

A EDUCAÇÃO DE MENINAS NO INÍCIO DO SÉCULO XX: A EDUCAÇÃO DE AURELIA JOSZ E A DIDÁTICA DA EXPERIMENTAÇÃO

*THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY: AURELIA
JOSZ'S EDUCATIONAL AND DIDACTIC EXPERIMENTATION*

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ABSTRACT: This paper illustrates the results of historical research on educational experimentation in the field of education of girls. In the early 20th century in Italy the debates on how girls and women were to be educated was very lively. Italy, which had recently been unified, saw for the first time, legislation that established that primary schooling should also be open to young girls and women. Even though the law established compulsory schooling for boys and girls at the time, actually, educational paths accessible to or reserved for girls were extremely limited. Within this framework, the experimentation of Aurelia Josz is interesting and little known: she was a teacher, trainer and writer who founded in 1902 the Women's Practical School of Agriculture (Scuola Pratica Agraria Femminile). It was a training course for girls who wanted to become professionals in agriculture, breeding, floriculture, and gardening. Aurelia Josz carried out largely innovative experimentation as to curriculum, methodologies, and design of spaces and materials. This contribution will analyze Josz's experimentation and compare it with the contemporary pedagogical debate, starting from the study of the documents present at the Historical Archives of the Società Umanitaria and at the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Centre of Milan.

Keywords: Girls' education. Gender. Aurelia Josz.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper illustrates a case of foundation of an innovative academic model, both in terms of methods and curriculum, which was conceived and implemented in the early 20th century by the educationist and writer Aurelia Josz. Her work was the first to address the issue of vocational training for girls by seeking solutions that would enable them to emerge from a condition of ignorance and dependence through more qualified employment than was available to women at the time.

Due to the difficulties in finding sources, the reconstruction of the history of this innovation and Josz's pedagogical principles proved to be very complex. Because she was born into an Italian family of Jewish origins, her books and writings were placed on the list of works by Jewish authors that were banned and were to be burned under the Italian government's Racial Laws passed in 1938 at the behest of the dictator Benito Mussolini. Fortunately, however, due to a transcription error, Aurelia's name was changed to Amelia, so some of her books were saved from this conflagration.

Thanks to this error as well as to some administrative documents preserved in the archives, we have been able to reconstruct her novel approach. As will become clear, she began her educational and didactic experimentation in 1902, which she continued until 1931, when it was proscribed by the fascist regime. Nevertheless, her innovative agenda, which was taken up again some time later, became and continues to be an important model for vocational education nationwide.

Therefore, we based this article on historical research, conducted through the analysis of a book written by Aurelia Josz, and two articles she published in the magazine *La Cultura Popolare* [Popular Culture]. Also used as indirect sources were some administrative documents from the historical archive of the *Società Umanitaria* [Humanitarian Society], which comprise school reports and presentations, applications for funding, as well as financial and administrative documents regarding Josz's travels through Europe. We consider this historical reconstruction fundamental since Josz's experimentation, which is rarely studied today, has proven to be especially innovative from the standpoint of the curriculum she proposed and the methodologies she used.

This paper initially offers an overview of the national and local context within which Josz operated. As we shall see, the atmosphere that gave rise to some of her most significant experimentation and the very intense debates concerning her pedagogical programmes was especially lively and stimulating. A discussion of how Aurelia implemented her ideas, and from which educational models she drew inspiration and what innovative elements it contained rounds out our examination of this fascinating figure.

AN INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL AND DIDACTIC EXPERIMENTATION FOR GIRLS

THE CONTEXT

At the close of the 19th century and in the early decades of the 20th, the cultural climate in Milan went through a distinctly lively period, linked to the rapid and intense economic development and the complex social changes that were influencing the city. (CANADELLI, 2008). At that time Milan had become a centre of pedagogical and educational innovation and substantial academic discussion that was influential both in Italy and internationally. Without doubt, all of this intellectual activity was connected to the experiences and discourse, which in those years were emerging in the United States and Europe, thanks to the pioneering thrust being generated by new schools as well as by those institutions that were firmly established.

In fact, Milan engendered many public initiatives, conventions, seminars, and courses, dedicated to themes concerning education, training and scholastic progress.

These events also contributed to the lively conversations and debates on these subjects that were published in the specialist and popular journals of the time. Also, during this fertile period in the Lombard capital, a great deal of original, educational and pedagogic experimentation came to light. Just to name a few, there was Maurilio Salvoni's Institute, Pizzigoni's *Rinnovata*, (today it is called *Istituto Comprensivo Rinnovata Pizzigoni*) and the first *Montessori Casa Dei Bambini* [Montessori Children's Houses] School (the latter two are still open today). These experiences played a considerable role in the proposal and evocation of deep contemplation on the issues surrounding schooling

and education, the organisation of spaces and materials, the design of the educational environment, and especially the role of the teacher. It bears recalling that after Pierre Bovet's visit to Maurilio Salvoni's experimental Institute, the former defined it as an "école nouvelle" [new school]. Later, this expression came to be used as a common indication of the many innovative European educationally and didactically experimental schools that sprang up in that period.

These new schools were characterised by many common features. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to specify that all these experimental schools proposed that they maintain their focus on outdoor spaces and open-air activities, on the need to overcome book-based learning and on basing teaching activities on observation, manipulation, and practical tasks. In this regard, both Pizzigoni and Montessori greatly emphasized that a new image of the child be advanced (PIZZIGONI, 1914). Specifically, they felt that children should be viewed as autonomous explorers, who had the right to their own spaces and materials designed for manipulation, as well as to learning activities occurring in organic, healthy environments, such as being surrounded by nature (MONTESSORI, 1909).

Furthermore, the attention to outdoor activities was also generating heated debate in those years in Milan. We know that the many experiments based on outdoor education led to an intense discussion all over Europe at the time (CHÂTELET; LERC; LUC, 2003). This concept became a central theme of the 1921 document drawn up at the Calais Conference by the *Bureau International des Ecoles Nouvelles* [International Office of New Schools], which also proposed that these "new schools" should include a location in the countryside, natural gymnastics, travel and camping, among their qualifying elements (RAYMOND, 2011). At that time, there was a fundamental shift in Italy from the view that saw outdoor education as especially necessary and beneficial for the prevention of illness and the maintenance of health of frail and sickly children to one that saw this dimension as useful and interesting for all children (SEVESO e FINCO, 2017). Already in 1915 there were open-air schools in several important cities in Italy (Padua, Venice, Genoa, Rome, Verona, Brescia, Florence, Parma, Milan, Bergamo, Treviso, Pavia, and Udine). In one of Italy's most important pedagogical journals of the day, *La Coltura Popolare* [Popular Culture], Mario Ragazzi wrote:

[It seems necessary] to allow all schoolchildren, without distinguishing between the frail and the robust, among those who may be more or less needy, to enjoy the healthful advantages of the outdoors. These initiatives were well known since they had been illustrated and discussed; the one was in the vast and complex, *Scuola Rinnovata Pizzigoni* and the other the other in the simpler and more limited, Travelling School of Bergamo (RAGAZZI, 1915, p. 167-168).

Another interesting aspect of this environment was the debate on whether school should be more attentive to doing, to the senses that is, to developing manual skills. This dimension was present in much of the experimentation and at least in part also involved both the academic and the ministerial contexts. The discussion, hinging on the need to modernise teaching by adopting methodologies that were more linked to doing, was consolidated after the Minister of Education, Michele Coppino's mission to the famous Nääs school, in Sweden. Founded in 1872 by August Abrahamson (1817-1898), the Nääs school was developed and coordinated by Abrahamson's nephew Otto Salomon (1849-1907).

In the summer of 1887, a delegation of teachers, headed by Adolfo Pick of the Fröbelian schools, together with the Italian educationists Pietro Pasquali and Pasquale Villari and the teacher Emidio Consorti, learned first-hand about the *slöjd* method. The term *slöjd*, derived from an ancient Scandinavian word, which means “manual” or “handmade”, essentially referred to hands-on work that was educational. It was from this experience that the need for a regeneration of the educational system as a whole arose. This official visit sparked a debate on the need to modernise teaching in schools and the importance of manual work and its potential in education. The focus on manual work and the need to renew educational methods in 1888 had also permeated Baccelli Elementary School Programmes, which were curricula inspired by Positivism, with references to the observation of natural events. These programmes called for a departure from “dogmatism” and then called to mind:

Over the last twenty years, there is one principle, which has again lately become popular, though vainly advocated over the centuries by few unfortunate heralds, and which is, that the only truly productive education is that which we gather from our own experience. From this concept, education should become, as far as is possible, an exercise in observation, which will excite and sustain the students' curiosity.

Unfortunately, these programmes were in force for only a few years during which there was not enough time for them to become effective. The traditional practice of teaching, which remained anchored in very repetitive systems, continued to be highly theoretical. Teachers based their lessons on explanations and repetition. No manual work nor any active observations by students were put into practice.

The discussions on schools and teaching methods ran parallel to the debates on how girls and women were to be educated and on how teachers should be trained. Italy, which had recently been unified, saw for the first time, legislation that established that primary schooling should also be open to young girls and women (PIRONI, 2014). Even though the law established compulsory schooling for boys and girls at the time, actually, educational paths accessible to or reserved for girls were extremely limited.

Indeed, the wretched state of cultural and economic misery in which many families found themselves, prompted most parents to perceive girls' education as essentially unnecessary (MAPELLI e SEVESO, 2003). Instead, girls were employed doing housework, caring for younger siblings and working in the fields, which for all intents and purposes kept them out of school. If there was any disposable income in the family, investment would generally be directed towards the education of their male children, in the hope that some possible future social mobility might be gained and in the belief that, once the son had grown up, he would in turn provide for the maintenance of the extended family (SEVESO, 2018).

The statistics are clear: in that period girls had little or no access to education. In 1901, the level of female illiteracy was estimated to be at 54.4%, whilst male illiteracy was at least twelve points lower at 42.5%. Nevertheless, in addition to the figures on basic literacy, other aspects and phenomena, which make the situation more complex to read and interpret, should also be considered. Though in many cases, girls had access to schooling, their attendance only rarely surpassed the first few years of primary instruction. Furthermore, presence at school was often especially discontinuous and fragmentary, since it was perforce subordinated to family commitments and employment, which were perceived as more urgent and unavoidable. Therefore, the somewhat opaque

literacy figures for girls, may have even been substantially overestimated due to these more nuanced phenomena of exclusion.

For these very same reasons, even in cases where girls were able to attend primary school, very few of them had access to secondary or higher education, which families often deemed unnecessary or even harmful. In this regard, Carmela Covato, Professor of the History of Education, has pointed out that at the very beginning of the 20th century, there was an animated debate on whether higher education should be offered to women, since such scholarship had been deemed to be the possible cause of hazardous competition between male and female professional outcomes. Professor Covato drew attention to how there emerged in this area “a lively controversy, fuelled by old and new prejudices found not only in the then dominant common sense, but also in scientific and political circles and especially in the circuit of the Catholic culture” (1991, p. 67).

In this situation, over the course of a few decades, the *Scuola Normale* [Normal Schools], which were initially intended for training prospective teachers whether male or female, became the preeminent teacher training vehicle for girls. The achievement of a primary school teaching certificate became such a highly coveted and idealised goal, for many middle and lower-middle class families that this qualification was considered worthy of enormous economic sacrifices for the purchase of suitable materials, clothing, and at times, significant costs for boarding facilities that were frequently substandard, nearby the Normal Schools. In many cases, enrolment in a *Scuola Normale* could represent a real hardship. Girls were pushed to attend schools far from their hometowns. Often the *Scuola Normale* was teeming with moral poverty and exaggerated competitiveness. Then, once the girls finally graduated, they were commonly employed in uncomfortable and isolated areas where they were often subjected to the victimisation of prejudice and hostility from the local inhabitants.

At the same time, within this framework, there was also Aurelia Jozs’s proposal. Conceived as a training course for girls strongly focused on education through actions or “doing”, in outdoor settings, surrounded by nature, this programme was not just a novel venue as it offered two main innovative elements for the girls’ education: namely original methods and materials and an entirely new curriculum.

It is interesting to trace the origins of Josz's ideas and from where she imported this model. In her *Relazione e Programma della Scuola Pratica Agricola Femminile in Niguarda* [Report and Programme of the Women's Practical School of Agriculture at Niguarda] dated 1905², Josz reconstructs the genesis of her idea. Reading an article in the *FortNight Review international journal*, written by Mrs Crawford and dedicated to the latter's narration of her visits to agriculture schools in Belgium, Josz was prompted to wonder if such programmes could be implemented in Italy. Crawford, in her writing, by illustrating the Belgian experience in an attractive and passionate manner, bemoaned the dearth of agrarian education for women in England. Taking her cue from these considerations, Josz began to reflect on the lack of similar educational paths in Italy as well. She wrote in her Report (1932, p. 5): "The issue was so significant and fit so perfectly in the framework of my thoughts, that I could think of little else". When she reconstructs this moment in her essay, *La donna e lo spirito rurale* [Women and the Rural Spirit], she emphasises that in Belgium, these schools were supported both "by the government and by private individuals, in moral and material co-operation, with the aim of reinvigorating the forces that enhance the value of the land" (1932, p. 6).

Although Josz's idea was original and advanced, it met with enormous difficulties in finding support and adequate financial resources at the Ministry. She also turned to associations and organisations. For example, she attended the Agrarian Congress in Lodi, where she found no one to listen and no financial backing.

Many girls and women were actually employed in agriculture at the time, but in conditions of extreme exploitation and with no vocational training. Most of these women, often illiterate, worked twelve-hour days or even longer, earning truly meagre wages, harvesting fruit or vegetable crops, reaping, silkworm farming, etc. Farmers' associations had no interest in changing this situation, where landowners and even the small farmers maintained their controlling role leaving the girls ignorant and exploited (VITA JOSZ, 1957).

² This Report was then inserted into the Josz's book *La donna e lo spirito rurale* [Woman and the Rural Spirit].

Therefore, Josz had no choice but to turn to other proponents in an attempt to bring her own project of female education to fruition. At this juncture, she came into contact with other women, who were engaged in social work and who played a fundamental role in the dissemination of pioneering educational ideas. It is certain that she met Alessandrina Ravizza, who most likely introduced Josz to the works of Leo Tolstoy. Perhaps this explains why, in her writings, Josz emphasised that this thinker was fundamental to her development and that she agreed with some of the Russian writer's pedagogical principles and proposals. Specifically, she felt that education should be in a natural setting and about nature, that there is a need for outdoor activities, and that teaching manual skills is essential.

In 1902, Maria Camperio Siegfried, a Milanese noblewoman, who was very sensitive to educational issues and specifically to those surrounding the education of women, donated 500 lire to subsidise the opening of Josz's school (. This donation permitted Josz to establish the *Scuola Pratica Agricola Femminile* (Practical Agricultural School for Girls) at the *Orfanotrofio Femminile delle Stelline* [Girls Orphanage of the Stars]. She was also able to appoint a Provisional Committee to run the school. A key year for the school was 1905, when it became independent and was moved to, to a beautiful villa with a large plot of land in the Niguarda area just north of the Milan city centre.

As we were able to glean from a file still in the archives of the *Società Umanitaria*, that year, Josz was also able to go on a fact-finding mission, financed by the same Society. As it was also undertaken under the auspices of the Italian Ministry of Agriculture her trip was deemed an official one, evidenced by the Ministerial report on that mission, which was published the following year in the Official Bulletin of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Trade. Primarily, Josz went to Belgium, where there were eleven active agricultural schools, of which she visited those in Goreind, Overysche, Brugelette and Héverlé. In her diary, which she later transcribed into her book *La donna e lo spirito rurale*, she noted: "This latter school, especially in view of its wealth of didactic and experimental material, as well as of the breadth of its programme, was perhaps - to criticise just a little - even too comprehensive, relative to the cultural level of the students." (JOSZ, 1932, p. 28).

She also made stops in Lucerne, Berne, and Liège. Finally, after a short stay in Paris, she travelled as far as Great Britain, where she found many schools that were closed including the Lady Warwick School of Agriculture. Whilst Josz was in England, she was only able to visit the Kew Gardens School of Horticulture and the Swanley Horticultural College in Kent. She was mainly interested in learning about these experiments because she did not want to simply ‘copy’ them. In her opinion, it was necessary to find a model that could be adapted to the specific circumstances in Italy. She wrote in her report, which she later transcribed in her book: “Yes, I wish to observe and study but I will not ever copy anything: this has always been my motto. Each and every plant requires its own climate and soil, hence every action must coincide equally”. (1932, p .25).

Her aim was therefore to use the ideas that originated in Belgium and transform them according to the needs, the characteristics, and the history of the context in Italy. In this case, we can truly speak of a *transfer culturel*, as defined by Michel Espagne, who uses this category of investigation to indicate the passage of a cultural object from one context to another, with all those modifications, new interpretations, and new applications of semantics that become inevitable (ESPAGNE, 1998). The adaptation that Josz implemented was influenced both by what she saw on her European tour and by the stimuli that came from the Italian, and especially the Milanese, experiments mentioned above.

Unfortunately, her project seemed to be fraught with financial difficulties. In the files found in the *Società Umanitaria* Archives one can read the list of the school’s supporters, who were mostly made up of private individuals or associations (such as the *Società Umanitaria* itself). Regardless, over the years Josz’s experimentation gained extensive recognition. In 1906, the school was awarded the gold medal at the International Exhibition in Milan for the modern methods adopted. In 1911, it mounted a successful participation in the International Exhibition in Turin. After 1914, Josz proposed a specialisation programme for teachers who had already graduated, and for those who would go on to teach in rural schools. In 1921, in the journal *La Coltura Popolare*, she proudly wrote that by Royal Decree the school “had been recently established as an autonomous institution, on the basis of a Consortium formed between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Province and the Municipality of Milan” (JOSZ, 1921, p. 174).

THE INNOVATIVE ELEMENTS OF JOSZ'S EXPERIMENTATION

Though this is neither the place nor the time to dwell on the school's complex history, it would instead be amply appropriate to discuss the innovative elements of Josz's experiment. Her idea was twofold. On the one hand, she wished to modernise the methodologies and instruments used in schools at that time, which were anchored to an abstract didactic approach, which was for the most part passive on the part of the students. On the other hand, her goal was to implement a new training programme for girls, with a well-defined curriculum and clear professional outlets.

Regarding methodology, as a History and Geography teacher who had worked in complementary technical and normal schools, she had seen how the girls of that time were being offered an education that was very abstract, based on repetitive teaching, and whose objective was to have the students learn notions that were often far removed from reality. A heartfelt passage in her report clearly demonstrates her attention to this dimension:

More than once, scrutinising the appearance of my female students in the supplementary, technical and normal schools, I felt my heart aching with pity, to see so many of these girls grow so pale as they pored over their books, like flowers who were wilting for lack of sunlight (1932, p. 5).

It was not Josz's intention to polemicise against books as objects of study per se. Rather, she wished to emphasise how indispensable it was for these girls to implement pathways that proposed practical learning based on observation and experimentation alongside their study in books. Besides, Josz was the author of school textbooks, even though she had already experimented with new teaching tools and methodologies, such as using theatre for teaching history, or the setting up of a geographic museum using her students' creativity to make paper materials. Therefore, she regularly promoted fresh operational strategies in the classroom, which engaged the pupils in concrete actions and made it possible to flank traditional, theoretical, and book-based teaching with more attractive and interesting methodologies. She wrote:

In my personal study, on my own, to teach Geography, I succeeded in constructing a method based on sketches, models, and objective demonstrations - a novelty at the time - that pleased my students and encouraged them to actually do things". (She was referring to her experience at the *Scuola Normale Agnesi*) (1932, p. 5).

When she founded the *Scuola Pratica Agraria Femminile* (Practical Agricultural School for Women), she proposed a method that saw the intertwining of theory with practice. She described her teaching method: "Theory and practice complement one another, so that each task becomes intelligent, fruitful and a source of deep and intimate satisfaction" (1932, p. 7). Josz continues by describing the innovative methods she implemented at the *Scuola Pratica Agricola Femminile*:

Meanwhile at Niguarda, the pace of our activities was broadening and becoming more intense: lessons on general cultivation, theoretical classes held by specialist instructors, all under the shade of the solemn deodar cedar. And then there is the corresponding parallel practice in the field, in the vegetable garden, in the barn, in the chicken coop and in the kitchen in weekly shifts (1932, p. 43).

During lessons on theory, some lecturers used a very unconventional instrument for that period, the projection apparatus, and slides, which was also discussed in the journal *La Coltura Popolare*. Even though this instrument was being used as a new and effective teaching tool for the first time, there was no shortage of criticism and rejection. We know, from reading the magazine *La Coltura Popolare*, that in Italy the National Consortium for Libraries and Light Projection in Turin held around 12,000 slides in 1911 and 30,000 in 1913. This increase clearly shows the strong interest in this apparatus. The journal, *La Coltura Popolare* also initiated an interesting discussion on how to use projections in education, so that they would not replace explanations, but so that they could truly be a complement for teachers. Aware of the effectiveness and innovative scope of these methods, Aurelia Josz encouraged the teachers at the school she founded to use them.

Moreover, disciplines such as Italian or mathematics were taught on the basis of concrete experience. In this, she seemed to anticipate the proposals of later activism:

The effects were also beneficial with regard to the students' intellectual development: for example, when studying language, it was found that since they only had to write about

what was perceived by their senses, or about what was immediately suggested by life, they soon learned to express themselves clearly. This way, in agricultural accounting, the majority of these students were able to gain a clear grasp of the by no means easy to comprehend device known as double-entry bookkeeping (1932, p. 43).

As in the proposals of Montessori and Salvoni, Josz considered the education of the sight, training in direct observation, to be important: “The basis of the school should be the study of the natural sciences, derived from direct observation. Morality should hinge on agricultural work from whence the ideas of equity, mutuality, welfare, punctuality, and order are derived...” (1932, p. 85).

On this point, she describes one of her memories. She recounts having witnessed science lessons for young children at the Montesca School imparted by Alice Franchetti:

Now I recall attending a lesson on natural things for the children at the Montesca School of the late Baroness Franchetti in Città di Castello. The Baroness was accompanying me. And it is not easy to describe the joy of those poor little children as they scrutinised and then showed us the transformation of a dicotyledonous seed in water, and the metamorphosis of a tadpole, and the analysis of a flower... (1932, p. 84).

All these methods came together to create a very innovative and original training programme. The fact that Josz thought of this precisely to elevate the education of girls by offering them instruments and opportunities to enter the world of work and to perform skilled tasks, thus releasing them from exploitative situations is interesting. Furthermore, Josz’s objective was to offer an alternative education to what was provided by the *Scuola Normale*, as already illustrated above. In fact, at the time, the *Scuola Normale* was the only educational choice for girls, making it an obligatory path for the few who were fortunate enough to continue their studies. She pointed out that in England, on the other hand, there were then several agricultural schools. She also mentioned a horticultural college. The same situation could be found in Germany, Switzerland and in the United States, where courses had also been set up in home economics, with degrees offered by universities (Domestic Arts and Sciences). This phenomenon testifies to the interest in creating new educational paths for girls in Western countries.

In her experience as a teacher of history and geography in complementary, technical, and normal schools, Josz realised how much of a strain this single course of

instruction put on the girls and how it was instead necessary to design other courses for young women of the day. In her Report, cited above, she describes her students and points out:

Thinking about their future, considering how those girls who were most pained had for the most part come from the countryside, were far from their loved ones, were housed in boarding schools where little is paid, and little is eaten, who were engaged in the struggle for a teaching certificate, that blessed passport, for employment that would pay just a few lire a month. I wondered whether it would not be better for them to stay close to the earth, in the sun, in the open air, working in the furrows, preserving the freshness of their spirit, the firmness of their flesh, and the robustness of their blood (1932, p. 5).

Josz understood that the *Scuola Normale* was an educational programme that would uproot these girls from their history and from their natural interests, whilst it was still responding to that great desire to escape a future of exploitation linked to total ignorance. That is why she created a school that would allow girls to escape their ignorance and to not be exploited, but that would be different from the *Scuola Normale*. Her most pressing concern was also very evident after the First World War, when in the pages of *Il Secolo XIX* [newspaper] she addressed the issue of the conditions of all those girls who were left fatherless (18 March 1919):

But what can be done about these girls? After the third or fourth grade they will have to stay at home with their mothers and learn what she knows. And if she knows nothing - as is very likely - they will remain ignorant. Ignorant on the eve of receiving the vote, ignorant in the bosom of the family they will form. Oh! Is this not the reward owed to the women of the fields, who knew how to sacrifice all and work for their country (1932, p. 78)

In this passage, Josz makes a meaningful correlation of the issue of female education with those other rights whose acknowledgement was being demanded by the many women's associations of that time. In the same article, however, she reminds readers of women's plight in general, especially those who were excluded from culture and education: "There are millions of women waiting for the comfort and light of knowledge. It does not seem to be too much to ask that at least one sister school to the *Scuola Pratica Agricola femminile di Niguarda* be established as soon as possible in each province" (1932, p. 78).

The importance of this experiment for the problem of women's education was recognised by several contemporaries, including the historian and pedagogue Pasquale Villari, who wrote in a letter to Josz: "The school you founded seems to me excellent and deserving of every encouragement. It is precisely what we need. If I come to Milan and can stay for a few days, I will come to see it" (JOSZ, 1932, p. 35).

Or we can also read the positive assessments of Paolo Mantegazza, a famous doctor, anthropologist and politician, and son of Laura Solera Mantegazza, herself a Milanese philanthropist active in the field of children's and working women's rights: "This new school is a great step on the road to the progress of our women who will help their companions in the cultivation of the fields, but who, as ignorant as they are, can only provide them with manual labour" (JOSZ, 1932, p. 36).

CONCLUSION

The research conducted on the experience of the *Scuola Pratica Agricola femminile* was undertaken using the little testimony available caused by the tragic loss of many original documents and sources. In spite of this, it was possible to analyse the innovative aspects of this experimentation, which turned out to be connected to the particular investigative climate extant in Milan and throughout Italy in the early 1920s, not to mention the myriad activities of the highly animated women's movements in action at that time promoting children's rights and women's emancipation.

The experimentation implemented by Aurelia Josz proved to be highly innovative in terms of materials, spaces and methodologies used for teaching and applied to learning processes especially as it showed its originality and significance in its development of novel educational programmes specifically for girls who worked in the countryside. In fact, Josz the educationist was offering these women the possibility of escaping a future of ignorance and exploitation. Her school allowed these girls to achieve a good level of education and to carry out agricultural work whilst also participating in real decision-making.

This research is not only valuable for reconstructing the history of women: its significance also spans the century in its reflection on the role of girls and women in

agriculture today. In many nations, women still make up the majority of the agricultural workforce. Often these women are engaged in very onerous tasks (gathering wood, collecting water, etc.), yet they are regularly excluded from decision-making (PINI, 2002). The data indicate, however, that it is precisely the women who are capable of becoming promoters of a truly ecological transition and a new approach based on awareness of and care for the environment (TRAUGER; SACHS; BARBERCHECK; KIERNAN; BRASIER; FINDEIS, 2008). One hundred years later, Aurelia Josz's work shows how it is still necessary today to offer women in this sector adequate training, awareness of their rights, and an education that enables them to also actively participate in decision-making processes.

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RESUMO: Este artigo ilustra os resultados da pesquisa histórica sobre experimentação educacional no campo da educação de meninas. No início do século 20, na Itália, os debates sobre como meninas e mulheres deveriam ser educadas foi muito animado. A Itália, que havia sido recentemente unificada, viu pela primeira vez uma legislação que estabelecia que a educação primária também deveria ser aberta a meninas e mulheres jovens. Embora a lei estabeleça a escolaridade obrigatória para meninos e meninas na época, na verdade, os caminhos educacionais acessíveis ou reservados para as meninas eram extremamente limitados. Dentro desse quadro, a experimentação de Aurelia Josz é interessante e pouco conhecida: foi professora, formadora e escritora que fundou em 1902 a Escola Prática da Agricultura Feminina (Scuola Pratica Agraria Femminile). Foi um curso de treinamento para meninas que queriam se tornar profissionais em agricultura, criação, floricultura e jardinagem. Aurelia Josz realizou experiências amplamente inovadoras quanto ao currículo, metodologias e design de espaços e materiais. Esta contribuição analisará a experimentação de Josz e a comparará com o debate pedagógico contemporâneo,

partindo do estudo dos documentos presentes no Arquivo Histórico da Società Umanitaria e no Centro de Documentação Judaica Contemporânea de Milão.

Palavras-chave: Educação de meninas. Gênero. Aurelia Josz.

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