

# Presentation

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“The easy way objects from daily life have been forgotten is embarrassing.”

Marie-Pierre Julien and Céline Rosselin

The fact described in the epigraph calls attention to the ordinary nature of objects, which has inescapable presence in societies and in human living. However, by means of such recurring existence, objects have been second in intellectual worries and in academic studies. Giving visibility to that everyday dimension has been the goal of individuals who analyze material culture in several fields. In this respect Marie-Pierre Julien and Céline Rosselin, through their interesting essay entitled *La Culture Matérielle*, published in 2005 by La Découverte press from Paris, questioned the material culture concept validity emphasizing that it is a kind of notion which helps thinking about construction of subjects, of objects and of culture because material culture cannot be reduced to material objects, but it integrates the relationship between subjects and objects. As a matter of fact, those authors say that this is the physical relation between objects and subjects that provides culture. Objects have shapes, colors, sizes, material items. On the other hand, besides that, they play social, aesthetic and symbolic roles. In this sense objects have polysemic meanings which are semantically redefined as long as they exist and as long as they are used. Still regarding the mentioned authors' understanding, subjects are not passive receivers when the message is communicated by the object, unlikely they build the meaning supported by an active process of perception.

Those statements are essential when we take material culture as an investigation issue or as information source in historical studies on education.

Therefore, in the school universe it is necessary to be aware of the multiple senses held by objects and devices which constitute school materiality. School material culture, as pointed by many authors, highlights teaching concepts and social and cultural purposes of education. The introduction, use and disappearing of some devices are directly related to changes in education, that are modernization initiatives on teaching and on pedagogical renewal. As a result, in the education area material culture keeps specific characteristics. Objects at schools get an educational meaning, then a great number of them give support

to teaching and they are tools to spread culture, while others are members of the school shape architecture. In that direction, objects of social use are often converted into school materials, adding new principles and uses according to cases of cultural elements teaching and learning. It is one more time in the book written by Marie-Pierre Julien and Céline Rosselin where we find the precious noticing: the relationship of students with pens, pencils, desks, notebooks, amphitheatres, uniforms, among a lot of other school objects, are more than indicators of scholar culture. In the act on artifacts, students rebuild themselves as students and they contribute to forge a particular culture.

As education historians who have been dedicated to the study of material culture, we face the problems of dealing with a new issue of difficult theoretical and methodological solution. The look, which moves from traditional matters in the field as educational policies, history of educational institutions and educational thought to school materiality, exposes school buildings, blackboards, guidebooks, desks, laboratories, parietal charts, globes, maps, models, stuffed animals, scientific devices, etc. which became a reading key to understand school and the relations of educational subjects as teaching, practices, institutions and pedagogical notions. Thus, in our studies about that culture we have been searching for finding the richness from the symbolic representation of those objects that witnessed the school history itself through inventory.

In order to contribute in this debate, the amount of texts gathered in this dossier means another important gift to the knowledge on school materiality, as well as the role of objects in the school culture that shows research procedures which point out reflective guidelines that are close to the use of the school material culture principle as an idea which helps in explaining the historic reality of varied educational events.

The originality of those studies can be found in the questions they arise and in the interpretations they propose. The reader will find in the texts of this dossier reflections on excellence school equipment as a member of modernity (Marcus Bencostta), changes in the material world of blind children (Ian Grosvenor and Natasha Macnab), architectural spaces thought to real actions in Mexican schools (Oresta López, Norma Ramos and Armando Espinosa), Portuguese schools (Carlos Manique) and Brazilian schools (Célia Dórea), teaching devices and their role in education modernization (Rosa Fátima), such as the school blackboard as relevant technical-material support in modern schools (Valdeniza Barra), manuscript journals which were made by children who reported their daily affairs at school (Maria Teresa) and printed magazines used in the process of training teachers (Rosa Lydia).

Finally, we make an invitation to readers interested in knowing a little about that history full of instigating explanations and curiosities which makes the task of building a writing engaged with the serious work of historians pleasant.

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