pleas, and certificates of merit, provides a vivid and concrete geography of female teaching, which complements the institutional dimension with the human, social, and daily one.

The research confirmed the usefulness of a methodological approach careful not to fall into particularism but aimed at reading every fragment as part of a broader historical and social fabric⁵⁰¹, treating the school as a place rich in relationships, a symbolic and material safeguard of the civil community, and an essential hub in the processes of modernization and territorial development⁵⁰². The Analytical Appendix at the end of this study, the result of a thorough work of data collection and cataloging, serves as fundamental empirical evidence, lending concreteness to the material dimension of the profession and demonstrating the value of an approach that integrates social history with local archival investigation.

⁵⁰⁰ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, bb. 1-43, verbali di visita.

⁵⁰¹ F. Pruneri, *Oltre l'alfabeto*, cit., pp. 16-19.

⁵⁰² G. e M. Giarrizzo, *Per una storia d'Italia come storia delle sue scuole*, Maimone, Catania 2005.

Analytical Appendix. Licensed female teachers from the “G. Turrisi-Colonna” Normal School serving in the primary schools of the Province of Catania between 1861 and 1914

As a supplement to the analysis conducted on the development of primary education and the professional condition of female teachers in Sicily, the following analytical appendix is attached. It consists of a detailed list of teachers who graduated from the Normal School for women of Catania and were active in the Province’s primary schools within the chronological period 1861-1914.

The result of a thorough investigation of primary archival sources, this section aims to offer a comprehensive vision, both quantitative and qualitative, that lends substance to the material and daily dimension of the female teaching profession, which is often difficult to infer from general statistics. It compiles synthetic but significant data for each name, specifying the year the qualification was obtained (classified as a lower-grade, higher-grade license, or a qualifying diploma), the Municipalities where the profession was practiced, the condition of the school premises, and the judgments on the teacher’s work and the students’ progress.

These data were extracted from the reports of the inspection visits preserved in the personal files of the primary teachers within the *Provveditorato agli Studi* fund, at the State Archives of Catania⁵⁰³. The list aims to constitute a useful tool for a micro-historical approach, offering insights for the interpretation of the professional path of the female teachers of the Etnean Province and for the reconstruction of a “living and concrete geography” of female teaching, capable of bringing to light individual stories and specific local critical issues.

NAME AND QUALIFICATION	SCHOOL YEAR	MUNICIPALITY	SCHOOL BUILDING CONDITION	EVALUATION OF THE TEACHER’S WORK	CLASS PERFORMANCE	Folder
Affronto Mollica Francesca higher license, Catania 1892	1904-05 – 1917-18	Catania	Mediocre. Lacking metric system materials	Excellent	Regular attendance	3, 27, 43
Albanese Rosaria higher license, Catania 1878	1885-86 – 1895-96	Catania	Incomplete furnishings, good room	Sufficiently educated and has didactic aptitude	Disciplined and diligent	2
Albergo Domenica diploma, Catania 1906	1912-13 – 1913-14	Catania	Decent room but near noisy street, incomplete materials	Positive	Satisfactory	3
Alongi Marianna higher license, Catania 1900	1901-02 – 1907-08	Adernò	Cramped room with poor surroundings. Incomplete furnishings and materials	Zeal and aptitude, productive work	Good results from pupils	2
Alù Marianna higher license, Catania 1898	1902-03 – 1910-11	Catania	Mediocre classroom, decent furnishings	Diligent and capable	Remarkable intellectual development. Satisfactory conduct	2
Amato Papale Silvia higher license, Catania 1888	1902-03 – 1913-14	Catania	Small but ventilated classroom, fair benches, scarce materials	Good education and excellent teaching skills	Satisfactory results	30
Ambra Clementina higher license, Catania 1905	1906-07	Giarre	Fair room, insufficient furniture and materials	Diligent and capable	Satisfactory results	2
Ambra Vincenza diploma, Catania 1905	1905-06	Ramacca	Suitable room, old benches, lack of materials	Commendable ability and zeal, knows modern pedagogy	Satisfactory results	1
	1913-14 – 1914-15	S. Giovanni La Punta	Unsuitable room, also serves as teacher’s lodging. Old benches	Zeal and teaching aptitude	Satisfactory results	
Anastasi Concettina diploma, Catania 1912	1912-13	Catania	Cramped room, poor surroundings. Missing map of Europe	Sufficient ability and zealous	More than satisfactory results	2
Anfuso Giovanna lower license, Catania 1872	1888-89 – 1890-91	Piedimonte Etneo	Cramped room, incomplete	Not yet convinced by modern methods	Insufficient results	2

⁵⁰³ ASCT, Provveditorato agli Studi, class. A3 – *Fascicoli personali insegnanti elementari e asili infantili del Comune di Catania e provincia*, bb. 1-43. The following list constitutes a synthetic and partial overview of a substantial work of data collection and cataloging carried out with the collaboration of professor Stefano Lentini and dr. Claudia Grasso.

			furnishings, no teaching aids			
Anfuso Giuseppina lower license, Catania 1878	1878 – 1884	Assoro	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	1
	1884 – 1888	Zafferana Etnea	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
	1888-89 – 1914-15	Zafferana Etnea	Mediocre room, insufficient benches, missing teaching materials	Good teaching aptitude and decent education	Disciplined and diligent class	
Anfuso Teresa lower license, Catania 1864	1888-89 – 1889-90	Caltagirone	Cramped room, incomplete furnishings	Zealous, sufficiently prepared and skilled	Mediocre performance	2
Annino Maria diploma, Catania 1912	1913-14	Belpasso	Unsuitable room, poor furniture and materials	Diligent and capable	Sufficient performance	1
	1914-15	Agira	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
Ardizzone Carmela higher license, Catania 1880	1885-86 – 1891-92	Catania	Suitable room, insufficient furnishings	Goodwill, aptitude and skill	Not very diligent or disciplined	2
Ardizzone Francesca higher license, Catania 1882	1884-85 – 1907-08	Catania	Inadequate classroom, fair furnishings, scarce materials	Sufficient teaching ability	Very unrefined pupils, satisfactory results	3
Attanasio Giuseppina diploma, Catania 1901	1901-02	Bronte	Barely decent room, old benches, mediocre materials	Fair ability and teaching aptitude	More than sufficient results	1
	1902-03 – 1907-08	Adernò	Cramped room, poor furnishings and teaching materials	Very diligent and with excellent education	Satisfactory results	
Azzolina Elvira diploma, Catania 1909	1912-13	Caltagirone	Dirty and unsuitable room, old-style benches	Educated and very capable, but needs to be less affectionate and informal	Good results, but could be excellent if the teacher were more authoritative	2
Baffi Nunziatina diploma, Catania 1911	1914-15	Catania	Cramped room, fair teaching materials	Commendable	Satisfactory results	3
Barba Angela diploma, Catania 1908	1909-10	Nissoria	Unsuitable room, poor furnishings, scarce materials	Mediocre aptitude and diligence, sufficient ability	Educational and teaching performance mediocre	5
	1910-11 – 1914-15	Ramacca	Fair classroom, good furnishings, missing teaching materials	Mediocre ability and fair diligence	Just sufficient performance	
Battiatì Nigido Francesca lower license, Catania 1879; higher license granted in 1904	1907-08	Caltagirone	Small and dark classroom, insufficient teaching materials, fair furnishings	Diligent, sufficiently educated, good teaching aptitude	Many pupils cramped into small classroom, satisfactory results	4
Battiatò Agatina lower license, Catania 1881	1882-83	Maletto	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	6
	1883-84 – 1913-14	S. Gregorio	Suitable rooms until 1897-98. Later deemed fair, with old benches and mediocre teaching materials	Sufficient ability and zeal	Sufficient performance	
Bazzano Buongiorno Emilia higher license, Catania 1899	1907-08	Catania	Noisy surroundings, unsuitable benches, scarce materials	Diligent, good education and aptitude	Sufficient performance	4
Bella Anna higher license, Catania 1896	1896-97 – 1901-02, 1913	Zafferana Etnea	Mediocre room and furnishings	Good ability and fair teaching aptitude	Some children are poor and neglected, sufficient results	4
Bellino Maria higher license, Catania 1902	1906-07 – 1907-08	Giarre	Satisfactory room and furnishings, deficient teaching materials (Immacolata College)	Good diligence and ability, affectionate with pupils	Abundant educational and didactic performance	4
Benincasa Rachele diploma, Catania 1904	1910-11	Acireale	Mediocre room, old benches, satisfactory teaching materials (S. Rosalia College)	Diligent and capable	Pupils are not suited to their grade level due to promotions made for family convenience or school vanity	4
Biondi Lanza Emilia diploma, Catania 1903	1906-07	Biancavilla	Mediocre classroom, accessed through another, causing disturbance. No toilet. Nothing present	Diligent with mediocre teaching aptitude	Good educational results, less so didactic	4
Bocchetti Annunziata lower license, Catania 1864	1885-86 – 1912-13	Scordia	Unsuitable room, mediocre	Fair ability and teaching aptitude	Mediocre performance	6

			furnishings and materials			
Bonanno Spina Anna higher license, Catania 1879	1907-08	Catania	Dark classroom, old benches, no materials	Tries to apply the best teaching methods	Disciplined pupils and fair results	4
Bonaventura Venera higher license, Catania 1872	1885-86 – 1895-96	Catania	Suitable room, fair furnishings	Diligent and capable	Unmotivated and undisciplined pupils	4
Borzi Marianna lower license, Catania 1867	1888-89 – 1914-15	Catania	Very cramped room, mediocre furnishings and materials	Unfamiliar with the method, not very zealous	More than mediocre performance	3
Bugliarello Concettina lower license, Catania 1886	1888-89	Motta S. Anastasia	Very poor model benches	Zealous with good method. Has earned the esteem of families and students	Regular school attendance despite many pupils being from disadvantaged families	4
	1889-90	Trecastagni	Mediocre room, awful furnishings, lacking naming posters	Very zealous and uses a good method	Irregular attendance: families use girls for household and farm chores	
Busà Giuseppina (nun) lower license, Catania 1890	1910-11	Acireale	Satisfactory room, adequate furnishings and materials (Angelo Raffaele College)	Sufficient diligence and ability	Sufficient didactic and educational results	4
Calanna Giuseppina higher license, Catania 1879	1885-86 – 1899-900, 1913-14	Catania	Cramped room, mediocre furnishings and materials	Mediocre ability and sufficient education (belong to the old school)	Fair or unsatisfactory results	3
Calvagna Giuseppina higher license, Catania 1887	1892-93 – 1900-01	Catania	Suitable room, mediocre furnishings and materials	Zeal and teaching aptitude	Fair performance	7
Capizzi Grazia diploma, Catania 1910	1910-11	Acireale	Good room and furnishings, abundant teaching materials (Buon Pastore College)	Teacher has diligence and ability, but three hours of class are too few	Slightly poor didactic results	7
Carbone Francesca diploma, Catania 1909	1907-08 – 1914-15	Nicolosi	Mediocre room until 1908–09, then deemed unsuitable and unhealthy. Poor furnishings and materials	Diligent, teaches with a good method	Fair performance	9
Carbone Longobardo Angela diploma, Catania 1901	1907-08	Catania	Small and well-lit classroom, decent furnishings, scarce materials	Moderately diligent and capable	Almost all are repeating students, speak dialect, mechanical teaching	7
Carbone Lucia diploma, Catania 1900	1907-08 – 1911-12	Pedara	Good classroom, poorly maintained toilet, insufficient and old benches	Diligent teacher with sufficient ability	Satisfactory results	9
Carbone Maria higher license, Catania 1892	1893-94	Zafferana	Mediocre room, incomplete furnishings, missing benches and map of Italy	Diligent and capable	Good results	7
Carcò Rosolia Giuseppina higher license, Catania 1894	1907-08	Catania	Poorly distributed lighting	Fair diligence and education	Clean and disciplined pupils, good mental development	7
Caruso Corsaro Teresa higher license, Catania 1889	1911-12	Misterbianco	Fair classroom, five-seat benches fairly suitable	The teacher needs to update the register and introduce the diary	(no performance info)	7
Castorina Concetta diploma, Catania 1908	1909-10 – 1911-12	Riposto	Good room and furnishings, satisfactory teaching materials	Zeal and sufficient ability	Satisfactory results	7
Catania Patanè Marietta higher license, Catania 1889	1891-92 – 1901-02	Catania	Mediocre room, furnishings and materials	Fair ability and aptitude	Mediocre results	7
	1913-14	Acireale	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
Caudullo Annetta higher license, Catania 1892	1907-08 – 1913-14	Catania	Fair classroom, old benches, scarce materials	Very diligent, good teaching aptitude	Satisfactory results	3
Celano Marietta higher license, Catania 1881	1885-86 – 1904-05	Catania	Cramped facilities in via Pulvirenti; good ones in Duomo district and via Manzoni;	Quite effective, good method	Satisfactory results	11

			insufficient materials			
Censabella Maria Carmela diploma, Catania 1910	1910-11 – 1912-13	Leonforte	Excellent room, suitable furnishings, sufficient materials	Diligent with sufficient ability	Mediocre results	10
Centorbi Maria lower license, Catania 1879; converted in 1905	1888-89 – 1914-15	Grammichele	Suitable room until 1905–06, later described as mediocre. Old-style benches, poor teaching materials	Zealous with sufficient aptitude. Rarely applies new methods	Pupils learn mechanically	9, 13
Chines Agatina diploma, Catania 1911	1912-13	Catania	Small but bright classroom, fair furnishings, lacks didactic museum	Very diligent and with teaching aptitude	Sufficient results	11
Cirnigliano Pasqualina higher license, Catania 1884	1887-88 – 1894-95	Militello	Mediocre room and furnishings	Willing and with fair education	Mediocre results	11
Clarenza Bice higher license, Catania 1891	1895-96	Catania	Suitable room, incomplete furnishings	Worthy of praise	Positive results	11
Cona Teresa higher license, Catania 1890	1891-92	Cerami	Horrible room, no furnishings	Diligent and skilled	Good results	11
Condorelli Grazia higher license, Catania 1887	1895-96 – 1902-03	Catania	Suitable room, mediocre furnishings and materials	Fair education and aptitude	Mediocre results	3
Condorelli Rosa higher license, Catania 1875	1893-94	Misterbianco	Suitable room, complete furnishings	Diligent and uses a good method	Satisfactory results	3
	1889-90 – 1896-97	Catania	Suitable room, complete furnishings	Commendable	Good results	
Coniglio Angela higher license, Catania 1886	1891-92 – 1900-01	Troina	Unsuitable room until 1895–96, then suitable. Incomplete furnishings	Diligent with sufficient teaching aptitude	Fair results	11
Coniglio Silvestra lower license, Catania	1889-90	Troina	Unsuitable room, incomplete furnishings, missing nomenclature charts	Poor education and little zeal	Poor results	11
Consoli Cristina higher license, Catania 1877	1888-89 – 1895-96	Catania	Suitable room, incomplete furnishings	Skilled educator, manages the class with excellent method	Satisfactory	11
Corbellini Russo Rita higher license, Catania 1880	1907-08	Catania	Large classroom, noisy surroundings. Satisfactory furnishings, scarce teaching materials	Sufficient diligence and teaching aptitude	Pupils not used to reading explanation, teaching is mechanical	11
Cordova Vincenzina lower license, Catania 1881	1885-86 – 1906-07	Biancavilla	Room deemed suitable until 1893–94, then unsuitable. Incomplete furnishings	Fair ability and teaching aptitude	Mediocre results	11
Costantino Concettina diploma, Catania 1911	1913-14	Catania	Unsuitable room, missing wall charts	Commendable education, very commendable teaching and educational aptitude	Commendable results	11
Costarelli Antonietta higher license, Catania 1876	1888-89 – 1902-03	Acireale	Suitable room, complete furnishings, mediocre teaching materials	Mediocre ability and teaching aptitude	Sufficient results	11
Crea Maria Teresa higher license, Catania 1890	1888-89	Sortino	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	12
	1900-01 – 1914-15	Grammichele	Suitable room, mediocre furnishings, poor teaching materials	Diligent and skilled	Fair performance	12, 13
Cuccaro Rosina higher license, Catania 1876	1885-86 – 1902-03	Catania	Unsuitable room, incomplete furnishings and teaching materials	Good ability and aptitude	Satisfactory results	3
Cuppari Palmira diploma, Catania 1901	1913-14 – 1914-15	Catania	Cramped room, fair benches, scarce teaching materials	Diligent and capable	Good didactic performance	3
D'Ambra Clementina higher license, Catania 1906	1907-08	Giarre (Milo hamlet)	Unsuitable room, old and deficient furnishings, missing teaching materials	Poorly diligent, good ability	Very poor results in all three grades (single school)	13

	1908-09	Aci Castello	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	15
	1910-11 – 1913-14	Acireale (Linera hamlet)	Fair room, mediocre furnishings, poor and bad teaching materials	Mediocre diligence, sufficient ability	Barely sufficient performance	13
D'Amico Maria higher license, Catania 1904	1888-89	Aci Catena	Narrow, poorly ventilated and dimly lit room, old benches, no teaching materials	Bad reputation, lacks sense of duty	Pupils in first section can't read or write; second section well started	13
	1889-90	Camporotondo	Good room, insufficient benches	Zeal and teaching aptitude	Disciplined and diligent class	13
	1891-92 – 1895-96	Zafferana Etnea (Fleri hamlet)	Damp room, incomplete furnishings, missing wall charts	Diligent and with fair method	Low attendance, mediocre performance	13
	1907-08 – 1911-12	Mascalucia	Poorly lit room, unsuitable benches	Sufficient ability and aptitude, zeal	More than satisfactory performance	13
D'Amico Rosaria higher license, Catania 1882	1887-88 – 1913-14	Ramacca	Good classroom, mediocre furnishings, scarce teaching materials	Experienced, zealous and modest teacher, knows good teaching principles	Satisfactory results	14
Dandolo Maugeri Agatina higher license, Catania 1882	1907-08	Catania	Poorly distributed lighting, noisy surroundings	Diligent with fair ability	Willing pupils, reasonably trained in mental arithmetic	13
D'Anna Nunzia diploma, Catania 1913	1914-15	Leonforte	Unsuitable ground floor, indecent and insufficient furnishings, a piece of tar-coated cardboard used as a blackboard	(no data)	(no data)	14
De Feo Gilda diploma, Catania 1913	1913-14	Riposto (Archi hamlet)	Fairly spacious and lit room, includes lodging for the teacher. Old-style benches, scarce school materials	Active and diligent	The teacher just completed registrations; class still needs discipline	13
De Gregorio Grassi Sarnia diploma, Catania 1902	1907-08	Catania	Very small room, mediocre furnishings, missing teaching materials	Diligent, fair teaching ability	Poor results. Pupils are poor and neglected by families	13
De Lodi Antonietta lower license, Catania 1870	1890-91 – 1898-99	Catania	Cramped room in 1890–91, later deemed suitable and hygienic. Furnishings and materials sufficient	Not very diligent, poorly educated, does not apply the new method	Disciplined class, but poor performance	13
De Maria Anna diploma, Catania 1913	1913-14	Regalbuto	Very unsuitable and cramped room, bad and old furnishings, insufficient teaching materials	Diligent and capable	Fair performance	15
De Maria Laura diploma, Catania 1913	1913-14	Aci Castello (Ficarazzi hamlet)	Decent room, but noisy surroundings. Old-style benches, teaching materials missing	Sufficient diligence, good will and ability	Irregular attendance, fair performance	15
De Maria Remigia diploma, Catania 1908	1908-09 – 1914-15	Giarre (Croce-Sciara hamlet)	Damp and unsuitable room, old-style benches, no teaching materials	Mediocre ability and aptitude	Barely sufficient results	15
Di Bella Agatina higher license, Catania 1881	1888-89 – 1891-92	Giarre (San Giovanni hamlet)	Suitable room, adequate furnishings, missing geographical map	Earned a certificate of commendable service and lifetime appointment; seems to rest on her laurels	Poor results	13
	1897-98	Riposto (Torre hamlet)	Mediocre room, adequate furnishings, old-style benches, insufficient teaching materials	Mediocre teacher, worked little due to illness	Insufficient results	
Di Grazia Giuseppa lower license, Catania 1879	1879-80 – 1880-81	Troina	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	15
	1881-82 – 1913-14	Militello	Awful room, insufficient and unsuitable furnishings,	Zealous and effective, with teaching ability and aptitude	Satisfactory performance	

			incomplete teaching materials			
Distefano Anna diploma, Catania 1897	1897-98	Belpasso	(no data)	Substitute teacher. Great teaching merit. Parents and students regret her loss	Excellent class performance	15
	1899-1900	Camporotondo	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
	1900-01	Catania	(no data)	Substitute in the S. Cosimo section. Commendable service, uncommon zeal	(no data)	
	1908-09 – 1913-14	Aci Castello	(no data)	Impeccable and productive service	(no data)	
Di Stefano Arcidiacono Giuseppina diploma, Catania 1900	1907-08	Catania	Small but bright and airy classroom. Uncomfortable benches, insufficient materials	Sufficient ability, mediocre diligence	First grade pupils inattentive and irregular. Few can read	13
Di Stefano Villani Flavia diploma, Catania 1903	1907-08 – 1909-10	Catania	Decent room, scarce teaching materials	Sufficient aptitude, mediocre education	Sufficient performance	13
Dulzetto Angelina diploma, Catania 1910	1912-13 – 1914-15	Aci Catena	Very poor room, unsuitable and old furnishings, insufficient school materials	Diligent, fair education and good teaching ability	Satisfactory results	15
D'Urso Maria higher license, Catania 1884	1897-98 – 1907-08	Catania	Cramped room, mediocre furnishings and teaching materials	Fair teaching aptitude	Poor or mediocre results	13
Failla Elisabetta lower license, Catania 1865	1888-89 – 1891-92	Catania	Cramped and unsuitable room, very bad benches, missing geographical maps	Fairly diligent	Diligent and successful	16
Falco Serafina higher license, Catania 1870	1895-96 – 1914-15	Nicosia	Unsuitable room and furnishings, no teaching materials	Sufficient diligence and ability	Mediocre performance	17
Falcone Emanuela diploma, Catania 1898	1899-900 – 1910-11	Regalbuto	Cramped classroom, mediocre furnishings, abundant teaching materials bought by the teacher	Admirable teaching aptitude	Very satisfactory performance	17
Falcone Giuseppina lower license, Catania 1896	1899-900	Ramacca (Giardinelli hamlet)	Fair room, old-style benches, extremely poor materials, no blackboard	Teacher's work confused and ineffective	Poor results	17
	1908-09 – 1913-14	Vizzini	Unsuitable room, old-style benches, no teaching materials	Good education, diligent and active	Good results	
Falsaperla Carmela higher license, Catania 1877	1885-86 – 1895-96	Catania	Good room, complete furnishings	Fair aptitude, good method	Studious and diligent class	16
Fanelli Lucrezia (nun) lower license, Bari 1876; higher license, Catania 1901	1889-90 – 1913-14	Aci S. Antonio	Unsuitable room, old-style benches, no teaching materials	Advanced age, deafness, and poor health make her completely unfit	Almost no results	17
Fassari Domenica lower license, Catania 1876	1885-86 – 1903-04	Adernò	Cramped room, incomplete furnishings, missing wall charts	Poor education, sufficient teaching aptitude, little zeal	Very poor results	3, 16
Fassari Marietta lower license, Catania 1878	1890-91 – 1907-08	Catania	Cramped room, old-style benches, incomplete materials	Sufficient ability and aptitude	Poor or barely mediocre results	3
Ferlito Angelina lower license, Catania 1883	1890-91	Catania	Cramped room, missing maps of Sicily and Italy	Uncertain method but full of zeal	Mediocre educational performance	16
Fernandez Vincenza lower license, Catania 1871	1887-88 – 1892-93	S. Cono	Fair room, incomplete furnishings and materials	Poor education, tries her best to apply teaching principles	Disciplined but with poor results	16
Ferrara Antonietta lower license, Catania 1877	Not specified	Aci S. Antonio	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	16
	Not specified	Belpasso	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
	1888-89 – 1891-92	Aci Catena	Damp and indecent room, old furnishings, worn-out materials	Poor education and fair aptitude	Mediocre results	

Ferrara Carmela lower license, Catania 1870	Not specified	Licodia Eubea	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	3
	Not specified	Leonforte	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
	1888-89	Adernò	Cramped and awful room, insufficient benches, no teaching materials	Fair education, true love and zeal for teaching	Disciplined and successful	
Ferrara Carmelinda diploma, Catania 1907	1911-12	Biancavilla	Unsuitable and damp classroom, outdoor toilet. Old-style benches, no teaching materials	Mediocre ability and diligence, cold and unengaging teaching style	Poor results	16
Ferrara Ester higher license, Catania 1886	1888-89 – 1898-99	Catania	Suitable room, mediocre furnishings, sufficient teaching materials	Knows how to inspire emulation and make teaching enjoyable	Teacher's work is very effective	43
Ferretti Cristina lower license, Catania 1876	1888-89 – 1914-15	Aci Castello (Acitrezza hamlet)	Cramped room, insufficient furnishings and teaching materials	Diligent and with good ability	Mediocre performance	17
Ferretti Rapisarda Celsa higher license, Catania 1880	1890-91	Catania	Mediocre room, old-style benches, missing map of Sicily	Zealous and with good aptitude	Studious and disciplined class	16
Ferro Agatina higher license, Catania 1888	1885-86 – 1891-92	Catania	Suitable room, incomplete furnishings and teaching materials	Educated with teaching skill	Good performance	43
Ferro Angelina lower license, Catania 1880	1888-89 – 1913-14	Vizzini	Unsuitable rooms, incomplete furnishings and teaching materials	Good will, mediocre aptitude	Sufficient performance	18
Ferro Concetta lower license, Catania 1877	1888-89 – 1913-14	Vizzini	Poorly suitable rooms, incomplete furnishings and materials	Skilled teacher and good educator	Fair performance	18
Ferro Maria higher license, Catania 1902	1910-11	Catania	Suitable room, three-seat benches appropriate, sufficient teaching materials	Zeal and good aptitude	Excellent results in all subjects	16
	1885-86	Mascalucia	Cramped room, incomplete furnishings, missing benches and map of Italy	Good teacher, but can't achieve full results with three sections	Fair performance	16
	1891-92 – 1895-96	Catania	Cramped room, exposed to noise	Zeal and good aptitude	Fair performance	
Ferroni Adelaide lower license, Catania 1876	1885-86 – 1901-02	Catania	Fair room and furnishings, incomplete teaching materials	Fair ability and aptitude	Good performance	16
Fichera Agatina diploma, Catania 1899	1910-11 – 1913-14	Catania	Cramped room, unsuitable benches, scarce teaching materials	Diligent and skilled	Sufficient performance	43
Finocchiaro Giuseppina diploma, Catania 1905	1908-09 – 1914-15	Acireale	Fair classroom, sufficient furnishings, deficient materials	Diligent and with good ability	Poor results in 1908–09, later satisfactory	17
Fischella Maria diploma, Catania 1908	1908-09 – 1914-15	Misterbianco	Cramped room, old-style benches, incomplete materials	Zealous, very calm character, struggles to maintain discipline	Sufficient performance	18
Florentino Maria Cristina higher license, Catania 1904	1905-06	Aci Catena	Fair room, mediocre furnishings and materials	Takes care of the school	Poor performance	16
	1907-08	Acireale (Scillicenti hamlet)	Decent room, poor furnishings, deficient materials	Just received the benches the day before yesterday, only managed to enroll students	Performance cannot yet be evaluated	
Fragapane Concetta higher license, Catania 1882	1888-89 – 1889-90	Grammichele	Poorly lit room, facing northwest, no teaching materials	Fair education and mediocre teaching aptitude	Disciplined class but not very advanced	16
Franco Eloisa diploma, Catania 1905	1906-07 – 1913-14	Calatabiano	Fair classroom, old benches, deficient materials	Diligent and fairly capable	Mediocre results	18
Frediani Elettra lower license, Catania 1870	Not specified	Mirabella	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	16
	Not specified	Catenanuova	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	

	Not specified 1887-88 – 1889-90	Gagliano Ramacca	(no data) Cramped room and incomplete furnishings, missing nomenclature charts	(no data) Skilled and applies most effective pedagogical principles	(no data) Satisfactory performance	
Freri Giuseppa higher license, Catania 1888	1888-89	Scordia	Mediocre room, very poor and insufficient benches, no teaching materials	Inexperienced with methods due to being in her first teaching year, but has education	Diligent but intellectually underdeveloped	16
Fumagalli Lucia lower license, Catania 1871	1890-91	Catania	Cramped room, missing maps of Italy and Europe	Educated and with good method	Not very diligent or studious	16
Gallone Vita lower license, Catania 1881	1888-89 – 1907-08	Centuripe	Mediocre room, old-style benches	Fair capacity and aptitude	Mediocre performance	19
Galvagna Leonardi Maria higher license, Catania 1887	1907-08	Catania	Bright and airy classroom, decent furnishings, insufficient teaching materials	Diligent and sufficiently educated	Satisfactory performance	19
Gangemi Carmela lower license, Catania 1870	1888-89 – 1901-02	Nicolosi	Recognized as suitable until 1894–95, then became cramped. Incomplete furnishings and teaching materials	Diligent but with limited ability, fulfills all her duties and does not spare herself	Poor performance	19
Gargano Carmela higher license, Catania 1869	1885-86 – 1898-99	Catania	Suitable room, good furnishings, sufficient teaching materials	Zealous and methodical	Satisfactory performance	19
Garozzo Nicolosi Gaetanina higher license, Catania 1895	1909-10	Catania	Small room, benches for three or four students	Sufficiently educated	More than sufficient performance	19
Garozzo Rosina higher license, Catania 1885	1889-90	Adernò	Unsuitable room, very bad benches, missing nomenclature charts	Distracted by family matters, was absent due to illness	Most pupils deserted school, those remaining were not diligent	19
Garuffi Carmela higher license, Catania 1883	1885-86 – 1895-96	Catania	Cramped rooms, except the Duomo district in 1885–86. Incomplete furnishings, insufficient teaching materials	Zealous and with aptitude	Satisfactory performance	19
Gismondo Giuseppina diploma, Catania 1901	1909-10 – 1912-13	Catania	Cramped room, unsuitable benches for four, decent furnishings and materials	Good education, commendable aptitude	Satisfactory performance	19
Giuffrida Condorelli Rosa lower license, Catania 1879	1885-86 – 1894-95	Misterbianco	Fair room, insufficient furnishings until 1890–91, then completed	Fair aptitude and method	Regular performance	19
Giuffrida Giuseppa higher license, Catania 1878	1889-90	Catania	Cramped and damp room, no teaching materials, only a blackboard	Poor aptitude and low education, uses mechanical method	Negligent and not studious	19
Giuffrida Maria higher license, Catania 1865	1914-15	S. Pietro Clarenza	Cramped room, old-style and insufficient benches	Almost ineffective educational work	Poor educational and didactic performance	20
Grassi Carmela higher license, Catania 1881	1885-86 – 1901-02	Paternò	Mediocre room, sufficient furnishings, old-style benches	Educated, intelligent, experienced in teaching; works with skill	Satisfactory performance	19
Grassi Giuseppina higher license, Catania 1896	1899-900 – 1907-08	Catania	Unsuitable and poorly lit classroom, mediocre furnishings, insufficient materials	Zeal and sufficient aptitude	Mediocre performance and poor attendance	19
Grassi Grazia diploma, Catania 1910	1909-10 – 1910-11	Bronte	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	21
Grasso Concetta diploma, Catania 1911	1911-12	Giarre	Satisfactory classroom, good furnishings, no teaching materials	Not very lively or expressive, beginner	Poor intellectual engagement, disappointing results	19
	1912-13	Adernò	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	20

Grasso Todaro Santina higher license, Catania 1886	1910-11	Catania	Large and sunny classroom, complete teaching materials	Zealous and sufficiently skilled, good educator	Excellent performance	19
Guzzardi Borzi Marianna lower license, Catania 1865	1895-96	Catania	Suitable room, complete furnishings	Strong aptitude	Very satisfactory performance	19
Ingui Ida higher license, Catania 1888	1907-08	Catania	Small but airy and bright classroom, mediocre surroundings, insufficient teaching materials	Broad education and aptitude	Pupils are from middle class and attend regularly. Satisfactory performance	16
Lamagna Condorelli Rosa higher license, Catania 1875	1885-86	Catania	Suitable room, insufficient furnishings, no gym sticks	Zeal and teaching aptitude, excellent educator	Very satisfactory performance	23
Lanza Maria higher license, Catania 1885	1916-17	Catania	Large and bright classroom, furnishings and teaching materials sufficient and in good condition	Lacks practical teaching ability	Educational and didactic performance is sufficient	43
La Rosa Grazia diploma, Catania 1908	1909-10 – 1912-13	Linguaglossa	Decent room, good furnishings, mediocre teaching materials	Sufficiently diligent with fair teaching ability	Sufficient performance	24
La Rosa Maria Elvira diploma, Catania 1909	1909-10 – 1912-13	Giarre (Dagala hamlet)	Good room, good furnishings, missing teaching materials	Very diligent with strong teaching ability	Satisfactory performance and commendable discipline	22
Laudani Domenica diploma, Catania 1912	1912-13	Pedara	Mediocre room, sufficient furnishings	Sufficiently capable and diligent	Mediocre performance	22
La Via Rosalia lower license, Catania	1888-89	Nicosia	Poorly exposed and dim room	Mediocre education and aptitude, though with good intentions	Poor attendance due to a measles outbreak lasting several months	23
Lazzara Maria lower license, Catania 1879	1888-89	Fiumefreddo	Good room, old benches, no teaching materials	Though young, she's not yet skilled in new methods	Poor performance	23
	1890-91 – 1891-92	Scordia	Mediocre room, incomplete furnishings, missing wall charts	Diligent with good method	Satisfactory performance	
	1893-94	Catania	Suitable room, complete furnishings	Diligent and capable	Satisfactory performance	
Leonardi Giovanna higher license, Catania 1881	1909-10	Catania	Decent and spacious classroom, benches with two and three seats	Zealous and fair teaching ability	Satisfactory performance	23
Leonardi Savasta Vittoria higher license, Catania 1877	1895-96	Catania	Narrow room, complete furnishings	Poor education and aptitude	Poor performance	23
Leonardi Todaro Maria higher license, Catania 1876	1885-86 – 1904-05	Catania	In 1885 taught in suitable room, later in very cramped spaces. Furnishings and teaching materials insufficient	Educated and with teaching aptitude, teaches with passion	Fair performance	23
Leotta Carmela higher license, Catania 1887	1888-89 – 1914-15	Acireale	Decent room, old-style benches, satisfactory teaching materials	Diligent, consistent, hardworking and capable	Satisfactory performance	22
Liardo Rosa lower license, Catania 1870	1888-89	Gagliano	Unsuitable room, incomplete furnishings, no teaching materials	Mediocre education and little aptitude	Very poor performance	23
	1891-92	Pedara	Narrow room, incomplete furnishings, no blackboard	Poor education, bad method, lacks proper manners	Mediocre performance	
	1892-93	Scordia	Suitable room, complete furnishings	Limited aptitude and education	Poor performance	
	1897-98	Linguaglossa	Mediocre room, incomplete furnishings, old-style benches,	Poor education and very limited teaching aptitude	Poor performance	

			mediocre teaching materials			
Lisi Ignazia higher license, Catania 1902	1906-07 – 1909-10	Castiglione	Unsuitable room, old furnishings, scarce teaching materials	Sufficient diligence and teaching ability	Performance is mediocre	24
	1911-12	Piedimonte Etneo	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
Lo Giudice Giuseppina higher license, Catania 1892	1893-94	Adernò	Suitable room, complete furnishings	Hardworking, intelligent, and very capable	Very satisfactory performance	23
Longo Francesca higher license, Catania 1864	1885-86 – 1895-96	Catania	Mediocre room, sufficient furnishings, incomplete teaching materials	Educated and zealous	Satisfactory performance	23
Lorello Michelina lower license, Catania 1870	1888-89 – 1901-02	Catania	Taught in a recognized suitable room until 1897, then in a cramped space. Incomplete furnishings and teaching materials	Fair aptitude	Mediocre performance	23
Lo Sauro Giuseppina higher license, Catania 1884	1891-92 – 1893-94	Assoro	Good room, incomplete furnishings, missing blackboard	Good aptitude and sufficient education	Satisfactory performance	23
Lo Sauro Maddalena higher license, Catania 1875	1893-94	Assoro	Good room, good furnishings	Skilled and educated	Sufficient performance	23
Lo Sauro Palma lower license, Catania 1877	1895-96 – 1897-98	Nicosia	Mediocre room and furnishings, incomplete teaching materials	Sufficient skill and aptitude	Sufficient performance	23
Maggio Musumeci Diana higher license, Catania 1872	1888-89 – 1897-98	Catania	Mediocre room and furnishings. Incomplete teaching materials	Diligent and with aptitude	Regular performance	27
Maggiulli Teresa higher license, Catania 1869	1885-86 – 1895-96	Catania	The room was deemed suitable and furnishings complete only in 1895-96	Good education and aptitude	Poor performance in 1888-89 at Teatro Massimo branch: many students were rejects from other sections	27
Mangano Caterini Giuseppa diploma, Catania 1882	1896-97 – 1912-13	Catania	Decent room, mediocre furniture, incomplete teaching materials	Commendable aptitude, good method, and practical approach	Regular attendance, satisfactory performance	27
Mangiagli Sebastiana higher license, Catania 1870	1888-89 – 1914-15	Acireale	Decent but poorly lit room, satisfactory furnishings, sufficient teaching materials	Diligent but somewhat old-fashioned	Sufficient performance, satisfactory discipline	25
Marano Concetta diploma, Catania 1911	1911-12	Giarre (Milo hamlet)	Cramped and damp room, old-style benches, no teaching materials	Sufficient diligence, but lacks teaching practice	Poor performance, clumsy in expression	25
	1913-14 – 1914-15	Acireale (Stazzo hamlet)	Suitable room, poor furnishings and materials	Very diligent with good capability	Very good performance in all subjects	
Marano Rosaria diploma, Catania 1906	1907-08 – 1914-15	Acireale	Inadequate classroom until 1912-13, later deemed good. Old-style benches, insufficient materials	Diligence and teaching ability	Satisfactory performance	25
Marino Angela diploma, Catania 1905	1907-08 – 1914-15	Militello	Mediocre room, old-style furniture, scarce teaching materials	Diligent with strong teaching aptitude	Satisfactory performance	25
Marino Grazia lower license, Catania 1873	1888-89 – 1902-03	Centuripe	Cramped room, mediocre furnishings and materials	Mediocre education and sufficient teaching aptitude	Sufficient, mechanical performance	27
Martone Teresa higher license, Catania 1890	1886-87 – 1914-15	Calatabiano	Decent room, mediocre furnishings, satisfactory school materials	Fair pedagogical knowledge	Fair performance	25

Mascali Beatrice lower license, Catania 1888	1888-89 – 1889-90	Cerami	Unsuitable room, incomplete furnishings	Sufficient teaching ability	Mediocre performance	27
	1891-92	Catenanuova	Good room, mediocre furnishings, missing printed register and chalk	Fair teacher, replacing the main one who is ill	Very poor performance	
	1895-96 – 189-98	Cerami	Cramped and unsuitable room, incomplete furnishings, no teaching materials at all	Fair skill and diligence	Barely sufficient performance	
Maselli Lydia diploma, Catania 1906	1910-11	Piedimonte	Decent room, bad benches, no teaching materials	Diligent and with good teaching ability	Sufficient performance	25
Mazzone Antonietta higher license, Catania 1880	1885-86 – 1899-900	Catania	Decent room, incomplete furnishings and teaching materials	Aptitude and good method	Mediocre performance	27
Mazzone Carmela diploma, Catania 1904	1907-08	Licodia Eubea	(no data)	Maximum diligence and sufficient aptitude	More than sufficient performance	27
Messina Garufi Carmelina higher license, Catania 1883	1910-11	Catania	Small classroom, movement difficult. Benches for four pupils, poorly suited. Missing maps of Italy and Sicily	Sufficient ability, good educator	Satisfactory performance, polite and disciplined pupils	27
Messina Giuseppina diploma, Catania 1907	1911-12 – 1913-14	Viagrande	Unsuitable classroom capacity, old-style benches, scarce teaching materials	Diligent and with good ability	Sufficient performance	26
Miaglia Elisabetta lower license, Catania 1861	1887-88 – 1891-92	Ramacca (Giardinelli hamlet)	Poorly suitable room, incomplete furnishings	Completely ignores new teaching principles, failed to improve the rusty old method	Class is intellectually inert, more stunned than disciplined	27
Miaglia Teresa lower license, Catania 1878	Not specified	Villarosa	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	27
	Not specified	Contessa	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
	Not specified	Geraci	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
	1888-89 – 1890-91	Catenanuova	Mediocre room, incomplete furnishings	Teaching follows precepts of the old dogmatic school	Insufficient performance	
Micalizie Giuseppa lower license, Catania 1873	1888-89 – 1914-15	Motta Sant'Anastasia	Recognized suitable until 1901-02, later barely mediocre, old-style benches, incomplete teaching materials	Fair ability and teaching aptitude	Mediocre or poor performance	26
Milazzo Rosina diploma, Catania 1905	1887-88 – 1908-09	Mineo	Deemed unsuitable in 1887-88 as part of a corridor, later recognized suitable. Incomplete furnishings, insufficient teaching materials	Performs her duties with great zeal but has only sufficient ability and aptitude	Slightly more than sufficient performance	27
Milazzo Teresa lower license, Catania 1880	Not specified	Zafferana Etnea	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	27
	Not specified	Mascali	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
	Not specified	Aci S. Antonio	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
	Not specified	Belpasso	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
	Not specified	Scordia	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
	Not specified	Biancavilla	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	
	1885-86	Adernò	Unsuitable room, no furnishings, lacks everything	Sufficient education and great teaching ability, but neglected object lessons	Girls very well advanced in all subjects	
	1891-92 – 1895-96	Catania	Suitable room in Borgo branch. Incomplete teaching materials	Sufficient culture and aptitude	Satisfactory performance	
Minnelli Salvatrice higher license, Catania 1879	1885-86 – 1895-96	Catania	Cramped rooms until 1890-91, later suitable. Incomplete teaching materials	Zealous and with good method	Satisfactory performance	27

Mollica Angelina diploma, Catania 1905	1908-09 – 1914-15	Acireale	Mediocre room, decent furniture, insufficient teaching materials	Limited education but sufficient diligence and teaching aptitude	Satisfactory performance	26
Mollica Ferrara Maria higher license, Catania 1875	1888-89 – 1905-06	Catania	Suitable room from 1896 to 1899. Later, cramped and noisy. Scarce teaching materials	Zealous and with good method	Poor performance	27, 43
Mollica Francesca diploma, Catania 1892	1896-97 – 1902-03, 1913-14	Catania	Cramped room, mediocre furnishings and teaching materials	Fair ability and aptitude	Mediocre performance	27, 43
Montanari Rosa lower license, Catania 1888	1902-03 – 1914-15	Centuripe	Inadequate room and furniture, insufficient teaching materials	Sufficient diligence, little ability and teaching aptitude	Mediocre performance	26
Motta Giuseppa diploma, Catania 1913	1913-14	S. Giovanni La Punta	Suitable room, old- style benches, missing maps	Good ability, performs duties with grace and care	Satisfactory performance	28
Naselli Giovannina higher license, Catania 1876	1888-89 – 1895-96	Regalbuto	Mediocre room, incomplete furnishings, benches of very poor model	Sufficient culture but little aptitude for teaching	Poor performance	29
Naselli Maria higher license, Catania 1890	1890-91 – 1895-96	Regalbuto	Unsuitable room, incomplete furnishings	Good education and teaching aptitude	Good performance	29
Naselli Vita lower license, Catania 1880	1888-89 – 1910-11	Centuripe	Cramped room, mediocre furniture, incomplete teaching materials	Sufficient ability and teaching aptitude	Sufficient performance	29
Nicolosi Giuseppina lower license, Catania 1874	1885-86 – 1899-900	Catania	Good room, incomplete furnishings	Zeal and sufficient aptitude	Satisfactory performance	29
Nicolosi Rodoligo Grazia higher license, Catania 1882	1885-86 – 1907-08	Catania	Decent room, mediocre furnishings and teaching materials	Educated and with aptitude	Fair performance	43
Pace Annetta lower license, Catania 1878	1875-76 – 1884-85	Bronte	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	30, 31
	1890-91 – 1897-98	Giarre	Unsuitable room, mediocre furnishings, incomplete teaching materials	Mediocre literary culture, little knowledge of new dialectical methods	Poor performance	
	1907-08 – 1914-15	Castiglione	Unsuitable room, mediocre furnishings, decent teaching materials	Mediocre ability, sufficient diligence	Poor performance	
Pagliaro Ortensia diploma, Catania 1910	1911-12	Aci S. Antonio	Unsuitable and unhygienic room, decent furniture, incomplete teaching materials	Sufficient diligence and ability, good aptitude and culture, but inexperienced	No judgment possible as class started late (February)	31
Panebianco Gambera Teresa lower license, Catania 1885	1907-08	Catania	Small and dark room, good furniture, insufficient teaching materials	Diligent and with teaching aptitude	Satisfactory performance	30
Panebianco Pasqualina higher license, Catania 1879	1897-98 - 1914-15	Aci Catena	Cold and indecent room, mediocre furnishings, incomplete teaching materials	Diligent and with sufficient teaching ability	Poor educational performance due to the large number of female pupils and the insufficient number of benches	31
Pappalardo Giuseppina higher license, Catania 1874	1885-86 – 1901-02	Catania	Cramped room, incomplete furnishings and teaching materials	Zealous and with good method	Mediocre performance	30
Parlato Sanfilippo Rosaria higher license, Catania 1875	1885-86 – 1888-89	Adernò	Very poor room, two very poor three- seat benches, no teaching materials	Poorly instructed in new methods and not very zealous	Pupils not very regular and lacking trust in the teacher	30
Parrino Rosina higher license, Catania 1883	1887-88	Raddusa	Mediocre room in teacher's house. Old-model benches, missing teaching materials	Zealous but not very effective	Poor discipline, too varied in age	30
Patanè Urzi Caterina diploma, Catania 1899	1907-08	Catania	Adequate classroom size, well-lit, decent	Diligent and fairly educated	Pupils are trained to think and speak sensibly;	30

			furnishings, insufficient teaching materials		come from very poor families	
Pedalino Benedetta diploma, Catania 1906	1907-08 – 1914-15	Fiumefreddo	Good but somewhat cold room, old-style benches, poor furnishings, no materials	Diligent, fairly cultured, commendable ability	Satisfactory performance	32
Percola Giovannina diploma, Catania 1913	1913-14	Tremestieri Etneo	Poorly decent and suitable room, old-model benches, missing maps	Good ability, performs duties with love, commendable service	More than sufficient educational and didactic performance	32
Perres Maria higher license, Catania 1891	1891-92	Pedara	Suitable room, incomplete furnishings, missing maps of Italy and Sicily	Capable and hardworking young woman	Satisfactory performance	30
Pistorio Carmela higher license, Catania 1885	1885-86, 1888-89 – 1891-92	Agira	Cramped room, incomplete furnishings and teaching materials	Sufficient education and strong teaching aptitude	Very satisfactory performance	30
Politi Nunziata lower license, Catania 1880	1885-86	Bronte	Suitable room, decent furnishings, missing nomenclature charts	Works diligently but is uncertain in method	Most pupils are behind and not quick-witted	30
Polizzi Elena diploma, Catania 1911	1911-12	Assoro	Good room, old-model benches, insufficient teaching materials	Temporary teacher, began school on June 1st	Fair educational and didactic performance	30
Previtera Adelina higher license, Catania 1888	1888-89	Giarre	Suitable room	(no evaluation)	(no class performance)	30
Previtera Maria higher license, Catania 1871	1885-86 – 1899-900	Catania	Unsuitable room, incomplete furnishings and teaching materials	Good education and aptitude	Satisfactory performance	30
Puglisi Faro Gaetana higher license, Catania 1892	1895-96 – 1904-05	Catania	Cramped room, mediocre furnishings and teaching materials	Good education and aptitude	Satisfactory performance	30
Puglisi Longo Maria lower license, Catania 1876	1891-92	Gravina	Mediocre room, complete furnishings	Object lessons recommended to the teacher	Mediocre performance	30
Puglisi Vita diploma, Catania 1902	1906-07	Mascalucia	Cramped room, poor furnishings, no teaching materials	Zealous and good teaching aptitude	Fair performance, dictation proceeds too slowly	30
	1907-08 – 1909-10	Catania	Decent classroom, unsuitable benches, teacher has started a teaching museum	Fairly educated, diligent, with special aptitude	Fair performance	
Puleo Massimina Angelina diploma, Catania 1906	1907-08 – 1910-11	Trecastagni	Very narrow and dark room, insufficient and unhygienic furnishings, no teaching materials	Fairly zealous and with good teaching aptitude	More than sufficient performance	32
Pulvirenti Agata higher license, Catania 1887	1891-92	Randazzo	Suitable room, insufficient and unsuitable furnishings	Fair in method, diligent	Fair performance	30
Quattrocchi Angelina lower license, Catania 1876	1888-89 – 1907-08	Riposto	Suitable room, sufficient furnishings, adequate teaching materials	Fair education and strong teaching aptitude, but applies the method moderately well	More than sufficient performance	30
Ragusa Concettina diploma, Catania 1914	1914-15	Belpasso	Cramped room, old-model benches, missing teaching materials	Great ability, performs duties with love, commendable service	More than sufficient performance	33
Rampulla Giacoma diploma, Catania 1913	1914-15	Gagliano Castelferrato	Mediocre room but without toilet, sufficient furnishings but old model, no teaching materials	Sufficiently diligent and of good ability	Mediocre performance	33
Ricca Calì Concetta diploma, Catania 1909	1910-11 – 1914-15	Acireale	Decent room, furnishings and teaching materials mediocre. In school year 1913–14, due	Diligent and capable, does not lack aptitude but shows little enthusiasm and gives	Mediocre performance	33

			to the earthquake of May 8, the school had to move under a Red Cross tent, fairly comfortable and spacious	little liveliness to lessons		
Rossana Rosa diploma, Catania 1900	1907-08 – 1913-14	Aci Castello	Decent room, incomplete furnishings, insufficient teaching materials	Good diligence and ability	Sufficient performance	34
Rusconi Albina lower license, Catania 1877	1877-78	Grammichele	<i>(no data)</i>	<i>(no data)</i>	<i>(no data)</i>	33, 34
	1878-79 – 1914-15	Gagliano Castelferrato	Damp, dark, indecent room. Unsuitable furnishings, no teaching materials	Diligence and aptitude	Mediocre performance	
Russo Angelica diploma, Catania 1904	1907-08 – 1912-13	Zafferana Etnea	Unsuitable and indecent classroom, old-model benches, missing teaching materials	Good education, sufficient ability and teaching aptitude	Mediocre performance	33
Russo Gemma diploma, Catania 1911	1912-13	Zafferana Etnea	Small classroom, unsuitable and insufficient furnishings, missing teaching materials	Regular diligence and good ability	Good educational and didactic performance	34
Russo Lucia diploma, Catania 1911	1912-13 – 1914-15	Calatabiano	Decent classroom, old-type furnishings, insufficient teaching materials	Diligent, satisfactory teaching ability	Mediocre performance	33
Saglimbene Ursino Maria higher license, Catania 1893	1899-900 – 1913-14	Catania	Cramped and unsuitable room, mediocre furnishings, incomplete teaching materials	Fair ability and aptitude	Mediocre performance	43
Santonoceto Grazia higher license, Catania 1883	Not specified	Aci Catena	<i>(no data)</i>	<i>(no data)</i>	<i>(no data)</i>	35
	1888-89 – 1889-90	Masali	Suitable room, complete furnishings, no teaching materials	Teaching ability	Good performance	
Sapienza Grazia higher license, Catania 1896	1896-97 – 1902-03	Mascalucia	Suitable room, old-model benches, incomplete teaching materials	Sufficient education, applies new methods	Fair performance	35
Saporito Francesca higher license, Catania 1877	Not specified	Acireale	<i>(no data)</i>	<i>(no data)</i>	<i>(no data)</i>	35
	Not specified	Aci Catena	<i>(no data)</i>	<i>(no data)</i>	<i>(no data)</i>	
	1885-86 – 1895-96	Catania	Suitable room, complete furnishings, in 1895-96 only missing wall charts	Zealous, excellent aptitude and high education	Commendable performance	
Scacco Lucietta higher license, Catania 1875	1875-76 – 1913-14	Licodia Eubea	Unsuitable room, old-model benches, poor and incomplete teaching materials	Diligent and with teaching aptitude	Good performance	36
Scalia Maria diploma, Catania 1905	1908-09 – 1911-12	S. Giovanni La Punta	Large ground floor but poorly decent, four-seat benches unsuitable, fair teaching materials	Serious young woman with a modest character, respects her superiors. Good ability and aptitude	Good performance and admirable discipline	38
Scandurra Anna lower license, Catania 1867	1872-73 – 1913-14	Giarre	Unsuitable room, mediocre furnishings, no teaching materials	Mediocre diligence, poor education, poor ability	Performance leaves much to be desired	36
Scavone Carmela diploma, Catania 1906	1911-12	Centuripe	Dark and damp classroom, insufficient old-model benches	Hardworking, intelligent, and with good ability	Satisfactory educational and didactic performance	35
Sciuto Santoro Antonina higher license, Catania 1871	1885-86 – 1899-900	Catania	Good room, incomplete furnishings and teaching materials	Zealous and skilled educator	Satisfactory performance	43
Scollo Francesca diploma, Catania 1907	1907-08 – 1910-11	Assoro	Cramped room, lacking light and air, old-model benches, no teaching materials	Diligent and with sufficient ability	Pupils eager to learn, sufficient performance	36

Scravaglieri Rosa diploma, Catania 1901	1910-11 – 1914-15	Regalbuto	Fairly large room but dirty and in bad condition, very poor and insufficient furnishings, no teaching materials	Mediocre diligence, sufficient ability. Cannot maintain discipline	Mediocre performance	36
Sortino Filippa higher license, Catania 1892	1892-93 – 1894-95	Mirabella	Unsuitable room, incomplete furnishings and teaching materials	Sufficient preparation, aptitude, and zeal	Disciplined and well-prepared pupils	35
Spampinato Maria diploma, Catania 1898	1900-01 – 1912-13	Belpasso	Mediocre room and furnishings, scarce teaching materials	Diligent and educated, good teaching ability	Regular performance	38
Spina Anna higher license, Catania 1879	1885-86 – 1909-10	Catania	Fair rooms, incomplete furnishings and teaching materials	Zealous and with good aptitude	Fair performance	43
Spina Famulari Angelina higher license, Catania 1904	1910-11	Catania	Suitable room, fairly suitable three-seat benches, sufficient teaching materials	Diligent and with satisfactory ability. Applies good teaching methods	More than sufficient performance	35
Spina Teresa higher license, Catania 1880	1893-94	Biancavilla	Mediocre room, complete furnishings	Good and diligent teacher	Satisfactory performance	35
Strano Angelina diploma, Catania 1909	1910-11 – 1912-13	Regalbuto	Fair classroom, old-model benches, no school materials	Diligent, with good ability	Sufficient performance	38
Tamburino Maria Stella higher license, Catania 1879	1887-88 – 1902-03	Militello	Mediocre room, poor furnishings, scarce teaching materials	Zealous and with teaching aptitude	Good performance	40
Tergolina Maddalena diploma, Catania 1901	1910-11 – 1912-13	Catania	Large and cold room, fair three-seat benches, incomplete teaching materials (only a blackboard)	Zealous and with good method	Good preparation and mediocre intelligence	40
Tizzoni Tropea Cesira diploma, Catania 1903	1910-11	Mascali	Fair room, satisfactory furnishings, deficient teaching materials	Solid diligence and good ability	Satisfactory performance	39
	1911-12 – 1912-13	Aci S. Antonio	Cramped room exposed to noise, new two-seat benches, no teaching materials	Sufficient ability and fair aptitude, without effort and without enthusiasm	Satisfactory performance in reading and grammar, less in arithmetic	
Tolomei Rosaria lower license, Catania 1878	1878-79 – 1888-89	Pedara	Cramped room, very poor model benches, no teaching materials	Poor education, unaware of new methods	Poor performance especially in language and intellectual development	40
Tornello Angela diploma, Catania 1913	1913-14 – 1914-15	San Michele di Ganzaria	Fair classroom, poor furnishings, no teaching materials	Zealous and with excellent education, but still has beginner's uncertainties	Satisfactory performance	39
Tornello Rosa diploma, Catania 1912	1912-13 – 1914-15	Grammichele	Fair classroom, unsuitable furnishings, scarce teaching materials	Diligent and with fair teaching ability	Mediocre performance	39
Toscano Rosaria diploma, Catania 1909	1912-13	Maletto	Unsuitable room, insufficient furnishings, no teaching materials	Good diligence and sufficient ability	Mediocre performance	39
Trimarchi Giuseppina higher license, Catania 1886	1888-89 – 1902-03	Catania	Cramped room, sufficient furnishings, incomplete teaching materials	Zealous and with good method, full of love for the school	Fair performance, regular attendance	40
Trimarchi Virginia diploma, Catania 1907	1910-11 – 1912-13	Viagrande	Poorly lit room, sufficient but unsuitable furnishings, no teaching materials	Good diligence and ability	Poor performance, parents indifferent to school	39
Tudisco Ursini Elisabetta higher license, Catania 1898	1909-10	Catania (section of Sciarra Curia)	Suitable room, almost in the countryside and well-ventilated. Four-seat benches poorly suitable,	No judgment on teacher's quality, "as she has to travel far to reach this countryside"	Barely sufficient performance	40

			teaching materials almost complete			
Vinciguerra Concetta diploma, Catania 1898	1914-15	Catania	Fair classroom, fair furnishings and teaching materials	Diligent and with excellent teaching ability	Satisfactory performance	43
Vitale Francesca higher license, Catania 1885	1907-08	Catania	Small and poorly lit classroom, poorly lit and unhygienic surroundings	Diligent and with good method	Attentive and quick, accustomed to observing and reflecting	41
Zangara Costanzo Eufemia higher license, Catania 1883	1907-08	Catania	Small classroom, noisy surroundings, unsuitable three-seat benches, scarce teaching materials	Fair aptitude, mechanical teaching, fond of her work	Mediocre educational performance, poor in mental calculation	42
Zanghi Serafina lower license, Catania 1888	1888-89 – 1904-05	Aci S. Antonio	Decent room, mediocre furnishings, incomplete teaching materials	Fair diligence and aptitude	Sufficient performance	42
Zappalà Vincenza (widow Martoglio) higher license, Catania 1871	1885-86	Catania	Suitable room, sufficient furnishings, missing composition pictures	Skilled but “distracted from teaching due to very strong sorrows”	Mediocre performance	42
Zinno Maria higher license, Catania 1889	1895-96	Nicosia	Mediocre room and furnishings, missing cabinet	Diligent teacher with good method, promoted the teaching museum	The pupils benefit	42
Zuco Rapisarda Domenica higher license, Catania 1893	1901-02 – 1912-13	Catania (hamlet of Ognina)	Decent room, mediocre furnishings, incomplete teaching materials	Diligent, with fair ability and teaching aptitude	Performance between sufficient and mediocre until 1907–08, later satisfactory	42

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