

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: SCHOOLS AS LABORATORIES: SCIENCE,
CHILDREN’S BODIES, AND SCHOOL
REFORMERS IN THE MAKING OF
MODERN ARGENTINA (1880-1930)

Sabrina González, Doctor of Philosophy, 2022

Dissertation directed by: Dr. Karin Roseblatt, Department of History

This dissertation examines the influence of scientific ideas in the school to illuminate teachers’ participation in the production of scientific knowledge about pedagogy and childhood. I interrogate how scientific theories circulating transnationally—including positivism, Darwinism, neo-Lamarckianism, and eugenics—, impacted pedagogical theory and practice. I contribute to the historiographies on race and gender in Latin America by conceptualizing the schools as a laboratory, a site for the circulation and production of scientific knowledge. Between 1880 and 1930, Argentina experienced cultural, political, and economic transformations. Argentine elites promoted their nation’s insertion into the world economy through industrialization, urbanization, and European immigration. Drawing on scientific ideas that provided a language to diagnose and propose solutions to social problems, the government founded normal schools, secondary education institutions to train teachers. In 1884, the Congress passed a law that universalized primary education. Primary and normal schools became the

means to incorporate children into the nation and the site where thousands of first-generation students —mostly women— continued their studies with the help of a state run system of national and provincial fellowships.

I argue that in school laboratories teachers contributed to reproducing the positivist and racist ideologies that disciplined children while, at the same time, teaching prompted women to participate in science. Women became producers of knowledge within a local and transnational network that expanded beyond the classroom and connected their practice with magazines, congresses, and scientific journals. By observing children's bodies and experimenting with pedagogical methods, teachers advanced pedagogy as a science and developed studies on children's intelligence. Drawing on their teaching experiences and in scientific discourses circulating transnationally, many teachers used their position to challenge what they considered as disciplinary and authoritarian practices and organized to democratize the school. School reformers experimented with teaching methods, enacting alternative ways of schooling that centered on children's freedom of movement and expression. By looking at the links between science and teaching, I contribute to highlighting the historical connections between the emergence of universal schooling in Latin America, the rise of eugenic thought, and the emergence of women's participation in science and politics.

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REFORMERS IN THE MAKING OF MODERN ARGENTINA (1880-1930)

by

Sabrina González

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Advisory Committee:

Dr. Karin Roseblatt, Chair

Dr. Alejandro Cañeque

Dr. Matthew Karush

Dr. Patricio Korzeniewicz

Dr. David Sartorius

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Preface

My journey as a working-class student from Buenos Aires, Argentina, educator in formal and informal education, and daughter of a primary school teacher have sparked the research questions for this project. This preface aims to reflect on my positionality as a researcher, understanding that my experience in the school, both as a student and as a teacher, has shaped my reading of the sources. Because we cannot see from everywhere, I reflect on the discourses and practices that have shaped my “partial vision” on the history of Argentina.

I was born in Marcos Paz, a small town in the province of Buenos Aires, in a working class family. From family narratives and my own experience in the school, I learned that the school is not always a welcoming institution for working class children. During the 1930s, my maternal grandfather, José Larrodé, learned to write with his right hand while the teacher tied his left hand to the desk. For my grandfather, learning was a painful experience. I understand now that discouraging children to write with their left hand was a common teaching practice that aimed to adapt children’s bodies into normal able bodies. My own experience in primary school during the 1990s, brings me memories of violent teaching practices. I remember suffering during the school festivities that celebrated the anniversary of independence. I was never elected to perform the role of the white women from the high society of Buenos Aires called “*dama antigua*.” Only my blonde classmates performed this role. Instead, I interpreted the character of an Afro-descendant street

vendor. Every year, the teacher assigned to poorer and darker skinned students the role of street vendors. Each time my mom painted my face with a burned cork and I danced candombe to please the school authorities and the audience. Working on this project allowed me to come back to these quotidian memories of the school and analyze them under a critical perspective that highlights how teachers reproduced and created racial differences in the school and how children internalized them. In the end, my desire to dance minuet instead of candombe was part of a colonial thought that praised European traditions and neglected African roots in the history of Argentina.

Regardless of the most violent aspects of schooling, education represents an enormous source of pride for working class families. My grandparents could only advance to sixth grade since economic constraints required them to work from an early age. My grandmother, Miriam Sánchez, reminded me how challenging school was for a poor girl whose parents worked all day on a farm. Completing homework was not easy since she had to take care of the cleaning and the cooking for her entire family. My grandmother's dreams of becoming a hair stylist vanished under barriers that working class young women faced in the 1940s. She joined the workforce in a textile factory where she worked until she got married and dedicated full time to the labor of mothering and housewifing. Because both of my grandparents were denied the possibility of studying, they insisted that their daughters continue their studies after graduating from high school.

As working-class women and first-generation students, teaching was the obvious path for José and Miriam's daughters. As with many of the teachers that I

study in this dissertation, my mother and aunts --Lilia, Irene, and Mercedes Larrodé--, found in the normal school an avenue to find a job. While the teaching diploma did not have the same status of a university degree, it promised economic autonomy and emancipation. Since I was a child, I learned the many obstacles of teachers' quotidian labor. I found in the archives similar narratives that speak to the long history of teachers' struggle in the school including the lack of resources, the conflictive relationships with parents, the disciplinary measures of the inspector, and the fear of being subjected to a "summary investigation." Teachers in my family taught under precarious conditions in public schools with no heat during the winter or ventilation during the summer. In times of economic crisis in the 1990s and 2000s, they had to provide their own chalk. In the classroom, they encountered children without clothing and suffering from hunger. Like many other teachers, they embodied teaching as an apostolate, a sacrificial activity performed in cold classrooms for a meager salary that did not fairly compensate their labor.

However, the school became for them a site for political awareness and solidarity. The lack of resources dedicated to public education inspired them to join multiple strikes and participate in labor unions. Observing children's needs animated them to mobilize small acts of rebellion against a neoliberal system that denied children from the most basic needs. My mom Lilia used to collect the pencils that my sister and I did not use to form a communal pencil case for their students. During the economic crisis of 2002, the national government stopped providing food for school lunches. As a result, my aunt Mercedes invited children to her home to provide at least one meal a day. My mom established a "food pantry" in her school. She asked a

local bakery for donations and commuted for hours on public transportation with a bag of pastries. Until her retirement, working under the administration of neoliberal President Mauricio Macri and Governor of Buenos Aires María Eugenia Vidal, my mom collected jackets for her students who were unable to attend class during the winter due to the lack of appropriate clothing. From these actions, I learned that the labor of teachers was similar to mothering. Beyond imparting knowledge, teachers nurtured children, provided the most basic resources, and made the school a home where poor children found food, care, and refuge in times of austerity. My dissertation aims to shed light onto the school reformers who long before my mom and my aunts “put their bodies” into the transformation of the school. Just as my mom had, they also believed the school could be a laboratory to enact the society they envisioned.

My own journey as an educator informs how I approach progressive teachers in this dissertation. My first teaching experience in 2008 was not in formal education but in a “Bachillerato de Educación Popular,” an alternative school to the state for working class adult students. The “bachis” were one of the multiple manifestations of popular organizing after the neoliberal crisis of 2002. From a theoretical perspective, they were inspired by Paulo Freire’s pedagogy that conceptualizes education as a tool for liberation and the class as a dialogical experience where the hierarchical roles are blurred in a collective process of reading and transforming the world. In practice, they were motivated by an educational crisis that expelled working class students from formal education. Unlike formal schools, the “bachis” developed alternative practices such as “*autogestión*” (self-management). My experience with popular education was

less theoretical than practical. I experimented with popular education methods by making mistakes, by entering into conflictive relationships with students, and more than anything else, by relying on a network of educators to discuss pedagogy and politics. In these classrooms, I learned that pedagogical experiments can be challenging after decades of reproducing hierarchical teaching practices. Regardless of how much teachers, who were privileged university students, told students that a grade only reproduced hegemonic hierarchies of society, they wanted to be graded, they expected to be rewarded for their work, and they demanded that their classmates be punished with a bad grade if they put less labor into an assignment. Teaching in the “bachis” helped me understand the gaps between pedagogical theory and practice. No matter how much we read Freire’s work, there was no instruction manual for the implementation of popular education methods. My teaching experience in the “bachis” informs my approach to pedagogical experiments at the turn of the twentieth century. Fourteen years ago, I started asking myself and debating with *compañeres* how activists and well-intentioned educators’ agendas could contribute to working class students, how to build consensus between educators and the local community, and to what extent can education lead to social change. This dissertation is an attempt to answer the questions that emerged from these pedagogical experiments.

This project was born out of my political commitments to critical pedagogies. My engagement with anti-racist and feminist teaching practices is the product my negative experiences as a student, experiences that I intentionally aim not to reproduce in my own teaching and advising practices. The school was a source of anxiety not only because I wanted to dance a minuet like my blonde friends on

independence day but because as a working class student and daughter of a school teacher, my family deposited in education the solution to all our problems. They used to say: “If you study you are going to be someone.” Thus, I got a fellowship to study in a private high school that paved my entrance into the university. In a way, the fellowship was a blessing *and* a curse as I had to get the highest grades of my class to keep renewing it every year. I knew I had to excel in school in order to “be someone.”

As I was working on this project, I found the same statement in a graduation ceremony at a normal school for women in the 1910s. Discourses like this deeply shaped working class people’s relationship to education. A diploma promised the beginning of an existence, otherwise denied by the daily economic constraints of poor people. Yet, it was only thanks to a system of public education that allowed working class students to pursue a bachelor's degree that I was able to continue my studies and dedicate these last years to the study of history. My dissertation aims to reflect on the role of education as both a source of discipline and liberation. I hope the narrative that I have constructed in the following pages contributes to understanding how the school disciplined children’s bodies but also how teachers navigated conflictive situations with the state and local communities while building in the school a site for knowledge production and, ultimately, for social change.

To Lilia, my first and best *maestra*

Para lxs que ponen el cuerpo por una escuela y un mundo más justo

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List of Abbreviations

AABEMS - Asociación Argentina de Biotipología, Eugenesia y Medicina Social

AGN - Archivo General de La Nación

CNE - Consejo Nacional de Educación

EMS - Escuela Modelo Sarmiento

ENP - Escuela Normal de Paraná

PCFI - Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional

UNLP - Universidad Nacional de La Plata

Introduction

The bell told me what I had to do. My science accommodated itself to the rhythm of “ring, ring.” Tireless Proteus obeyed like a little lamb the voices of command given to it every half an hour. Sometimes it took the form of arithmetic, until a sharp stroke forced it to become reading or history. I never would have imagined that the bell played such an important role in the life of the school. Actually, it is the boss. Hasn’t it shocked you that it is that inert metal thing that imposes its laws on all life that bubbles in the bodies of children?¹

The narrative of teacher Marta Samatán portrays a school dominated by an inert object that organizes the time and the quotidian experience of teachers and children. In the school, the bell “commands” and “forces” teachers to change from one subject to the other. The bell is the object that epitomized the hegemonic culture of *normalismo*, a set of teaching practices that presupposed that children should stay quiet in the classroom to obey superiors and incorporate knowledge and that the teacher should stay in front of the classroom —on a type of stage— imparting the lessons to be memorized by the students.² In this narrative, the teacher appeared as a “little lamb” that obeys the rhythm imposed by the bell and, at the same time, a Proteus in charge of leading the sheep. Characterizing the effects of *normalismo*, Samatán asks the reader if they have not too been “crushed” with the “inert metal” of the bell that strikes children’s bodies. This narrative portrays teachers and children almost in a prison with little freedom to escape the claws of *normalismo*. Yet, the

¹ Marta Samatán, *Campana y horario* (Rosario: Editorial Ruiz, 1939), 11.

² The term *normalismo* refers to a pedagogical current that emerged in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. This project responded to the elites’ project of centralizing and nationalizing education. Flavia Fiorucchi and Myriam Southwell, “Normalismo,” in Flavia Fiorucci and José Bustamante Vismara, *Palabras claves en la historia de la educación argentina* (Buenos Aires: Unipe, 2019). Michel Foucault conceptualized normal schools as places where instruments of disciplinary power such as surveillance and normalization took place. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

narrative also invites another reading. One that is less victimizing of both children and teachers. Samatán refers to teaching as a science. Even more, she uses the possessive “my” science, stressing to what extent teachers perceived their task as a scientific and yet personal endeavor. Through teaching many women encountered “science.” In the classroom, teachers like Samatán occupied positions of power, even with the discomfort that came from rejecting the rhythm of the bell. With the tools that “their science” —pedagogy— gave to them, they wrote, they spoke in conferences, they published books. Many used their writing and public speaking skills learned in normal schools as a window to study, to observe children’s nature, to travel internationally, to read and exchange ideas, and to challenge, like Samatán in *Campana y horario*, the supposedly omnipotent power of the bell. Samatán’s narrative exemplifies the tensions that this dissertation aims to historicize in the history of education in Argentina. This is a story about science, children’s bodies, and school reformers adapting to and transforming the disciplinary practices in the classroom and beyond.

This dissertation examines the relationship between science and teaching in making modern Argentina between 1880 and 1930. I interrogate how scientific theories circulating transnationally —including positivism, Darwinism, neo-Lamarckianism, and eugenics—, impacted pedagogical theory and practice. In doing so, I aim to understand how primary school teachers —mostly women— participated in the production of scientific knowledge about pedagogy and childhood. I argue that scientific theories contributed to both a state project that aimed to discipline the

population while at the same time it encouraged teachers to produce knowledge.³ Teachers utilized the tools of scientific observation and experimentation to advance the study of children and promote pedagogical reforms. I conceptualize the school as a laboratory to highlight the school as a site of knowledge production and to illuminate teacher's practices both inside the classroom and within a transnational network that connected the school with prisons, magazines, congresses, and scientific journals.

The school laboratory points to the positivist and racist ideologies inherent in the origins of universal schooling. Considering the school as a laboratory, my dissertation highlights the historical connections between the emergence of universal schooling in Latin America and the rise of eugenic thought at a moment when science aimed to provide solutions to all social problems. In the classroom and beyond, teachers advanced the racist agenda of state officials, intellectuals, and hygienists aiming to educate children for a modern nation. Drawing on positivist theories teachers helped to reproduce the racial hierarchies imposed by colonized visions of education. They conceptualized children as primitive or even potential criminals, reinforcing the hierarchical relationships that justified their disciplinary role in modern Argentina. By the 1900s, the school became a laboratory of experimental psychology that studied children's learning abilities and classified students based on mental categories. Thus, the school was not just a repository of racial thought produced somewhere else but a central site where categories of racial differences

³ I draw on Foucault's conceptualization of power and knowledge. He asserts that "power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 27.

were constructed. Children's bodies were measured, compared, and categorized.⁴ A series of regulated pedagogical practices emerged from the school laboratory, establishing pedagogy as a science and the teacher as an observer who paid attention to particular observable facts in children's bodies and behavior. The science of teaching, supposedly objective and impartial, emerged from these practices of observation in the classroom and promoted teaching practices that emulated the distance between the teacher-observer and children-objects of study.

The school laboratory opened a new opportunity for women as producers of knowledge. The school, as the laboratory, was a creation of modernity, a technological device where knowledge was generated. In this sense, science had a productive and even liberatory role for women.⁵ Considering the school as a space where scientific practices were developed, it recognizes the potential that the school had for women participating in the scientific debates of their time. I show that women were not "just" mediators between the scientific theory produced elsewhere and the knowledge popularized in the classroom for working class children. The scientific education learned in the normal school encouraged women to observe, to question assumptions, and to research. Women strategically utilized these skills to participate in a vibrant transnational exchange of ideas through scientific and activist networks encouraging teachers to experiment with new pedagogies. To experiment in the classroom was to practice, to engage in trial and error. In Spanish, to experiment

⁴ These practices have been studied for the case of Brazil by Jerry Dávila, *Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1917-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁵ I took inspiration from Nancy Stepan who defines science as a "productive force generating knowledge and practices that shape the world in which we live." Nancy Leys Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics. Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

(*experimental*) also refers to experience, a critical category to understand women's strategies to participate in the production of knowledge about childhood and pedagogy. Thus, the school laboratory illuminates the opportunities for women to learn, create, and innovate in a time when male scientists argued that women were naturally incapable of occupying positions of power.

Science created a venue for contesting power, a democratizing arena for the debate of social issues. Teachers utilized the tools of *normalismo* to debate whether the school was preparing children for life.⁶ In doing so, many challenged the authoritarian practices of *normalismo* and fought for the democratization of the school. While historians have indicated the influence of positivism in the process of modernization in Latin America, my reading of the school laboratory refers to a less explored dimension such as the participation of women in the transnational production of scientific ideas.⁷ Considered together, the school laboratory racialized children's bodies contributing to Argentine white supremacy at the same time it prompted possibilities for women to engage in science and politics. Thus, the school

⁶ I use the term alternative schools to refer to the private schools run by socialist and anarchist teachers in opposition to the public schools run by the National Council of Education or the provincial state. Adriana Puiggrós defines the alternative in relationship to the hegemonic project of *normalismo*: "An alternative is another situation, project, program proposal, solution, another subjective formation, another pedagogical subject, which can be opposite to the previous one, contain areas of coincidence and difference, or be the bearer of elements of previous experiences, ordered in a new configuration." Adriana Puiggrós, *El lugar del saber. Conflictos y alternativas entre educación, conocimiento y política* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2003), 25. During the origins of the school system in Argentina, there were other private schools like those run by Catholic groups that are not part of this project.

⁷ Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974); Natalia Priego, *Positivism, Science, and 'the Scientists' in Porfirian Mexico: A Reappraisal* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016); Jens Hentschke, "José Victorino Lastarria's Libertarian Krausist-Positivism and the Discourse on State- and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Chile." *Intellectual History Review* 22, no. 2 (2012): 241-60; Jens Hentschke, "Argentina's Escuela Normal de Paraná and Its Disciplines: Mergers of Liberalism, Jarusims, and Comtean Positivists in Sarmiento's Temple for Civilizing the Nation, 1870 to 1916", *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 17, no. 1 (April 2011): 1-31.

laboratory raises the question of women's participation in science. Argentine teachers subverted gender norms and challenged male scientific authority while they contributed to the creation of racial and gendered hierarchies that subjected children's bodies to the needs of emerging capitalist production.

"Schools as laboratories" does not propose a linear story towards progress prompted by education. Rather, it maps the debates and tensions that teachers, principals, and professors encountered in their quest for modernity. This story began in the 1880s when, along with other measures that aimed to secularize the state, elites passed a primary education law that established mandatory education for children from ages six to fourteen. This dissertation covers until 1930, when the first military coup overthrew the democratically elected president Hipólito Yrigoyen. Yet, as suggested in the conclusions, in the 1930s teachers continued to lead school experiments to advance children's autonomy and to produce pedagogical knowledge.

Schools as Laboratories

My project conceptualizes the school as a laboratory drawing on Bruno Latour's work. As an analytical category, the laboratory destabilizes the clear distinction between science and politics, inside-outside, the macro and micro level.⁸ In the laboratory, scientists "gain strength by multiplying mistakes," by displacing

⁸ Studying Pasteur's laboratory, Latour explains that "outside" his laboratory, in the farm, disease was hard to study because the anthrax disease was an invisible micro-organism striking in the dark, hidden among many other elements such as big animals and dirt. "Outside" animals, farmers, veterinarians were weaker than the invisible bacillus. "Inside" the laboratory, the invisible bacillus became visible and man became stronger than the bacillus. Bruno Latour, "Give me a laboratory and I will raise the world" in Knorr-Cetina K and Mulkay, M. J. (eds.), *Science Observed: Perspectives on the Social Study of Science* (London: Sage Publications, 1983,) 147.

objects, and manipulating the scale. In the school laboratory, teachers manipulated children trying to find solutions to national problems. To a certain extent, inside the classroom teachers controlled the contents of school curricula, the pedagogic practices, time and space, and children's bodies. They closely observed children and made conclusions about human development based on children's reactions to different stimuli. In doing so, they centered children as objects of scientific inquiry. In the school laboratory a new practical know-how was developed, from which teachers gained authority to debate about childhood and on a larger scale, the future of the nation.

Drawing on the actor-network theory, my project illuminates the network of human and non-human "actants," that participated in the making of modern Argentina. The school laboratory highlights the importance of pedagogical objects in the practice of teaching.⁹ The desk, the blackboards, and the pointer, became part of the naturalized landscape of the school during the consolidation of the school system. These objects had an impact on children's behavior in the school. They delimited power and knowledge and they helped teachers to study children's bodies. The stories of *normalismo* told in this dissertation introduce the bell as an iconic symbol that marked the teachers and children's practices. When the teacher's vision became insufficient to study children's bodies, new scientific objects entered the classroom such as the chronometer, anthropometric devices, and intelligence tests. By the turn of the century, school reformers introduced plants, animals, dirt, and insects believing

⁹ Latour defines "actants" as something that acts, an intervener, neither a subject nor an object. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

that it was in contact with nature that children could better learn. Thus, non-human actants contributed to disciplining children, to studying their bodies as much as liberating children through innovative assignments that opened the school to the outside world.

The school laboratory is connected with the pedagogical theories that circulated outside the classroom and beyond the nation-state.¹⁰ Practices of translation, adaptation, and innovation happened in the mediation between pedagogical theories from abroad and the local quotidian teaching practices. In the school laboratory the lessons, assignments, rituals, and practices of observation were connected with the debates happening outside the borders of the school. In addition, teachers used their experience in the school to theorize about pedagogy and child development, extending the knowledge outside the classroom. The network I reconstruct links normal schools, primary schools, prisons, universities, international congresses, publications, union halls, and street protests.

A Transnational Project of Modernization

While universal schooling was central to the consolidation of nation-states, my research highlights the school as a transnational endeavor. Transnational historians “treat the nation as one among a range of social phenomena to be studied

¹⁰ The blurred distinctions between the inside and outside of the school laboratory continues to be a source of tension for educators today, questioning how the classroom speaks to the urgent societal issues that affect students and their communities. Sylvanna M. Falcón “The Globalization of Ferguson: Pedagogical Matters about Racial Violence,” *Feminist Studies* 41, no. 1 (2015): 218-221. Denisha Jones and Jesse Hagopian, ed., *Black Lives Matter at School. An Uprising for Educational Justice* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2020).

rather than the frame of a study itself.”¹¹ Thus, a transnational approach to Argentine education considers the school as one of the sites where nations were constructed and imagined. A transnational approach illuminates the exchange of pedagogical ideas and practices across national borders. Teachers’ pedagogical influences came from a variety of countries including France, the United States, Italy, and Belgium. My dissertation highlights the connections between Argentine and the U.S. teachers. Historians have looked at U.S. and Latin American relations in the twentieth century to point both to the uneven relationship in the exchanges of ideas and goods as well as the U.S. imperial attempts to produce knowledge about the region and its populations.¹² Without disregarding the asymmetrical relations between the U.S. and Latin America, transnational historians have shown that in dialogues with their counterparts from the North, Latin American actors created their own notions of race, democracy, and science.¹³

My research investigates that transnational exchanges between teachers reinforced the hierarchical relationships between North and South. U.S. teachers who at the end of the nineteenth century traveled to Argentina to found normal schools,

¹¹ Micol Seigel, “Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn,” *Radical History Review* 91, (Winter 2005): 62–90, 63.

¹² The contact between U.S. and Latin America has been defined as communicative exchanges — multifaceted and multivocal— in which “insiders” and “outsiders” engage in action and represent each other. Joseph, Gilbert. M, Catherine LeGrand, and Ricardo Donato Salvatore, *Close Encounters of Empire : Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 15. On the production of knowledge on Latin American populations see: Ricardo Donato Salvatore, *Disciplinary Conquest: U.S. Scholars in South America, 1900-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); and Amy Cox Hall, *Framing a Lost City: Science, Photography, and the Making of Machu Picchu* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

¹³ Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Micol Seigel, *Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Ernesto Semán, *Ambassadors of the Working Class: Argentina's International Labor Activists and Cold War Democracy in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

conceived the local population as backwards. Argentine teachers who in the twentieth century traveled to the U.S. looking for models of schooling, saw in the U.S. a model of modernization worth emulating. Yet, the transnational relationships Argentine educators established with the U.S. also illuminate how transnational encounters gave women new venues for emancipation and pedagogical experimentation. Applying a pedagogical theory to a particular location, translating pedagogical texts, and sending students' homework to an international exposition were some of the activities that teachers developed as they built a transnational network to share information and debate their successes and failures in the classroom. The school reformers that I analyze in the following chapters utilized their experiences traveling and the knowledge collected in those transnational journeys to build an authoritative voice, influence their local contexts, and show that women were subjects of knowledge. School reformers draw on the transnational circulation of ideas about childhood to advance their own pedagogical agendas. Argentine teachers looked to international figures such as Francisco Ferrer of Spain and Ovide Decroly of Belgium to argue that Argentine schools needed to be transformed, modernized. On a small scale, they applied methods learned abroad in their classrooms, and they systematized their experiments in manuals of pedagogy, articles, and conferences that reached foreign as well as domestic audiences.

The Nation, The School, and the Teachers in Modern Argentina

Between 1880 and 1930, Latin America experienced crucial demographic, cultural, and economic transformations. Influenced by the Generation of 1837, Argentine elites and intellectuals promoted their nation's insertion into the world

economy through industrialization, urbanization, and European immigration.¹⁴ Elites took Juan Bautista Alberdi's claim to "govern is to populate" literally.¹⁵ Within Latin America, Argentina received more European immigration than any other country in the region.¹⁶ Convinced of the European racial superiority that social Darwinism prompted, they welcomed European immigrants to overcome the country's colonial legacy and build a modern nation.¹⁷ Yet, with the increasing number of Italian and Spanish immigrants joining the anarchist and socialist movements, immigrants quickly became a danger to national security.¹⁸ In this context, a major concern from the perspective of the government was how to integrate to the nation an increasing heterogeneous population.

¹⁴ José C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Ericka Beckman, *Capital Fictions: The Literature of Latin America's Export Age* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Julia Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1984).

¹⁶ In the period that goes from 1857 to 1914, the USA received around 27 million immigrants, while Argentina received 4.6 million and Canada around 4 million. According to historian Fernando Devoto, while the number of immigrants is substantially less in Argentina, in 1890, the percentage of immigrants in comparison with the total population of the USA was 14.7%. In Argentina, according to the 1895 national census, the percentage of immigrants reached 25.5% of the total population. By 1930, immigrants were 30% of the population. Fernando Devoto, *Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2009).

¹⁷ After the battle of Caseros, the role of the immigrant in Argentine society was defined not only in the work of Alberdi but also in the 1853 Constitution and the 1876 immigration law. In the latter, the definition of immigrant served to delimit who had access to benefits offered by the government. According to this law, immigrants were, by definition, European or those arriving to the country from the ports of Europe. Immigrant was a synonym of worker. They had to arrive in 2nd and 3rd class and had no physical defects or diseases, a "foreigner whose goal was to work the land, improve the industry, and introduce and teach the sciences and arts." Devoto, *Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina*, 32.

¹⁸ Adriana Puiggrós asserts that the dichotomy of civilization or barbarism continued but the term barbarism took on a new meaning with massive immigration. Puiggrós, *Sujetos, disciplina y curriculum: en los orígenes del sistema educativo argentino*.

Massive immigration and industrialization brought a new problem to the growing cities of Argentina, that of how to control and prevent diseases rapidly disseminated in the crowded urban space.¹⁹ “Social pathologies” which included dirt, crime, prostitution, vagrancy, and, later, class conflict were epitomized by the figure of the anarchist.²⁰ As in other Latin American countries, the process of nation-building relied heavily on the ideas of a group of experts that saw in science the path toward social and economic prosperity. Hygienists diagnosed problems and proposed solutions. They founded state offices, conducted reports, and aimed to intervene in public and private life.²¹ The living conditions of popular housing, known as *conventillos* and the working conditions in the factories were some of the issues that hygienists promised to solve through proper regulation. In order to do so, they wrote reports to the national government and published books regarding industrial hygiene, housing, and women’s work in the factories.²² Hygienists became leaders in

¹⁹ Diego Armus has illustrated some indicators of the urban growth between 1870 and 1950: “6,000 street lights in 1910 and 38,000 in 1930; more than 2 dozen radio stations broadcasting during the 1920s; by the end of the 1930s, 200 libraries and 168 movie theaters; 2,000 cars and 40,000 carriages in 1910; and by the late 1930s, 72 local bus lines transporting more than 1.5 million passengers daily.” Diego Armus, *The Ailing City: Health, Tuberculosis, and Culture in Buenos Aires, 1870-1950* (Durham ; Duke University Press, 2011), 19.

²⁰ Julia Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina. Science, Medicine, and the Modern State* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

²¹ Armus, *The Ailing City*; Gabo Ferro, *Degenerados, anormales y delincuentes: Gestos entre ciencia, política y representaciones en el caso argentino* (Buenos Aires: Marea Editorial, 2010); Jorge. Salessi, *Médicos maleantes y maricas: higiene, criminología y homosexualidad en la construcción de la nación argentina (Buenos Aires, 1871-1914)* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2000); Norma Isabel. Sánchez, *La higiene y los higienistas en la Argentina: 1880-1943* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad Científica Argentina, 2007).

²² Publications written by hygienists include Gregorio Aráoz Alfaro, *El libro de las madres: Manual práctico de higiene del niño, con indicaciones sobre el embarazo, parto, y tratamiento de los accidentes* (Buenos Aires: Cabaut Editores, 1929); Gregorio Aráoz Alfaro, *Estudios clínicos sobre la tuberculosis* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1924); Augusto Bunge, *Las conquistas de la higiene social informe presentado al excmo. Gobierno Nacional.* (Buenos Aires: Departamento Nacional Higiene, 1910); Augusto Bunge, *Los peligros de la industria* (Buenos Aires: Talleres gráficos de la penitenciaría nacional, 1910); Augusto. Bunge, *La legislación de higiene del trabajo* (Buenos Aires: Talleres gráficos de la penitenciaría nacional, 1910); Eduardo Wilde, *Curso de higiene pública*

promoting the foundation of state institutions, such as the Office of Municipal Statistics and the National Department of Hygiene and School Health.²³ They expanded public health infrastructure including the building of hospitals and police laboratories.²⁴

Schools became crucial institutions in the process of nation-building. Among other laws that contributed to secularization, in 1884 the national state promulgated the universal schooling law that made primary instruction mandatory. This legislation did not mean the final triumph of secular ideas. On the contrary, it marked the beginning of a process that would find liberal and Catholic actors in confrontation.²⁵ While elites, teachers, hygienists, and parents debated over the best type of education for children, thousands entered primary schools to learn how to read and write in the national language, national history, geography, and hygiene. Thus, the school became a central space to disseminate hygienic principles.²⁶ In order to regulate the hygienic conditions of the buildings and children's bodies, the national state established the

(Buenos Aires: C. Casavalle editor, 1885); Emilio R. Coni, *La mortalidad infantil en la ciudad de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de Pablo Emilio Coni, 1879); Guillermo Rawson, *Estudio sobre las casas de inquilinato de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad de la Luz Universidad Popular).

²³ Sánchez, *La higiene y los higienistas en la Argentina*.

²⁴ Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina*.

²⁵ Previous to the 1420 law, liberals advocated for a secular education and a centralizing role for state administration of the institutions previously supervised by the Catholic Church while conservatives defended the permanence of religious education in the schools. Without a consensus regarding the character of education, the law ambiguously defined education as secular while at the same time allowing schools to teach religion. As Adriana Puiggrós argues, religion was present in the school through textbooks, pedagogical lectures, and the quotidian discourse of teachers. Adriana Puiggrós, *Sujetos, disciplina y curriculum: En los orígenes del sistema educativo argentino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1990).

²⁶ In its first article the law established: "The main object of the school is to favor and direct the moral, intellectual, and physical development of every child from six to fourteen years old." The second article referred to hygiene, "Primary instruction should be mandatory, free, gradual and taught according to hygienic principles," quoted in Sanchez, 60.

Section of Technical Inspection and Administration of the Schools and created a new position, that of the school inspector, charged with “taking care of the hygiene, the discipline, and the morality of the schools.”²⁷ Primary schools not only sought to teach illiterate citizens and immigrants how to read and write the national language, but also aspired to instill modern habits in children. In the classroom children learned how to behave, where to move, what to drink, where to sit, when to run, how to talk, when to remain quiet, and how much time to devote to play and to work. The school developed a distinctive education of the body for boys and girls attuned to the needs of the emerging industrial capitalism.²⁸ Girls studied home economics and puericulture to learn how to cook, clean their homes, and take care of their babies. Boys received military instruction while girls exercised to better prepare them for reproductive functions.²⁹ Therefore, teachers did not just impart knowledge; they taught children to labor, to move, and to behave in particular ways.

An inescapable figure to understand the foundation of the school system in Argentina is the liberal intellectual, teacher, and president Domingo Sarmiento. As part of a generation of intellectuals in nineteenth-century Latin America who associated Europe with civilization, Sarmiento popularized the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism in his classic *Facundo, Civilization or Barbarism*. Civilization was associated with European, urban, literate, and clean attributes while barbarism referred to rural, illiterate, and dirty people encompassed in the figure of

²⁷ Sánchez, 61.

²⁸ The law of 1884 in its third article distinguished the instruction for both boys and girls: “For girls, it is mandatory to have the knowledge of crafting and notions of home economics. For boys, it is mandatory simple military exercises and, in the campaigns, notions of agriculture and livestock.” quoted in Sánchez, 60.

²⁹ Armus, *The Ailing City*,

the *caudillo*.³⁰ The metaphor embraced by so many Latin American actors, had a profound impact on the ways Argentine people conceived themselves in relation with other Latin American countries. While many nineteenth-century Latin American leaders and intellectuals challenged the idea of Europe as modern, the discourse of civilization extensively permeated the origins of the school system.³¹ A generation of teachers trained under the sponsorship of the national and provincial states, believed their mission was to transform “savage” children into civilized adults.³²

Teachers themselves modeled the type of transformation that the school sought to achieve. Student-teachers, as they called them, entered the normal school when they were around fourteen to sixteen years old. Therefore, an important part of their socialization as teenagers was shaped by their experiences in normal schools. Teacher Rosa del Río, daughter of Spanish and Italian immigrants asserted: “Before I entered the Normal School I was a savage (...) I was like a little animal.”³³ Many teachers

³⁰ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo, o, Civilización y barbarie* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1977).

³¹ James Sanders argues that besides the importance that the historiography has put into Sarmiento’s ideas of civilization, many actors in Uruguay, Colombia, and Cuba defended an American Republican Modernity that competed with hegemonic visions of modernity coming from Europe. Instead, they claimed that it was in America and not in Europe that the principles of modernity were better embraced through the values of republicanism. James Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

³² In 2013, the Association of the Normal School of Paraná Alumni “José María Torres” published *Simiente y mies*, a book that documented the students who graduated from the normal school since its origins at the end of the nineteenth century. The research sought to rescue the thousands of graduates who, from the founding school, “brought the secrets of literacy and culture to the borders of the country.” In the students’ names, —they continued— were “hidden the persevering rescue of the human base which fructified Sarmiento’s effort for civilization.” The alumni’s conception of the teacher’s role as a civilizing mission that disseminated culture to rural populations around the country speaks to the pervasiveness of a discourse that saw teachers, particularly those trained in Paraná, as missionaries of literacy and culture. Teresa Rocha, *Simiente y mies. La escuela normal de Paraná (1871-1969)* (Paraná: Imprenta Italia, 2010), 11-13.

³³ Beatriz Sarlo, *La máquina cultural: maestras, traductores y vanguardistas* (La Habana: Fondo Editorial Casa de las Américas, 2001), 21.

such as del Río were first generation Argentines and saw education as a path toward social progress. Most of the primary education teachers were women called by the national government to contribute to the modern nation through a profession that was conceived almost like an apostolate. Rosa del Río was part of a national effort to construct a “legion of patriotic schoolteachers,” a corps of educators able to reproduce a homogenous national body.³⁴ These schoolteachers, known as *normalistas* had the role of educating children with national norms and values. Ultimately, their task was to mold “normal” bodies, homogeneous subjects who would consolidate the nation state.

In order to train teachers in the science and art of teaching, the national state founded normal schools. These institutions became crucial spaces for the disciplining of bodies. Michel Foucault conceptualizes how in modern societies, the body becomes a useful force, as both a productive and subjected body. As he explains, while this subjection can be direct and physical, it also occurs through calculated, organized, technically thought out, and subtle ways.³⁵ From Foucault’s perspective, power is not possessed, acquired or preserved, but exercised. This dissertation draws on Foucault’s theory of power by showing that the disciplines developed in normal schools were exercised through school regulations, daily routines, and rituals. The written register of how bodies behaved within the school created new knowledge deployed through a “disparate set of tools or methods that Foucault calls a “political

³⁴ Andrea Alliaud, *Los maestros y su historia: los orígenes del magisterio argentino* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1993), 84.

³⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*.

technology of the body.”³⁶ The knowledge constructed and the power exercised over the modern body was diffuse and fragmentary, it operated as a micro-physics that, while producing coherent results, was multiform in its implementation.

The programs, school regulations, and requirements to enter the normal school were regulated at the national level. Normal schools functioned as secondary schools that students attended to continue their studies after completing the 6th grade. Normal schools were a distinctive type of institution vis-a-vis private schools or *colegios nacionales*. They were founded by the government through a system of national and provincial fellowships administered by the school authorities. Thus, normal schools provided students with less economic resources an opportunity for social mobility. The curricula differed from other institutions since, beyond taking classes such as language, mathematics, history, and geography, student-teachers took classes on pedagogical theory and practice. The practice school, or *escuela de aplicación*, functioned as a primary school for grades one through six. It is where student-teachers observed the lessons and practiced their teaching skills. For this reason, normal schools covered primary and secondary education, which were composed of at least two departments, the practice school and the normal course.³⁷

However, while the national state attempted to regulate an orderly system, the functioning of the school rapidly proved to be a challenge. The school system was extremely heterogeneous. Because the school budget depended on the national and provincial governments, the differences between the poorer and wealthier regions of

³⁶ Ibid., 27

³⁷ Some institutions such as the Normal School of Paraná had a third department, the kindergarten.

the country affected school resources.³⁸ There were important distinctions, therefore, between rural and urban schools. The 1884 universal schooling law established mobile schools in the recently incorporated territories of the South.³⁹ There were also schools where students went until 4th grade, called elementary schools, and graduate schools for 4th to 6th grade. Teachers joined the school within a hierarchical structure. Based on their experience, there were teachers of 3rd, 2nd, and 1st categories. Principals and vice-principals supervised teacher performance and school inspectors oversaw teachers' labor. Some schools functioned with multiple teachers, a full staff from principals to teachers and teaching assistants. But others functioned with only one teacher who worked as the principal of the school. During the organization and consolidation of the school system after 1884, the heterogeneity of schools and the geographical expansion of Argentina made the orderly and disciplined school controlled by the national state a discursive representation of the school more than a reality in practice.

Despite the sacrifices that teaching required, normal schools promised a relatively direct path toward the job market in a moment where women's workforce participation was growing. Although women had an important presence in jobs related to domestic tasks, formal education gave women access to administrative jobs in offices.⁴⁰ According to the national census of 1869, women worked mainly in

³⁸ For an analysis of the school system in Argentina in the provinces see Adriana Puiggrós, ed., *La educación en las provincias y territorios nacionales* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1993).

³⁹ *Ley de educación promulgada por el honorable congreso de la Nación el 8 de julio de 1884* (Buenos Aires: Litografía, Imprenta y Encuadernación de Stiller & Laass, 1884).

⁴⁰ Graciela Queirolo, "La máquina de escribir, las relaciones de género y el trabajo administrativo (Buenos Aires, primera mitad del siglo XX)" *H-industri@* 27, 2020, pp. 113-124; and *Mujeres en las oficinas. Trabajo, género y clase en el sector administrativo (Buenos Aires, 1910-1950)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2018).

domestic service and as dressmakers, laundry women, and weavers. With the advancement of industrialization, they joined the factories, especially in the food and textile sectors.⁴¹ The emergence of women in the public sphere prompted anxieties about women's abilities to successfully develop as mothers and housewives. From hygienists to socialist activists, women's labor represented a topic of concern that required state protection. Teaching was not exempt from the debates surrounding women's labor in the period. Teachers were closely monitored by the school inspector and, at times, punished for what was considered immoral behavior. Thus, although the school provided a source of emancipation for many women, teachers continued to be disciplined through a hierarchized system of state bureaucracy.⁴²

However, as the school system continued growing and the state attempted to increase their regulation of primary schools, teachers responded to the "social question" through collective organizing.⁴³ Far from being a homogenous and docile body of state officials, many joined socialist, anarchist, and feminist movements to challenge state-sponsored education. The death of Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer

⁴¹ Mirta Zaida Lobato, *Historia de las trabajadoras en la Argentina (1869-1960)* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2007).

⁴² Recently published articles had shown the disciplinary measures taken against teachers who subverted sexual expectations on school teachers. These works show that teachers engaged in clandestine affairs with principals and had children outside marriage. Adrian Cammarota, "Relatos sobre maestras acosadas e inmorales: género, educación y disciplinamiento en el sistema escolar argentino (1919-1935)," *Historia y Memoria de la Educación* 12 (2020): 395-432; Paula Caldo "Entre amores clandestinos y cesantías. La maestra y el director, Argentina 1920-1928," *Géneros*, no. 26 (Sept.2019 - Feb. 2020) 145-163; Pablo Pineau "Amores de mapoteca. Lujuria y normalismo en la historia de la educación argentina." *Cuadernos de pedagogía*, no. 13 (2005).

⁴³ In the twentieth century the government continued promoting the nationalization of education through what is commonly known as "Lainez Law" given the name of the Senator from Buenos Aires, Manuel Lainez. The 4878 law was sanctioned in 1905 and regulated in the following year with the goal of establishing primary schools around the country. The result was a mixed school system with some schools founded and regulated by the provincial government and others by the CNE. Ministerio de Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología, *A cien años de la ley lainez* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología, 2007)

in 1909, the emergence of women's collective action in the 1910 First Feminine Congress in Buenos Aires, the wave of strikes and increasing conflict between anarchist and socialist movements and the police, are part of the larger context that inspired teachers to call for an urgent school reform. Rejecting the practices of *normalismo*, they utilized their knowledge and teaching experience to debate the role of the school in changing political contexts. With the goal of democratizing the classroom, they questioned teachers' roles and developed different tactics in order to promote school reforms. They created their own magazines that offered a forum for teachers to criticize the school, they also founded alternative schools to the state inspired by anarchist pedagogies, and organized collective actions around leagues and conferences. They gave talks for working class parents trying to generate consensus regarding school reforms. Teachers used the scientific method and the tools they learned in normal schools to critique *normalismo*. Drawing on their experience in the classroom and their reading of pedagogical theories circulating transnationally, teachers built a transnational network as a platform to advocate for the development of children and to argue that the school was not adapting to a modern society. In other words, teachers adopted *normalismo* and used their scientific methods to effect pedagogical changes and create secular and inclusive learning spaces.

Race, Environment, and Children's Bodies

Argentine educators were widely influenced by scientific theories. Argentine *positivismo* had in *normalismo* one of its most important expressions.⁴⁴ Developed by Auguste Comte in France, it was through the work of Herbert Spencer that positivism influenced Argentine professors Pedro Scalabrini, Alfredo Ferreira, Víctor Mercante, and Rodolfo Senet.⁴⁵ One of the most influential positivists in the country, Dr. José Ramos Mejía, directed the National Council of Education between 1908 and 1912. It is not a coincidence that a philosophical theory concerned with governance and the behavior of the supposedly irrational multitude, found in teachers and professors a fertile arena. In more practical than theoretical terms, teachers were concerned with how to govern a student population that, as schooling became massive, presented challenges for the disciplinarian educator. Positivism brought to educators the belief that order was possible. Science promised progress in a moment of economic growth and industrialization.⁴⁶ In 1895, Alfredo Ferreira wrote in *La escuela positiva*

⁴⁴ Oscar Terán, *Historia de las ideas en la Argentina. Diez lecciones iniciales* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2019). See chapter 5 on positivism.

⁴⁵ Alfredo Ferreira (1863-1938) was a positivist educator who worked closely with the alumni and professors of the Normal School of Parana and directed *La escuela positiva* with Pedro Scalabrini. Scalabrini, was a professor of Natural History in the Escuela Normal de Paraná and will be introduced in chapter 1. Victor Mercante and Rodolfo were normal professors, graduated from the Escuela Normal de Paraná and the Colegio de Profesores de Buenos Aires, respectively. Both were avid contributors to scientific journals on psychiatry and education and pioneered the psychological study of childhood in the country. Their work will be examined in detail in chapter 2.

⁴⁶ A statement by Thomas Macaulay in 1902 illustrates the hope deposited in science. He asserted: "Science prolonged life; it mitigates the pain; it extinguished diseases; increased soil fertility; gave new assurances to the sailor; supplied new weapons to the warrior; linked great rivers and estuaries with bridges in ways unknown to our fathers; it guided the lightning from the heavens to the earth rendering it harmless; illuminated the night with the splendor of the day; extended the range of human vision; multiplied the strength of human muscles; it speed up the movement; it annulled the distances; facilitated the exchange and correspondence of friendly actions; the dispatch of all business; it allowed man to descend to the depths of the sea, to soar in the air; safely penetrate the mephitic recesses of the earth; cross countries in vehicles that move without horses; cross the ocean in boats moving at ten knots per hour against the wind. These are only part of its fruits, and these are its first fruits, since

“Positivism is the spiritualized, systematic, and generalized science. Outside science there is nothing.”⁴⁷ In this context, modernity came to signify a “commitment to science as the warranty of progress.”⁴⁸ The field of criminology was another important point of entrance of positivist ideas in the country. Positivist criminology in Argentina coincided with the foundation of prisons, journals to study criminals in prison and hospitals, and a series of devices to supposedly measure people’s criminal inclinations. Criminologists such as José Ingenieros expanded the conversation about race and environment that attracted state officials, physicians, and educators alike.

Continuing the sanitary tradition promoted by the *higienistas*, eugenics gave Latin American actors a hopeful perspective for the progress they were envisioning for the future development of their nations. Change was possible and reforms could generate permanent improvement.⁴⁹ A legacy from Darwinian evolutionary theory, eugenics provided Latin American elites and intellectuals a set of discourses to understand racial differences within an increasingly heterogeneous population. Francis Galton developed his ideas after reading his cousin’s book *The Origin of Species*. In 1869, he published what is considered a founding text in the history of eugenics, *Hereditary Genius*. Galton continued studying the laws of inheritance as he developed statistical methods.⁵⁰ Eugenics, the science of race improvement, has been

science is a philosophy that never rests, that never comes to an end, that is never perfect. Its law is progress. Terán, *Historia de las ideas en la Argentina*, 141.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh. Medicine, Law, and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Argentina* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 2.

⁴⁹ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*.

⁵⁰ Theodore Porter has asserted that Galton was particularly impressed by Darwin’s idea that the “embryo is formed through a complex process of selection involving the affinities and attractions of innumerable distinct elements” Theodore Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking 1820-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 280.

understood by Nancy Stepan as a “science of heredity shaped by politics, industry, and cultural factors particular to the historical moment and place” and as a social movement embraced by state officials, socialist and feminists to propose a set of policies.⁵¹ According to the author, Latin American eugenics were distinctive from Anglo-Saxon eugenics. The former was influenced by a neo-Lamarckian approach that focused on the environment (culture) and not as much on inheritance (biology). Thus, Latin American eugenics tended to promote transformations in the educational and public health system. The goal was not to prevent unfit people from reproducing, rather to educate people on how to better reproduce the race. The environment would affect people’s bodies and generate changes possible to be transmitted to the future generations. Teachers embraced neo-Lamarckianism, convinced that children’s bodies were susceptible to change and that the school environment could counteract what was considered the harmful influence of dirty housing and ignorant parents.

Despite the neo-Lamarckian influence that seemed to prevail among Latin American eugenicists advocating for educational and health programs, eugenics was inscribed in a racist context. As put by Héctor Palma, it was almost commonplace to assert the existence of inferior —black, asian, Gypsies, Jewish, and indigenous people— and superior races based on a combination of physical features, cultural bias, and sociological considerations.⁵² As literate, white-descendants, and middle class professionals, doctors and teachers contributed to the dissemination of racial

⁵¹ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 10.

⁵² Héctor A. Palma, “Eugenesia y educación en la Argentina,” in Carbonetti, A. y González Leandri, R. ed., *Historias de salud y la enfermedad en América Latina, siglos XIX y XX* (Córdoba: Centro de Estudios Avanzados, 2008), 231-252.

ideas *and* to the racialization of children's bodies in the classroom. Scientific journals such as *Semana Médica* and *Archivos de Psiquiatría y Criminología* functioned as an arena for the dissemination of scientific theories developed abroad and the local studies conducted in prisons, hospitals, and schools. Contributors debated how to cure what they perceived as degenerations of modernity including criminality, homosexuality, and madness.⁵³

At the core of the scientific debates inspired by theories of inheritance was the question about the body. How are bodies affected by the environment? Do all bodies respond the same way to external factors? What traits are inherited from parents to children? Can education, and appropriate housing conditions counteract inheritance? In other words, the debates hinged on how “nature” and “culture” interacted with each other.⁵⁴ Children were particularly suited for the project of regenerating the race in part because it was believed that children's brains were more malleable than adults. Among teachers, the principle of educating children since their first days fed the urgency that it was during childhood that the government and specialists had to intervene.⁵⁵ If childhood represented an early stage in human evolution, it was also true that children carried the hope for a better future. For young Latin American

⁵³ Salessi, *Médicos maleantes y maricas*; Ferro, *Degenerados, anormales y delincuentes*, Lila Caimari, *Apenas un delincuente. Crimen, castigo y cultura en la Argentina, 1880-1955* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2004); Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh*.

⁵⁴ Drawing on Peter Wade's contributions Karin Roseblatt proposes the body as a biocultural category that refers to both the terms commonly associated with the body such as inheritance, biology, nature, genes, and blood as well as cultural aspects related to exercise, work, kinship, and economic conditions. Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, “Bodies, Environments, and Race. Roots and Branches of Eugenic Nationalism in the Long Twentieth Century,” in Ana Barahona (ed.), *Handbook of the Historiography of Latin American Studies on the Life Sciences and Medicine* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2022).

⁵⁵ This is one of the principles developed by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), a pedagogy and educational reformer from Switzerland. His studies on children's education were based on the premise that children were naturally good.

nations, children came to represent the vitality of a democratic life vis-a-vis old Europe.⁵⁶

Historiography and Contributions

This project receives inspiration from and aims to contribute to three historiographies. First, my research contributes to the history of eugenics in Latin America. My conceptualization of the school laboratory positions the school as a central space to understand how Latin American actors constructed and understood racial categories through the study and disciplining of children's bodies. Since the pioneering work of Nancy Stepan, the history of eugenics in Latin America has grown enormously, shedding light to how eugenics thought circulated transnationally and how different institutions including museums and hospitals contributed to the implementation of eugenic policies.⁵⁷ Scholars have demonstrated the permeability of eugenic thought that appealed to doctors, policy makers, mothers, nurses and other professionals.⁵⁸ They study the receptions and appropriations of eugenic thought and

⁵⁶ On a review on the history of childhood in Latin America see: Bianca Premo, "How Latin America's History of Childhood Came of Age," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2007): 63–76.

⁵⁷ Marcos Cueto and Steven Paul Palmer, *Medicine and Public Health in Latin America: A History*, *New Approaches to the Americas* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Dávila, *Diploma of Whiteness*; Amy Cox Hall, *Framing a Lost City: Science, Photography, and the Making of Machu Picchu* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017); Carolyne R. Larson, *Our Indigenous Ancestors: A Cultural History of Museums, Science, and Identity in Argentina, 1877-1943* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015); Nancy P. Appelbaum, *Mapping the Country of Regions: The Chorographic Commission of Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States*; Julia Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Diego Armus, *Disease in the History of Modern Latin America: From Malaria to AIDS* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁵⁸ Jerry Dávila, *Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1917-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Okezi T. Otovo, *Progressive Mothers, Better Babies: Race, Public Health, and the State in Brazil, 1850-1945*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016); Alison Bashford and

how it contributed to the construction of racial hierarchies from sterilization clinics to public health campaigns.⁵⁹ Drawing on feminist perspectives on science, my research aims to contribute to these works by illuminating how teachers participated in the circulation and production of racial thought.⁶⁰ Despite women's centrality in debates regarding sexuality, and reproduction, most historians of science, medicine, and public health in Latin America focus on men.⁶¹ During the period under analysis women were indeed marginalized from scientific and intellectual communities, however, it is also true that, through eugenics, women leaders of the emerging feminist movement found a field of intervention to channel their demands around sex education and health. Understanding how science impacted women's lives and made possible their entrance into a male dominated world, I place science in a productive dimension which not only restricted but also opened new possibilities for women. By

Philippa Levine, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*; Diane B. Paul, *The Politics of Heredity: Essays on Eugenics, Biomedicine, and the Nature-Nurture Debate* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity: 1865 to the Present* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995).

⁵⁹ Bashford and Levine, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*; Vanderlei Sebastião de Souza, "Brazilian Eugenics and Its International Connections: An Analysis Based on the Controversies Between Renato Kehl and Edgard Roquette-Pinto, 1920-1930," *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 23 (December 2016): 93–110; Julia Rodríguez, "A Complex Fabric: Intersecting Histories of Race, Gender, and Science in Latin America," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (2011): 409–29; Diego Armus, "Eugenesia En Buenos Aires: Discursos, Prácticas, Historiografía," *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 23, no. suppl 1 (December 2016): 149–70; Nancy Leys Stepan, "The National and the International in Public Health: Carlos Chagas and the Rockefeller Foundation in Brazil, 1917 – 1930s," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (2011): 469–502.

⁶⁰ Sandra G. Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Amanda K. Booher and Julie Jung, *Feminist Rhetorical Science Studies: Human Bodies, Posthumanist Worlds* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2018); Victoria Pitts-Taylor, *Mattering: Feminism, Science, and Materialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

⁶¹ Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina*; Armus, *The Ailing City*; Marcos Cueto and Steven Paul Palmer, *Medicine and Public Health in Latin America: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Salessi, *Médicos maleantes y maricas*; Ferro, *Degenerados, anormales y delincuentes*.

focusing on the first decades of the twentieth century, my research expands the periodization of eugenics, challenging the association between eugenics and the authoritarian government during the 1930s.⁶²

Because of the centrality of women in the school, my dissertation is in dialogue with the history of women and gender in Latin America. The school presents a unique space to understand women's experience in the intersection of labor, motherhood, and sexuality. Historians have studied the experience of Latin American women in the factories, as union activists and professionals.⁶³ Through these works, women are now conceived as central actors in the promotion of health and education through laws and educational reforms. My analysis of teachers in Argentina contributes to the history of women and gender in Latin America by contributing the perspective of the growing middle classes. Teaching was conceived as a maternal activity, yet it represented a source of income for many women looking for economic independence. Viewing women as student-teachers of normal schools, primary school teachers, and writers, illuminates how women engaged with scientific practices and discourses. Experiential knowledge gathered in the classroom gave

⁶² Following Stepan's intervention regarding the "fascist" variant developed in Argentina after the visit of Nicola Pende and the development of Biotypology, scholars focused on the late 1920s and the 1930s. Marisa Miranda and Gustavo Vallejo, *Una historia de la eugenesia: Argentina y las redes biopolíticas internacionales, 1912-1945*, Historia (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2012); Galak, *Educación los cuerpos al servicio de la política*.

⁶³ Sueann Caulfield, *In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early-Twentieth Century Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905-1960* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000); Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Elizabeth Q. Hutchison, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900-1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, *Gendered Compromises: Political Cultures and the State in Chile, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Donna Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

women new possibilities to participate in activities normally associated with men, such as publishing, traveling, and public speaking. The school was then a space that facilitated women's participation in politics through the production of legitimated knowledge about childhood. They embraced motherhood, a crucial topic in women's political agendas, and promoted a pedagogy that both taught from a maternal pedagogy that challenged patriarchal *normalismo*, and prepared girls for their future role as housewives and mothers.⁶⁴ Teachers in Argentina, I show, founded modern pedagogy and contributed to interdisciplinary conversations. As part of their modernizing endeavors, teachers played a paradoxical role. While growing numbers of women began working outside the home, teachers challenged gender expectations, and their own subordination, through their participation in paid labor and their intellectual work. Teachers' incursion in spaces typically reserved for men such as university classrooms, congresses, and scientific journals generated rage among male principals and inspectors. At the same time, teachers furthered medical and scientific doctrines that promoted racialized and gendered ideas regarding the education of Argentina's future citizens and workers. They celebrated education as a vehicle of upward mobility and encouraged children to become efficient workers for capitalist production.

Third, my dissertation contributes to the historiographies of education. One of the primary concerns for historians of education has been determining how to conceptualize the school in relation to the state. What, exactly, does the school do?

⁶⁴ Donna Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*; Marcela Nari, *Políticas de maternidad y maternalismo político. Buenos Aires 1890-1940* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2004); Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay 1890-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

To what extent can we consider schoolteachers as passive agents of the state? While historians have portrayed teachers as efficient agents who promote dominant class ideology, in recent decades historians have expanded their questions and reading of sources.⁶⁵ Informed by the notion of hegemony, more nuanced narratives regarding school teachers and the role of the school in the process of modernization have moved the field toward understanding teachers as mediators between the national, regional, and local levels according to their own ideas of modernity, nationhood, and progress.⁶⁶ In the case of Argentina, Adriana Puiggrós has advanced the understanding of teachers by arguing that universal schooling was a product of struggle among teachers, pedagogues, and state officials.⁶⁷ My work draws inspiration from historians who in recent years have approached teachers from the

⁶⁵ Lilia Ana. Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas: la construcción de la nacionalidad argentina a fines del siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de cultura económica, 2001); Sarlo, *La máquina cultural*; Mary K. Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982). Through textbooks, disciplinary measures, the teaching of history, and patriotic rituals, schoolteachers aimed to construct a homogenous society as required by the nation-state. See: Luis Alberto Romero and Luciano de Privitellio, *La Argentina en la escuela: la idea de nación en los textos escolares* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores Argentina, 2004); Matthias vom Hau, “Unpacking the School: Textbooks, Teachers, and the Construction of Nationhood in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru,” *Latin American Research Review* 44, no. 3 (2010): 127–54; Lilia Ana. Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas: la construcción de la nacionalidad argentina a fines del siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de cultura económica, 2001).

⁶⁶ Mary K. Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

⁶⁷ The author classifies two groups of schoolteachers. The “normalistas” were heavily influenced by Sarmiento’s dichotomy of civilization and barbarism. They believed that teachers had a culture they needed to transmit to children conceptualized as inept or dangerous. The “radicalized democratic” teachers struggled for more inclusion of the popular sectors and advocated for the active participation of teachers and families. Adriana. Puiggrós, *Sujetos, disciplina y curriculum: en los orígenes del sistema educativo argentino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1990). Drawing on Puiggrós’s classification, Sandra Carli argues that positivist schoolteachers, the normalistas, imposed a methodological rigidity in the classroom while the Krausian perspectives encouraged more freedom for children and for schoolteachers who experimented with new pedagogies. While positivists saw the child as a natural savage, Krausian interpretations associated children with the divine order and the goodness of nature. Sandra Carli, *Niñez, pedagogía y política: transformaciones de los discursos acerca de la infancia en la historia de la educación argentina entre 1880 y 1955*. (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2002).

lenses of gender. They are unpacking the process of feminization in the teaching profession, the role of motherhood in teachers' writing, and the sexual anxieties generated by teachers challenging gender expectations.⁶⁸ My dissertation contributes to this scholarship by exploring the links between feminism and the pedagogies that teachers implemented in the classroom in their attempts of school reform.

The majority of the narratives in the history of education in Latin America give agency only to human actors. Schoolteachers are at the center of the historiographical questions without a careful study of how non-human actors impacted both teaching and learning. Diseases, water, dirt, and objects played a role in the laboratories schoolteachers constructed inside the classroom. Sandra Carli argues that the divergent conceptions of the child had pedagogic consequences; positivists promoted a school as a laboratory for studying and observing children, and Krausists promoted the school as a center of scientific experimentation and pedagogic renovation. My research complicates this distinction by showing the intertwined processes of observation and experimentation that were part of teachers' everyday experiences in the classroom. I revisit narratives that center children's bodies in the technologies of power developed by the school by paying attention to the objects that

⁶⁸ On the feminization of teaching see: Flavia Fiorucci, "Maestros para el sistema de educación pública. La fundación de escuelas normales en Argentina (1890-1930)," *Revista Mexicana de Historia de la Educación* 2, no. 3 (2014): 25-45; and Silvia Cristina Yannoulas, *Educación: una Profesión de Mujeres? La Feminización del Normalismo y la Docencia en Brasil y Argentina 1870-1930* (Buenos Aires: Kapelusz, 1996). On motherhood and teacher's writing see Marina Becerra, "Soy comunista y maestra: resistencias a la maternalización de las mujeres a través de la obra de Angélica Mendoza en la Argentina de los años 20' y 30,'" *Izquierdas*, no. 49 (April 2020): 385-411; Graciela Queirolo "Herminia C Brumana. La maternidad social a través del magisterio y de la escritura," in Adriana María Valobra ed., *Mujeres en espacios bonaerense* (La Plata: EDULP, 2009), 95-109. On teachers challenging gender expectations see Cammarota, "Relatos sobre maestras acosadas e inmorales: género, educación y disciplinamiento en el sistema escolar argentino (1919-1935);" Caldo "Entre amores clandestinos y cesantías. La maestra y el director, Argentina 1920-1928;" Pineau "Amores de mapoteca. Lujuria y normalismo en la historia de la educación argentina."

affected schoolteachers' scientific practices inside the classroom. Non-human actors were at the center of teachers' concerns regarding their role in the classroom and the influence of the environment in children's education: what objects would be more appropriate for the teaching of science? How should new industrialized objects be incorporated into the classroom? How did the elements of the natural environment (i.e. water, dirt, air) affect children's bodies?⁶⁹

Beyond my historiographical contributions, my project aims to spark pedagogical conversations among Latin American(ist) scholars and educators. This project is a call for contemporary educators to look back at a period where teachers were central actors in the political and scientific debates of their times. Educator Francisco Ferrer was executed while saying "Long live the modern school." While not all the costs of participating in politics were as high as in the case of Ferrer, teachers lost their jobs, suffered persecution, and clashed with the national authorities to transform the school. Teachers introduced new assignments at the expense of parents' criticism or the distrust of national authorities. More than anything else, collective organizing among teachers took time, energy, and money. Teachers organized believing education could be a source for social change. They proposed structural changes in the school curricula and the teaching methods, aiming for more egalitarian classrooms that could potentially benefit children. Building transnational solidarity, they experimented with new methods and reflected about them in publications expanding discussions across national borders. My conceptualization of

⁶⁹ Eduardo Galak centers children's bodies in the eugenic project through an analysis of physical education. *Educar los cuerpos al servicio de la política: cultura física, higienismo, raza y eugenesia en Argentina y Brasil* (Avellaneda: UNDAV Ediciones, 2016).

the school laboratory contributes to critically reflect about the pedagogical practices we develop in the classroom and how educators can create a transnational network of research, teaching, and community engagement to imagine radical futures.

Methodology and Sources

I conducted archival work in sixteen libraries and archives, mostly from Buenos Aires although I did some exploratory research in national archives in Santiago and Montevideo. U.S. archives provided me with documents of U.S. teachers that traveled to Argentina. Studying education presents a different challenge than the scarcity of historical records that some historians face. As I was doing research for this project, I found myself surrounded by a vast amount of sources dedicated to education from magazines to official documents. Thus, one of the methodological challenges of this research has been to delineate the contours of the dissertation. If the project of modern education was constructed across national borders, ideologies, and institutions, where and how do we delineate the contours of the school laboratory? The sources that I included illustrate that the school as a laboratory was shaped inside and outside of the school. Drawing from the work of teachers in conferences, journals, magazines, and memoirs, this project turns our attention to the school as a pedagogical laboratory constructed locally and globally, with human and non-human actors. The point of departure was the normal school as a laboratory for teacher training. The origins of the normal schools coincided with a foundational moment in the history of Argentina and a watershed for thousands of student-teachers and children who accessed formal education. I chose the Normal

School of Paraná, the cradle of normalismo, as one of the main scenes for chapter one. At the Historical Archive of the school I found programs, internal regulations, and daily logs. I focused more extensively on the principal's memoirs, from where I trace the quotidian experiences in the school, the conflicts between students and teachers, and the laborious organization of the practice school. These sources, created by the state bureaucracy to monitor the daily life of the school, became invaluable documents to investigate the daily constraints that principals and professors faced in building Argentine *normalismo*. I incorporated normal students' experiences through the writings of teachers who became important advocates for school reforms in the first decades of the twentieth century.

I trace links between the school and eugenics through the work of Víctor Mercante, a crucial figure in the development of the classroom as a laboratory of experimental psychology. The second chapter follows Mercante's life and work since he graduated from the Normal School of Paraná until he consolidated his scientific labor at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata (UNLP). Mercante is one of the most prolific teachers in this story, studied by historians of education and historians of science alike. I selected some of his work that is representative of the network of institutions that I identified in the eugenic study of childhood. *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño*, was written as a result of school experiments at the Normal School of Mercedes. I investigated Mercante's study on child criminality at the prison through the articles published at the *Archivos de Psiquiatría y Criminología*. I read these articles in a comparative lens to illuminate how Mercante studied criminals, what notions of inheritance appeared in his writing, and what

influence the school had on children's bodies. Finally, I followed Mercante to UNLP where he founded a laboratory of psychopedagogy. I study the journal *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines*, directed by Mercante where his colleagues and mentees published the results of the classroom experiments.

To study how the scientific study of children influenced the practice of teaching and learning, I utilize a variety of sources including textbooks used in the classrooms to teach “savage” children, articles published in the official journal of the National Council of Education, magazines, and teachers' accounts of the school that offer a picture of the normalist teacher, the disciplinary system, and the challenges teachers faced exercising their authority. I expand the school laboratory outside the classroom to incorporate the voices of parents and the local community. The collection of the National Council of Education at the Archivo Intermedio, proved to be an invaluable source to analyze the conflicts that emerged in the school between teachers, inspectors, and local communities. The “*investigaciones sumarias*” (summary investigations), are documents that vary from a couple of pages to hundreds of pages where the school inspector collected the information from interviewing the community, school data, local newspapers, the teaching experience of teachers, among others. Through the summary investigations it is possible to see that beyond teacher advocacy to experiment in the classroom, local realities for many teachers outside the borders of the City of Buenos Aires, presented serious challenges in asserting their authority.

I trace the pedagogical experiments developed outside public schools by investigating the *Liga Racionalista para la Infancia*, a pedagogical project that

united a broad range of teachers and activists from anarchist and socialist backgrounds. Among the rationalist teachers were Julio Barcos and Raquel Camaña, promoters of integral education, leaders of teacher organizations, magazines, and congresses that advanced the study of children from a perspective that challenged *normalismo*. I utilized the magazines specialized in education published by teachers, including *Francisco Ferrer*, *La Escuela Popular* and *Boletín de la Escuela Moderna*, socialist and feminist magazines, and presentations in the *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional* (1910).

In order to show women as producers of knowledge, throughout the dissertation I focus on the work of Herminia Brumana in *Tiza de Colores*, Marta Samatán in *Campana y horario*, Ernestina López in *La escuela y la vida* and multiple articles from *El monitor de la educación común*, Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano in *Los centros de interés en la escuela* and the articles published in *La Obra* and *La nueva era*, and Jennie Howard, *In Another Climates and Distant Lands*.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter “**Embodying *Normalismo*: Teacher’s Scientific Training at the Normal School (1880s-1910s)**” examines the origins of the school laboratory by studying what and how student-teachers learned at the normal schools. In looking at the interactions between principals, professors, and student-teachers, the chapter illuminates what type of knowledge student-teachers acquired through pedagogical theory and practice. I argue that examining from the perspective of the actors who were part of the everyday life of the school, normal schools opened new possibilities for women across the Americas. For U.S. middle class women, normal schools

provided an opportunity to travel internationally, exercise their autonomy, and assert their pedagogical knowledge. For local women, normal schools provided a new experience of socialization outside their homes that introduced them to novel scientific knowledge regarding childhood, hygiene, and pedagogy. The learning of pedagogical theory and practice facilitated women with the tools to observe, take notes, write, and perform in front of the classroom –all tasks they would undertake to study children and propose alternative ways of schooling. Yet, based on a teaching of science shaped by positivists and male understanding of objectivity, teachers were trained to teach children from a hierarchical position that served to maintain a distance between themselves and the children, and the local communities.

The second chapter, “**Building the Norm: The School Laboratory for the Eugenic Study of Children (1890-1920)**” follows the life and work of Víctor Mercante, a normalist professor who pioneered the application of experimental psychology in the classroom to study children. As the organization of the primary school system was taking shape, Argentina went through a process of rapid changes in the population. The classroom became a privileged site to study children since it represented a sample of the larger population. This chapter focuses on the work of Víctor Mercante, a pioneer and leader in transforming the classroom into a laboratory of experimental psychology that aimed to understand children and, more broadly, human development. I examine Mercante’s journey to understand the dialogues between pedagogy and anthropology, criminology, and experimental psychology. Inspired by the scientific method, normalist teachers trained in closely observing children, leading to the classification of children according to physical and mental

characteristics. Mercante popularized tests to measure children's intelligence, and, by 1906, he led the Laboratory of Psychopedagogy at Universidad Nacional de La Plata. The laboratory preceded the eugenic studies on children that biotypologists would promote in the 1930s through the *Asociación Argentina de Biotipología, Eugenesia y Medicina Social* (Argentina Association of Biotypology, Eugenics, and Social Medicine, AABEMS). Mercante's work had lasting legacies in the training of teachers in Argentina.

The third chapter “**Applying the Norm: Conflicting Authorities in the Disciplining of Children and Teachers**” explores the school from the perspective of the teachers' relationship with the children, the school inspectors, and local communities. It asks how did teachers establish their authority in front of children, their superiors, and local communities? In what ways was teacher authority conveyed, achieved, and undermined, and by whom? I demonstrate that the hierarchical relationships within the school system had negative consequences for children and women alike. The reality of the schools was far from being the orderly laboratory that Mercante wanted to create for the study of childhood. In the classroom, teachers encountered how children and parents reacted to their authority and established limits to state-sponsored education. In extreme circumstances, teachers faced expulsion from the schools and the communities.

The fourth chapter “**Challenging the Norm: School Experiments in the Search for the Modern School (1900-1910s)**” traces the alternative pedagogies proposed by anarchist, socialist, and feminist teachers by the turn of the twentieth century. I investigate the tactics teachers utilized to challenge state-sponsored

education and what pedagogies they imagined in opposition to *normalismo*. I show that school reformers founded magazines, organized congresses and built alliances with workers to propose an alternative pedagogy. They transformed the classroom into a laboratory of pedagogical experimentation where children could discover, investigate, and observe the natural world more than listen to the teacher's lessons and read textbooks. These pedagogies challenged the vision that children were naturally inclined towards criminality, and instead proposed a view of children that highlighted positive aspects such as spontaneity, curiosity, and movement. They disputed the notion of children's nature, prevalent among normal teachers and the manuals written by positivists like Mercante. This laboratory, unlike the one promoted by Mercante, did not have the same resources or state support. Elites banned anarchist and socialist leaders, expelling them from the country through the Residency Law and systematically closed schools. Yet, progressive school reformers' views on children were informed by eugenic ideals. They saw in the school a space of regeneration where working class children could better develop in a healthy environment.

The fifth chapter “**A Laboratory for Women’s Emancipation: Feminism, Maternal Pedagogies, and School Reforms in Buenos Aires (1900s-1920s)**” analyzes the intersections between women’s movements and the teaching profession. I show that teaching allowed women to encounter feminist discourses and join feminist movements in the second decade of the twentieth century. I argue that, drawing on feminist organizing and transnational conversations in congresses and magazines, women pioneered pedagogies that challenged normalist training and the

conceptions of the disciplined classroom. Women drew on pedagogical principles that emphasized children's natural development and encouraged children's expression, critical thinking, and movement. Drawing on maternal perspectives on children's education, school reformers proposed a new relationship between the school and the outside world introducing novel objects to enter the classroom, creating a closer bond between student and teachers, and allowing children to move and express themselves. Yet, drawing on transnational networks between Argentina and the U.S., school reformers reproduced hierarchical relationships between South and North America and contributed to asserting U.S. superiority. As a laboratory for women's emancipation, the school proved to be a valuable site for women to assert an authoritative voice. The knowledge that emerged from the classroom promoted a positive image of children as naturally good and aimed to provide teachers with pedagogical tools to transform their classrooms into more democratic spaces.

In sum, my dissertation argues that during the period from 1880 to 1930, the project by elites of universalizing primary education had competing results. On one hand, the school laboratory advanced scientific studies on human differences in the classroom, training thousands of teachers with the positivist perspectives that characterized working-class children as "savages" in need of education. On the other hand, the school laboratory created in the classroom a space for pedagogical experimentation that prompted women's participation in science and politics. While teachers transformed the school into a laboratory to measure children's intelligence and their abilities to work, thus further racializing children's bodies; the scientific

practices of observation and experimentation also provided teachers with the tools to challenge the authoritarian and patriarchal practices of Argentine society.

Chapter 1: Embodying *Normalismo*: Teacher’s Scientific Training at the Normal School (1880s-1910s)

Introduction

In 1869, Domingo Sarmiento founded the first normal school in Argentina, the Normal School of Paraná (Escuela Normal de Paraná, ENP). Many other normal schools would be founded throughout the country in the following decades to train teachers, the first step to educate the new generations in primary schools.⁷⁰ Normal schools were born at the same time Argentine elites were consolidating the national territory and reorganizing its population amidst one of the biggest European migrations to the Americas.⁷¹ Through normal training, elites delineated the knowledge and habits deemed desirable for future citizens. This chapter examines what knowledge student-teachers incorporated in their normal training. I show that, influenced by a modernizing agenda, student-teachers learned to discipline children and themselves. While some students embraced the norms and obeyed their professors to receive a diploma, others questioned the professors’ authority and distrusted the role of the “model teacher” they were called to emulate. In the normal school, student-teachers entered in contact with a scientific education that encouraged them to experiment. Normal training provided student-teachers

⁷⁰ Increasingly after 1884, when primary schooling became mandatory, the normal school became the only institution that granted teaching diplomas for primary school teachers, professors, principals, and school inspectors. Previous to the founding of normal schools, teachers proved their knowledge in teaching by taking an exam or teaching at private schools in their homes without any certification. Flavia Fiorucci, “Maestros para el sistema de educación pública. La fundación de escuelas normales en Argentina (1890-1930), *Revista Mexicana de Historia de la Educación* 2, no. 3 (2014): 25-45; Myriam Southwell, *Ceremonias en la tormenta: 200 años de formación y trabajo docente en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Clacso, 2021).

⁷¹ José Moya, *Cousins and Strangers. Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires (1850-1930)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), Fernando Devoto, *Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2009).

with the tools to critically observe, take notes, write, and perform in front of a group of students. By granting a teaching diploma that facilitated access to a job, normal training opened new possibilities for students from less privileged economic backgrounds, especially women. As much as normal schools disciplined students into daily behavioral habits that they would continue performing after graduation, the knowledge students acquired through pedagogical theory and practice opened new opportunities to participate in politics and science.

When looked from the perspective of normal students' experiences, normal schools appear as very complex institutions far from the perfectly ordered institution that molded docile bodies.⁷² In the study of *normalismo* as part of a centralizing and oligarchic state project, normal teachers have been characterized as agents of a disciplinary state, easily replaceable, willing to spread the state's message around the country.⁷³ While the foundation of normal schools responded to attempts by the government to centralize and homogenize the education of children, normal schools reflected the tensions and contradictions of institutions that advocated for perfect order and homogeneity in an increasingly diverse population of students educated to criticize

⁷² I join historians who have questioned *normalismo* as a unilateral state project. Fiorucci explained that the incorporation of women in higher education provoked tensions between principal and national authorities. Fiorucci, "Maestros para el sistema de educación pública." I draw on Marcelo Caruso who warns historians of education that followed a Foucaultian framework to be careful in the application of European theoretical models. Criticizing Miguel Angel Centeno, he prefers to talk about disciplines instead of disciplinary societies to investigate the differential ways in which Latin American actors appropriated, reacted, and rejected disciplinary systems imposed by the state. Marcelo Caruso, "'Sus hábitos medio civilizados': Enseñanzas, disciplina y disciplinamiento." *Revista educación y pedagogía*, no 37 (Septiembre, 2003): 107-127.

⁷³ Andrea Alliaud, *Los maestros y su historia. Los orígenes del magisterio* (Buenos Aires: Gránica, 2007); Juan Carlos Tedesco, *Educación y sociedad en la Argentina (1880-1945)* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2009); Adriana Puiggrós, *Sociedad civil y estado en los orígenes del sistema educativo argentino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1991).

and make arguments.⁷⁴ My reading of the sources aims to provide a window into understanding the learning experiences of student-teachers, the discourses that they encountered in the classroom, and the challenges they faced while incorporating teaching skills. Despite state intervention in programs, school regulations, and requirements to register in the school, I offer a picture of the normal school as a complex institution where multiple actors negotiated power.

The first section of this chapter contextualizes the teaching profession by paying attention to state expectations on teachers. Class and gender matters to this story. Students from working class families entered the school due to a system of national and provincial fellowships. Thus, the normal school provided them an opportunity to complete their secondary education. The requisites to enter the school and to access a fellowship suggests that only students who excelled in their primary studies and were able to prove good behavior were accepted to be trained as teachers. Women were crucial in the modernizing project. U.S. women were not the only ones who contributed to the foundation of the school, female students were particularly targeted as natural educators for children. By the 1890s, they occupied the majority of the student enrollment. However, even when the teaching of children was deemed by elites as a feminine task, male teachers occupied the hierarchical positions in the school system.

The second and third sections show the impact of positivist thought in normalist training. The second section investigates the moral lessons that student-teachers incorporated in the normal school. I demonstrate how positivism permeated the teaching

⁷⁴ Julia Rodríguez has described this state project as “utilitarian, modern, efficient, orderly but oligarchic, intrusive, controlling, and punitive.” Julia Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 5.

profession via a discourse centered on discipline and order. Student-teachers were taught to embody a model of moral behavior in front of children. Through a series of school regulations, quotidian conversations with the principal, and pedagogical conferences, student-teachers encountered a discourse that praised discipline and an orderly classroom as a crucial goal for the school. I show how student-teachers were taught about discipline at the same time they were being disciplined and closely supervised by their professors and principals. The third section demonstrates that a scientific education had contradictory effects in normal training. The influence of scientific theories in the school translated into innovative teaching practices that promoted students' active role in the classroom. In the practice school, a scientific education meant that students learned by experimenting with teaching methods and by observing their peers. Observation functioned as a means to reinforce student-teachers and children's discipline in the classroom. Yet, through observation student-teachers were able to collect evidence and make arguments to criticize teaching methods. Inspired by positivist thought, student-teachers learned that the science of teaching was objective and impartial and therefore the teaching practices in the classroom should reflect a distant relationship with children.

Entering the Normal School

Starting in the 1870s elites passed a series of regulations to organize and centralize the educational system. In 1876, the national government established the *Reglamento General de Escuelas* (General School Regulation), and in 1881 founded the National Council of Education (*Consejo Nacional de Educación*, CNE) dependent on the

Executive Power via the Ministry of Justice, Cult, and Public Instruction.⁷⁵ The 1882 Pedagogical Congress provided the basis for the 1884 educational law —known as the 1420 Law— that outlined the general principles for primary education. The 1420 Law established mandatory and free education for children between six and twelve years old and delineated the required knowledge children acquired in school.⁷⁶ The expansion of primary schools in the 1880s accelerated the foundation of schools in the provinces and the national territories and the urgency to train teachers.⁷⁷ In this context, normal schools became the only institution that granted diplomas required for the practice of teaching. In the following decades, hundreds of students around the country registered in normal schools to receive a teaching diploma. In the period that goes from 1884 to 1930, normal schools had granted around fifty thousand teaching diplomas for teachers and professors.⁷⁸ This rapid process of teacher training responded to the urge of the elites to hire primary school teachers to educate immigrant, rural, and indigenous children.⁷⁹

Normal schools were secondary education institutions that emerged as alternatives to other institutions functioning in the country such as the Colegios

⁷⁵ Myriam Southwell, *Ceremonias en la tormenta. 200 años de formación y trabajo docente en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2021).

⁷⁶ In its sixth article the law instituted the teaching of reading and writing, arithmetics, geography, history, moral and urbanity, hygiene, natural sciences, drawing, music, gymnastics, and the National Constitution. Girls were taught “manual work” or “handcrafting” while boys were taught military training. *Ley de educación promulgada por el honorable congreso de la Nación el 8 de julio de 1884* (Buenos Aires: Litografía, Imprenta y Encuadernación de Stiller & Laass, 1884).

⁷⁷ Fiorucci, “Maestros para el sistema de educación pública: La fundación de escuelas normales en Argentina (1890-1930).”

⁷⁸ The expansion of normal schools was accompanied by an expansion in primary education schools from 2,263 schools in 1889, the number expanded to 10,063 in 1932. Fiorucci, “Maestros para el sistema de educación pública.”

⁷⁹ According to the national census of 1869, more than a million people were illiterate, over approximately one million and seventy hundred people. The need to increase the amount of teachers was urgent to the extent that the following year Sarmiento prompted the creation of the Normal School of Paraná. Southwell, *Ceremonias en la tormenta*.

Nacionales. Between 1863 and 1864, the Colegios Nacionales of Buenos Aires, Catamarca, Salta, Tucumán, San Juan, and Mendoza were founded. They were directed toward male students from well-off families who would continue their studies at the university. Unlike the Colegios Nacionales, the Normal School constituted a more direct path to the labor market and provided a unique opportunity for poor and middle class children to continue their studies. Normal schools were complex institutions that encompassed primary and secondary education. At the Normal Department, student-teachers took courses based on curriculum regulated by the CNE. At the Department of Application or practice school, student-teachers put into practice their teaching skills with younger children. The practice school functioned as a primary school with courses from first to sixth grade.⁸⁰ At the ENP, there was a third department, the kindergarten.⁸¹

Although normal schools were part of a paid educational system, the majority of the student population had access to a system of fellowships that covered the tuition and contributed towards the cost of living.⁸² An alumnus from the ENP, Víctor Mercante remembered: “I was awarded the fellowship that filled my poor home with joy, opening the door of hope, which we thought was closed forever.”⁸³ As in the story of Mercante, normal schools democratized access to secondary school education for families with

⁸⁰ The original name in Spanish is “escuela de aplicación” (School of application).

⁸¹ Sara Eccleston founded the kindergarten. Eccleston continued to be an important figure in the founding of normal schools in the country. In 1888, Eccleston moved to Buenos Aires to organize the Kindergarten at the Normal School of Capital Federal. In 1903, she was part of the committee who re-designed the curricula for normal schools. Moreover, Eccleston was an active member in the networks that connected U.S. and Argentine pedagogy. “Unión Froebeliana Argentina,” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 249, June 30, 1894.

⁸² In exchange, the government requested from students four years of service in a primary school assigned by the National Council of Education. Myriam Southwell, *Ceremonias en la tormenta*.

⁸³ Víctor Mercante, *Una vida realizada. Mis memorias* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ferrari, 1944), 73.

fewer economic resources.⁸⁴ Yet, while the national and provincial governments supported normalist training, the fellowships did not cover all student expenses, and families had to provide some financial support to pay for food and rent since students resided off campus.⁸⁵ Moreover, because the fellowships depended on the national budget approved by Congress every year, changes in the government's priorities endangered the financial support students received. In 1899, former principal of the Normal School of Paraná and Congressional representative Alejandro Carbó, reacted against the reduction of scholarships. Drawing from his experiences as principal and as a former student at Paraná, he asserted that the fellowships represented an important factor for poor families to send their children to school. The reduction of fellowships, in Carbó's experience, resulted in overworked students who taught at night in order to pay for their education.⁸⁶ Carbó explained to the congressmen that, while parents were not able to pay for their children's entire education, "they were affectionate enough to make the sacrifice of parting with the fruit of their personal labor to help pay for it."⁸⁷

⁸⁴ The democratizing tendency does not mean that every normal school student belonged to working class or middle class families. As Myriam Southwell states, secondary education would become massive only by the mid 20th century. Myriam Southwell, *Ceremonias en la tormenta*. I found primary sources that confirmed that, at least until the first decades of the twentieth century, upper class girls attended normal schools. For instance U.S. teacher Jennie Howard recalls girls from distinguished families going to the school accompanied by their servants who carried the books for them. Jennie Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Raigal, 1951). In 1909, Principal Maximio Victoria complained that the "daughters of accommodated fathers receive the fellowship." Escuela Normal "José María Torres," Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1901-1925, Memoria 1909.

⁸⁵ The journey of a student at the Normal School of Paraná living in a pension and struggling with affording food is portrayed in the fictional work of normal school alumnus Víctor Mercante originally published under the pseudonym Scanavecchia. Víctor Mercante, *Los estudiantes* (Buenos Aires: Librería Hachette, 1961).

⁸⁶ Alejandro Carbó, an alumnus from the Normal School of Paraná, became its director between 1889 and 1892. He first worked as professor and vice-principal of the same institution. He became a provincial senator for Entre Ríos and later national deputy for the same province for four terms, between 1898 and 1910 and between 1912 to 1916.

⁸⁷ Alejandro Carbó, *En defensa de las escuelas normales* (Buenos Aires: Castex y Halliburton, 1899).

To register in the normal school prospective students had to prove their intellectual and moral capacities. They presented a “certificate of morality” signed by either a Justice of the Peace, a pastor, or a priest from the city they had lived the previous year; and a certificate of good health signed by a resident physician from Paraná.⁸⁸ Along with these certificates, students submitted a permission signed by their father or tutors.⁸⁹ Students also had to pass an examination. According to Myriam Southwell, during the second presidency of Julio Roca (1898-1904) changes in the regulations of normal schools were implemented through the leadership of Minister of Education, Osvaldo Magnasco (1864-1920).⁹⁰ From 1899, it was required to present a certification of finalized primary education. There were also modifications in the minimum age to enter the normal school. In its origins, boys could register in the school at fourteen years old while girls had to be sixteen. In 1889, the minimum age was sixteen for everyone.

Elites promoted teaching of primary education as a feminine task. From their perspective, there were economic reasons to privilege women’s normal training. In 1881, Sarmiento explained that women’s salaries represented a fraction of their male

⁸⁸ Sara Figueroa, *Escuela Normal de Paraná. Datos históricos (1871-1895)* (Paraná: Imprenta Predassi, 1934), 84; *Informe anual. La escuela Normal del Paraná en 1910* (Buenos Aires: Compañía sudamericana de billetes de banco, 1910). The requirements were similar in the U.S. normal schools with the difference that in Argentina prospective students registered in the normal school after finishing primary education while in the U.S. normal schools required four years of high school. et, in the U.S., acceptance to normal schools required an entry exam but in Argentina the lack of previous examination opened the doors of the school to more students. A preliminary exploration on U.S. primary sources shows that students had to be sixteen years old in the case of women and seventeen years old for men. They also had to submit a physical examination, a certificate of good moral character, and a written examination. *Catalog and Circular for Bridgewater State Normal School* (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Company, 1909); *Catalog and Circular for the State Normal School at North Adams* (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Company, 1900).

⁸⁹ Fiorucci argues that the lack of exams demonstrates the democratic character of normal schools. Although she also shows that some principals advocated for the exams as a way of raising the level of the student’s preparation when they enter the school. Fiorucci, “Maestros para el sistema de educación pública.”

⁹⁰ Southwell, *Ceremonias en la tormenta*.

counterparts.⁹¹ Reducing the cost of teacher salaries would allow the foundation of more schools for a growing Argentine population.⁹² Beyond the economic reasons, elites promoted women's education in normal schools because they believed women were better suited for teaching children. Minister of Instruction Nicolás Avellaneda (1837-1885) understood that teaching was appropriate for women since there were not many job opportunities for them and they were “endowed with those delicate and communicative qualities that make it easy to take over the intelligence and attention of children.”⁹³ Avellaneda considered teaching good for women *and* for the school. For women, it provided a “true regeneration,” creating a lucrative career for what was already considered their role as holders of tradition. For the school, the presence of women would transform the institution from a “shadowy prison that saddens and discourages children” to “an extension of the domestic home.”⁹⁴ Women’s sweetness and charm would, therefore, make the lessons more attractive to children. Thus, women would be instrumental in the emergence of universal schooling that was required to convince local communities of the benefits of primary education. As motherhood, teaching was conceived within the framework of self-sacrifice and austerity, almost like a priest. But unlike priests most teachers were women.⁹⁵ Comparing teachers to soldiers and priests,

⁹¹ In the first issue of *El Monitor de la educación común*, Sarmiento advocated for female teachers in order to save money in salaries “Rentas escolares en Jujuy,” *El monitor de la educación común* 1, no. 1, Sept. 1881.

⁹² Laura Rodríguez, “Normalismo y mujeres. Las maestras en el quién es quién en La Plata (1972): trayectorias de una élite intelectual y profesional,” *Trabajos y Comunicaciones*, 2da. Época, No 50, e092, julio-diciembre 2019.

⁹³ *Informe anual. La escuela Normal del Paraná en 1910*, 10.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ According to Szurmuk, Sarmiento saw U.S. teachers as farmers who would bring the seed of civilization. Yet, what was unusual about the farming metaphor was that the farmers were women. In a moment when women were predominantly assigned a role in the domestic space, Sarmiento’s ideas positioned women at the center of a national project. Unlike the male barbarian *gaucho*, modernity was

Avellaneda asserted that “they all need a vocation that helped them to grapple with the fatiguing challenges of their mission: to prepare, fertilize, and inspire the revelation of their high duties and the knowledge of their influence over the new generations.”⁹⁶

The presence of women was crucial in the foundation of normal schools not only as students but also as teachers. Most of the U.S. teachers who arrived in Argentina between 1869 and the late 1890s to work at the first normal schools founded in the country were women. This transnational project, originally designed by Sarmiento, continued until the presidency of Julio Roca (1880 to 1886). Mary Tyler Peabody Mann, wife of Horace Mann, and friend of Sarmiento, was instrumental in recruiting teachers suitable for the position.⁹⁷ While living in exile, Sarmiento was sent by the Chilean government to investigate the U.S. educational system. It is during this trip that Sarmiento met Horace Mann and his wife.⁹⁸ When the openings of the first normal schools were approved during Sarmiento’s administration, Avellaneda suggested that a portion of the budget for normal schools should be invested in foreign teachers: “The

imagined as female and white. Mónica Szurmuk, *Women in Argentina: Early Travel Narratives* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

⁹⁶ *Informe anual. La escuela Normal del Paraná en 1910*, 10.

⁹⁷ Mary Tyler Peabody Mann and Horace Mann established a close relationship with Sarmiento helping to recruit U.S. teachers. A teacher herself, and part of a circle of influential families in Boston, Mary Tyler Peabody continued a long distance friendship with Sarmiento through correspondence. Mary Tyler Peabody Mann, and Barry L. Velleman, “*My Dear Sir: Mary Mann's Letters to Sarmiento (1865-1881)*” (Buenos Aires: ICANA, 2001). Peabody Mann translated Sarmiento’s classic book *Facundo* to English and wrote a preface introducing his work to the U.S. audience. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants or Civilization and Barbarism* (New York: Hafner Publishing CO, 1868). Horace Mann is known for his educational labor founding schools. In Argentina, his pioneering work in education has been associated with Sarmiento. “Horacio Mann. El Sarmiento yanque [sic],” *La escuela popular*, no. 6, April 4, 1913.

⁹⁸ Between 1845 and 1849, Sarmiento was sent by the Chilean government to Europe and the U.S. in order to study educational systems that could be applied in Latin America. This trip inspired his books *Viajes por Europa, África y América* (1849) and *De la educación popular* (1849). Sarmiento arrived in Chile in 1840. He became an active member of the political and intellectual spheres in Chile. In 1841 he became the editor of *El Nacional* and the following year founded the first daily newspaper in Santiago, *El Progreso*. Allison Williams Bunkley, “Introduction” Sarmiento, Domingo Faustino. *A Sarmiento Anthology* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1972).

teachers trained in the United States, or in some other country where education has acquired its full development, brings with him his methods, his practice, his institutions; and the school that he directs will be a living model, destined to propagandize by example.”⁹⁹ Only a few male U.S. teachers were hired by the Ministry of Instruction. Among them was George Stearns who directed the ENP between 1870 and 1876. Stearns contributed to the founding of the school by designing the programs and traveling to the U.S. in order to recruit teachers and bring equipment to the school.¹⁰⁰ In addition to the U.S. teachers, educators from Europe were instrumental in the organization of normal schools in the foundational years, including José María Torres, who directed the ENP in two opportunities between 1876 and 1893.¹⁰¹

While teaching was originally born as a project for women, female and male students joined normal schools. Still, women constituted the majority of the student body. Historians have identified the feminization of teaching as a process that started at the end of the nineteenth century and ended in 1960, when 90% of primary school teachers were

⁹⁹ *Informe anual. La escuela Normal del Paraná en 1910*, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Figueroa, *Escuela Normal de Paraná*. Ana Bella Pérez Campos, *Escuela Normal de Paraná: construcciones discursivas de la nacionalidad argentina* (Paraná: Ediciones UADER, 2016), see chapter three.

¹⁰¹ Originally from Spain, before moving to Argentina, Torres had a long trajectory inspecting and leading schools in his country. In 1864, he accepted an offer to work as a vice-principal at the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires. In this role Torres stood as a disciplinary educator fictionalized in Miguel Cané’s famous novel *Juvenilia*. Miguel Cané, *Juvenilia* (Buenos Aires: Cámara Argentina del Libro, 1943). Torres was an influential figure in the building of *normalismo*. Since the founding of the Normal School of Paraná he worked as a national inspector. Later, Torres directed the school between 1876 and 1886 and then for a second term between 1892 and 1893. As a writer of manuals of pedagogy, his influence reached normal students around the country. Alumni from the ENP and principal Maximio Victoria described Torres as a “superior teacher and principal” whose influence reached beyond the classroom. According to Victoria, his lessons, projects, and speeches demonstrated his vision of education as a national problem and of mission school in disseminating culture. *Informe anual. La escuela Normal del Paraná en 1910*, 25-26.

women.¹⁰² There were three types of normal schools; those dedicated exclusively for girls, those exclusive for boys, and a third type called “mixtas” (mixed schools) where boys and girls shared classroom instruction. The state’s attempt to give primary education teaching a female character, is demonstrated in the founding of primarily normal schools for women beginning in 1890.¹⁰³

Even in mixed schools where men and women shared classroom instruction, student-teachers’ learning experience differed depending on their gender. Women received less instruction in mathematics and gymnastics while they dedicated more hours to manual labor learning sewing and embroidery and other “natural” female skills that the national government sought to encourage in teachers. From the perspective of the national government, home economics was deemed as necessary for the future mothers and teachers. As stated in the 1903 program, home economics was “essentially practical in nature and is constantly applied in the home, and by extension, in school and society.”¹⁰⁴ The knowledge it provided to future teachers was considered of “primary importance and are truly necessary for women, and above all, for those who must act in life under two aspects: as family members in the life of the home and as an efficient factor of our society in their character as a sample.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² “Normalismo,” in *Palabras claves en la historia de la educación argentina*, Flavia Fiorucci and José Bustamante Vismara ed., (Buenos Aires: Unipe, 2019). If we look at the records at the Normal School of Paraná, when the school opened its doors in 1870, attending the school was not a reality for many women. While women were theoretically accepted, it was not until 1876 when Principal Torres requested fellowships for the first three women (out of the ninety-two students) registered in the school. During the 1880s, there was almost no female presence in the Normal School of Paraná. The gender composition was equalized only in 1893 and by 1896 women led the number of enrolled students. Figueroa, *Escuela Normal de Paraná*. Teresa Rocha, *Simiente y mies. La escuela normal de Paraná (1871-1969)* (Paraná: Imprenta Italia, 2010).

¹⁰³ Fiorucci, “Maestros para el sistema de educación pública.”

¹⁰⁴ Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción, *Reglamento general de Escuelas Normales de la Nación* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de V. Daroqui y CIA, 1906), 21.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

The paths followed by teachers after graduation were also conditioned by their gender. Normal schools granted different teaching diplomas based on the coursework done by student-teachers. A shorter coursework, that varied between three and four years depending on the transformations in the program, provided a teaching diploma to teach in primary schools. An additional two years of coursework provided the diploma of “professor” that allowed teachers to work in secondary education—including normal schools—and in hierarchical positions such as normal school directorships and positions at the CNE. Taking the Normal School of Paraná as an example, the teaching diplomas indicate gender distinctions. Most of the students doing the professorship track were male while women tended to pursue a teacher’s diploma. Also, women were the absolute majority in kindergarten training. These distinctions demonstrate that the employment possibilities were shaped by gendered expectations. Once they graduated, women taught predominantly in primary schools while men became professors, principals of normal schools, and school inspectors. In addition, normal training opened other opportunities for male alumni. Graduates from the ENP entered politics, becoming provincial representatives in the Senate or the Chamber of Deputies.¹⁰⁶ By the 1910s female normal school alumni started enrolling in universities and claiming leadership positions at schools, the CNE, and teaching in higher education.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, although elites

¹⁰⁶ Two alumni and later principals of the Normal School of Paraná illustrate the political path that many normalistas followed at the end of the nineteenth century. Gustavo Ferrary, originally from Catamarca, directed the school between 1886 and 1889. He graduated from the school in 1878 with a diploma of professor. After directing the school Ferrary became governor for the conservative party Partido Autonomista Nacional (1891-1894). In Ferrary’s administration as a governor of Catamarca see Luis Alejandro Alvero, “En búsqueda del equilibrio. Producción y finanzas públicas de Catamarca a fines del siglo XIX,” *Revista Escuela de Historia* 10, no. 1 (Julio 2011).

¹⁰⁷ As we will see in more detail in chapter 5, women’s advocacy to participate in politics and education flourished around 1910 energized by female university students and teachers participating in feminist magazines. Socialist teacher Raquel Camaña represents an example of women’s advocacy to teach in higher education. Camaña applied for a position as a professor in the Universidad of Buenos

imagined teaching as a feminine profession, mostly men occupied hierarchical roles in an increasingly feminine world.

Uncomfortable with the perspective of competing with women for teaching positions, by the turn of the century male intellectuals and principals targeted women's education on different fronts. Principals were particularly concerned with the overwhelming presence of women in normal schools since they had become a threat to male leadership.¹⁰⁸ In 1909, the Principal of the Normal School of Paraná, Maximio Victoria, complained about the lack of male students.¹⁰⁹ The situation, as he put it, was a danger for the nation. He argued that male teachers were needed for hierarchical positions at the National Council of Education and as teachers in rural schools, since women tended to work at urban schools. Victoria suggested that in order to stop the feminization of teaching in Paraná, the government should assign fellowships primarily to male students. As principal of the Normal School of Mercedes, Mercante, former classmate of Victoria, joined him in describing the dominant presence of women as a national problem and advocating for a more equitable distribution of scholarships between men and women.¹¹⁰ In the report, he wrote that women, unlike men, could not educate children

Aires but she was rejected because the committee did not consider that women should teach at a higher education level. Raquel Camaña, "El prejuicio sexual y el profesorado en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras," *Revista de Derecho, Letras e Historia*, vol. 37, Dec. 1910.

¹⁰⁸ In 1905, from the almost twelve thousand teachers that worked for the National Council of Education, more than eight thousand were women. Fiorucci, "País afeminado, proletariado feminista."

¹⁰⁹ Maximio Victoria, originally from the province of Tucumán, graduated from the Normal School of Paraná in 1889 under the directorship of Alejandro Carbó and directed the school between 1907 and 1924. Rocha, *Simiente y mies*. Nicolás Motura, "Disputas en torno a la Reforma. Maximio Victoria y las reacciones contra la Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Educativas de Paraná (1918-1931)" *Avances del Cesor* 16, no. 20, (2019).

¹¹⁰ Víctor Mercante, "Informe de la dirección de la Escuela Normal de Mercedes" Memoria presentada al Congreso Nacional por el Ministro de Justicia e Instrucción. Anexo de instrucción pública, 1903.

and inspire a nationalist sentiment.¹¹¹ In 1908, Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938) wrote a series of articles in *El Monitor* where he advocated for restricting women's education.¹¹² He asserted that women needed to receive the most basic instruction to fulfill their roles in the home and to instruct their children during their first years. Lugones considered that it was not a good idea to allow women to occupy directorships since women "spend their lives in an intellectual semi-childhood."¹¹³ Finally, Lugones reminded the national authorities that the presence of women in the school threatened the secular project since they would disseminate Catholicism.

Women's education at normal schools generated sexual anxieties. During their teenage years, an age which scientific discourses characterized as tumultuous, girls shared many hours of their daily lives in the school.¹¹⁴ In 1905 Víctor Mercante published an article for *Archivos de Psiquiatría y Criminología* based on his observations of girls between 10 and 22 years old warning about an "epidemic" of lesbianism in schools for girls, especially in boarding schools.¹¹⁵ Mercante associated claustal

¹¹¹ Mercante asserted that women were capable of instructing "but the aptitude to educate, to awaken and cultivate in the child the feeling of duty, the love of work, of the homeland, to fuse into the same nationalist feeling that the great mass of foreigners who work with us, but who do not feel like us, neither they nor sometimes their children, it is essential that it be the man who deposits in the child's brain the seed of those feelings." Quoted in Fiorucci, "País afeminado, proletariado feminista," 133.

¹¹² Lugones is known as one of the main figures of literary *modernismo*. Originally an activist of the Socialist Party, by the turn of the twentieth century Lugones shifted his political ideas towards a conservative nationalism. By the time he writes in *El monitor*, Lugones is consolidating himself as an important intellectual within the literary circles of Ruben Darío. Oscar Terán, *Historia de las ideas en la Argentina. Diez lecciones iniciales, 1810-1980* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2019).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹¹⁴ In "La crisis de la pubertad" Mercante asserted that during puberty women experienced more energetic transformations than men. Girls would transform into reserved, afraid, and shameful women or become authoritarian and coquettish." Víctor Mercante, *La crisis de la pubertad y sus consecuencias pedagógicas* (Buenos Aires: UNIPE, 2014), 118.

¹¹⁵ Víctor Mercante "Fetiquismo y uranismo femenino en los internados educativos," *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología*, 1905. Mercante refers to lesbianism, following German psychiatrist Krafft Ebing, as "ecstatic uranism" defined as a sexual perversion that provoked an obsession devastating for mental development. Unlike men, women's homosexuality was not impulsive and tended to be

institutions with religious practices. The adoration of the virgin Mary, and a romantic imagination, promoted in women this “sexual perversion.”¹¹⁶ Mercante described that while recess breaks might have caused a good impression since girls were prohibited to run and yell, in fact quietness hid women’s romantic exchanges. According to the professor, lesbianism was possible to prevent through a detailed observation of students’ behavior, a psycho-moral study, distraction, outdoor exercises, and scientific lessons. In addition, it was necessary to prohibit kissing, hugging, and the “quiet and dual life.”¹¹⁷ He concluded lesbianism was easy to combat if “every director without puritanical boasting that leads to evil, begins by believing in the existence of the disease.”¹¹⁸

To prevent women’s advancement to leadership positions with the education system, principals and inspectors argued that women had different abilities.¹¹⁹ In 1908,

contemplative and romantic with some mystical elements that Mercante associated with the claustral practice of convents.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ In order to prove the existence of lesbianism in normal schools, Mercante analyzed letters by the students confessing their love, jealousy, and dreams. In a letter, one student told her girlfriend: “This morning I noticed that you were looking at Ofelia, you know how much I suffer with your behavior.” Another student expressed her jealousy and asked her girlfriend to be more discreet: “Yesterday when you went up the stairs your care was so little that many of my classmates saw your legs. I don’t know what happened to me at that moment. I felt blood rush to my cheeks. I beg you, my soul, to adjust the skirts and wear less starched petticoats.” One note revealed: “Last night I dreamed that we were alone, on a sofa, illuminated by the moon.” Ibid., 29-30.

¹¹⁹ Medical discourse contributed to the creation of bodily differences. Pablo Scharagrodsky identifies four specialized forms in which medical discourse described women’s bodies and prescribed their movement. First, anatomy identified the location of organs and bodily elements and contributed to disseminating the idea that women were inferior to men because their bones were more fragile. Second, Physiology of exercise prescribed certain types of movement for women based on their reproductive mission and propagated the idea that women should not suffer from muscular fatigue because that would “force their nature.” Third, gynecology interpreted women’s genitals and contributed to highlighting the risks of women’s bodies in relationship with the maternal role. Finally, anthropometry, with its bodily measurements, reinforced the concept that women were below the standards of strength of their weight, linking their debility with a moral insufficiency. Pablo Scharagrodsky, “Dime cómo te mueves y te diré cuál es tu ‘sexo’: Discurso médico, educación física, y diferencia sexual del siglo xix y principios del siglo xx” in *Moralidades y comportamientos sexuales. Argentina 1880-2011*, Dora Barrancos, Donna Guy, Adriana Valobra (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2014).

Mercante delivered a talk at the Pedagogical Section of Universidad Nacional de La Plata (UNLP), entitled “The Modern Women,” later published in the journal he directed, *Archivos de Pedagogía*.¹²⁰ In this talk, Mercante analyzed women’s role in society, evoking his experiments and the research of his friend Rodolfo Senet. Drawing on Senet’s anthropometric studies at UNLP, he asserted that women had less weight, strength, robustness, and resistance.¹²¹ Yet, he argued that based on these differences it was not possible to conclude that women were incompetent for working. Mercante concluded that working outside their homes did not deform women as many claimed. Instead, it was bad hygiene and hunger what affected them. Mercante was not aligned with the more conservative perspectives that allocated women to the domestic space but still believed that women had different capacities than men. He assured that “inferiority in an aptitude does not mean incapability.”¹²² Mercante’s experiments conducted with children at UNLP proved that women’s intelligence was not inferior but different from men.¹²³ Mercante went further, asserting that not only were women not inferior to men,

¹²⁰ Víctor Mercante, “La mujer moderna,” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 4, no. 12, 1908, 322.

¹²¹ Mercante is referring to the research published in the article “Investigaciones antropológicas. Estadística de la talla, tronco, abertura de brazos, extremidades inferiores y peso por edades y sexos,” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 3, no. 1, 1906.

¹²² *Ibid*, 326. Mercante considered that “domestic women,” who were supposed to just be good cooks, do the dishes, and clean the home, were a product of “sentimentalism” and not the reality of working class families. Moreover, Mercante stated that a problem to expect from women was the condensation of tasks that were central to the job of a doctor, a teacher, or a clothes designer, which women, without an appropriate home economics education, did everything wrong and “without pleasure.” In opposition to the “sentimentalist” voices, Mercante drew on the numbers that statistics provided. He quoted studies from France, but the reality of women working outside their homes spoke to the Argentine context as well. Most women worked as cooks, laundresses, ironers, seamstresses, farmers, florists, saleswomen, hairdressers, dressmakers, educationists, pharmacists, doctors, cashiers, writers, and artists. According to this changing scenario, the presence of women in the labor force was evidence that not all women “need for Humanity to live in peace and be happy, a male monarchy.” *Ibid*, 324-325.

¹²³ Mercante asserted that: “Her skull by the way is smaller, her brain mass less voluminous, her cephalometric diameters short, but which centers does this reduction affect? Is this reduction such that it causes profound mental differences? Absolutely not.” *Ibid*, 328.

but when considering perception, they were even superior to men. Based on his and his colleagues' experiments, women demonstrated to have better memory and showed better results regarding attention and imitation. Thus, Mercante claimed that a "woman is a retailer par excellence and her eyes, her ears and her touch reach a penetrative power that man only achieves by tenacious exercise."¹²⁴ Because of women's abilities related to fidelity and imitation, Mercante believed women could be excellent in tasks such as embroidery, sewing or any other type of job that required copying. Eventually—Mercante affirmed—women could be great chemists, pharmacists, or professors, "as long as their brain is not required to solve a problem that involves a new law, a new theory, a new concept."¹²⁵ Thus, women, unlike men, were not able to create, invent, or direct. Areas such as justice, politics, art, sciences, and philosophy were not suited for women's psychological abilities. While in his conference Mercante did not delve into the teaching profession, his assertions in an increasingly feminized world such as teaching meant that women should not occupy positions of leadership such as the directorship of a school, or a hierarchical position in the National Council of Education such as school inspector. Portrayed as having an "emotional type" or "lacking of criteria and having psychological instability" women were discredited for positions of power within the educational system.

Student-teachers entered the normal school while they were young and were transitioning from childhood to adolescence. For many, the school represented a transformative experience. Entering the normal school at sixteen years old, when they graduated after three or four years of training, they had become adults with the

¹²⁴ Ibid, 329.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 330.

responsibility of taking care of dozens of children in a classroom and beyond. Unlike the Colegios Nacionales, the school prepared their students for the job market and expected from the *normalistas* the incorporation of norms that they would teach to future generations through exemplary behavior. Ideally, in the passage from the normal school they would learn to embody discipline and show obedience to the rules and their superiors. The next section investigates the disciplinary discourses that student-teachers encountered in the classroom under the influence of positivist thought.

“Take Possession of Yourself within the Most Perfect Obedience and Discipline:”

Incorporating Normal Behavior in the School

The Normal School of Paraná was a model school and established the foundations for teaching training to the rest of the schools around the country.¹²⁶ The ENP was a central site for the circulation of positivist thought in Argentina.¹²⁷ Positivism has been defined as “a theory of knowledge in which the scientific method represents man’s only means of knowing.”¹²⁸ Under a positivist method, knowledge is derived from

¹²⁶ Alliaud explains that the model school (*escuela modelo*) was a strategy used by the national government to homogenize and organize the educational system. Alliaud, *Los maestros y su historia*. Indeed, the influence of Paraná reached other normal schools around the country. Its professors and principals participated in the design of the programs used at the national level. For instance, Principal José María Torres participated in the creation of the 1887 programs, the first programs published by the Ministry of Justice and Instruction. In 1903, Principal Leopoldo Herrera and Kindergarten Principal Sara Eccleston participated in the committee in charge of writing the programs. Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, *Plan de estudios y programas para las escuelas normales de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1903). Normal School of Paraná alumni became national inspectors, congressional representatives and principals in other normal schools and contributed to the prestige of the institution. See *Informe anual. La escuela Normal del Paraná en 1910*. In 1921 teacher magazine *La Obra* asserted that along with the Universidad de Córdoba and the Universidad de Buenos Aires, the Normal School of Paraná “has contributed fruitfully to cementing the character of our nationality.” “Interior. Congreso de educación” *La obra*, no. 13, Aug. 20, 1921, 29.

¹²⁷ Jens Hentschke, “Argentina’s Escuela Normal de Paraná and Its Disciplines: Mergers of Liberalism, Jarusims, and Comtean Positivists in Sarmiento’s Temple for Civilizing the Nation, 1870 to 1916,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 17, no. 1 (April 2011): 1-31.

¹²⁸ Leslie Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 383.

observation and experiment in the search for laws of phenomena. Its main proponent was Auguste Comte (1798-1857) considered the founder of modern sociology. Comte's influence in Latin America was extensive although it was through the work of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) that positivist thought was disseminated.¹²⁹ Leslie Bethell points to the influence of positivism in educational theory as an inclination toward a scientific and practical education as opposed to humanistic studies; and an adherence to secularism and state control.¹³⁰ This section explores positivist influence in *normalismo*, paying attention to the disciplinary methods that the authorities of the CNE and principles put into practice to promote a hierarchical and orderly school. This hierarchical and authoritarian society created within the borders of the school is one of the main manifestations in positivist thought operated in the school's daily routines. The classrooms were not only receptors of positivist ideas but laboratories where ideas of state control were put into practice through the training of teachers.

Latin American intellectuals embraced positivism convinced that the scientific methods could be applied to solve national problems. In Argentina, two intellectuals that disseminated positivism were José Ramos Mejía (1849-1914) and José Ingenieros (1877-1925). Ramos Mejía was a doctor from the Universidad de Buenos Aires. Ramos Mejía's main concern in his book *Multitudes argentinas*, was how to govern the multitud characterized as irrational. The environment, he believed, could affect the mass of immigrants arriving to the country and therefore, it represented a crucial factor in civilizing the population. A believer that, through the school, immigrant children could

¹²⁹ Terán, *Historia de las ideas en la Argentina*.

¹³⁰ Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*.

build a tie to the country, between 1908 and 1912 he utilized his position as President of the National Council of Education (CNE) to further promote the national sentiment in the school through the establishment of patriotic rituals.¹³¹ Another important figure in the history of positivism in Argentina is José Ingenieros. From Spencer, he adopted the notions of empirical experience as the source of knowledge. Ingenieros became a leader in the study of psychiatry and criminology through his work at the Sala de Observación de Alienados (Mentally-Ill Observation Room) of the Buenos Aires Police. In 1902, he directed the *Archivos de Criminología, Medicina Legal y Psiquiatría*. Ingenieros played a mentorship role for many teachers who by the turn of the century participated in the intellectual circles.¹³² Through their work, Ramos Mejía and Ingenieros contributed to the organization of schools, prisons, and hospitals. At the Normal School of Paraná, it was Pedro Scalabrini, a professor of Natural History, who introduced positivist ideas. Scalabrini was convinced that a systematic organization of education depended on: “the evolution of the species, the historical situation of the people whose education is to be guided, the precise and complete knowledge of human nature, and the systematization of the actual knowledge which has to be transmitted to students in a number of years, in the different grades.”¹³³ Scalabrini affirmed: “I know well that there are quite a number of

¹³¹ Lilia Bertoni studies how schools played a role in the construction of nationalist sentiment in the nineteenth century. Lilia Ana Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas. La construcción de la nacionalidad argentina a fines del siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001).

¹³² As we will see in next chapter, Ingenieros invited Mercante to collaborate in *Archivos de Criminología, Medicina Legal y Psiquiatría*. While at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, he became the professor of teacher Raquel Camaña. Herminia Brumana recognized in Ingenieros the mentor who opened the connections and provided her advice to become a writer. Camaña, “El prejuicio sexual y el profesorado en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras.” Herminia Brumana, “Evocación a José Ingenieros,” in *Obras Completas* (Buenos Aires: Amigos de Herminia Brumana, 1958).

¹³³ Quote in Hentschke, “Argentina’s Escuela Normal de Paraná and Its Disciplines: Mergers of Liberalism, Jarusims, and Comtean Positivists in Sarmiento’s Temple for Civilizing the Nation, 1870 to 1916,” 11.

other issues which constitute science, but I believe that without the previous solution of the problems mentioned, education lacks scientific bases.”¹³⁴

The concern of how to govern the multitudes was a national problem, principals and teachers experienced the same issues when trying to discipline children in the school. For this reason, *normalismo* was characterized by a series of routines that aimed to organize time, space, and children’s bodies. As Foucault has conceptualized, in modernity punishment becomes less “immediate physical pain,” associated with the dismembered or amputated body of the Middle Ages and adopts a more subtle suffering. In the process, the punishment leaves the domain of the visible quotidian domain and enters the “abstract consciousness.”¹³⁵ Much of what students learned at the normal school was the internalization of prerogatives regarding how to behave, respect norms, and discipline themselves. Through exchanges with professors and principals, student-teachers learned how to behave in a hierarchical and bureaucratic system of rewards and punishments. To belong to the school, to be a good normal student, and therefore to behave as a “normal” citizen, student-teachers had to comply with school regulations. According to these regulations, it was the obligation of the students to “attend classes punctually and conduct themselves with dedication and composure.”¹³⁶ In addition, it was their duty to “observe arrangement and cleanliness in their clothes.”¹³⁷ Incorporating societal norms meant to “respect their superiors inside and outside the school.”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 8-9.

¹³⁶ Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción, *Reglamento general de Escuelas Normales de la Nación*, 29-30.

¹³⁷ According to the Regulation of 1906, students with a chronic disease could not continue attending the school. Ibid., 29.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Student-teachers learned that their role as teachers was to behave as moral examples for future generations. Graduation speeches enforced the idea that teachers were apostles committed to the cause of education. During the 1888 closing ceremony at Paraná, Principal Gustavo Ferrary read the oath:

You swear by God and by the Fatherland to carry out with fidelity and patriotism any position entrusted to you in the exercise of your profession; stifle petty feelings and selfish views that lower the dignity of the teacher; to make careful efforts to rationally develop the physical, intellectual and moral faculties of the children entrusted to your direction.¹³⁹

In the same speech, Ferrary affirmed that normal schools “must make the teacher a perfect man, as far as possible, because the mission is going to entrust to him to help nature in the development of the child, directing its powers on the path of perfection and to be a good guide he needs to know the way well.”¹⁴⁰ The goals of the primary school to mold obedient citizens and workers were clearly stated by Ferrary, who asserted that teachers had to teach children to “respect the constitution, the laws of the Argentine Nation” and to be “affectionate and obedient, and later become foreseeable and loving parents, patriotic citizens and self-sacrificing good men and skilled workers of progress”¹⁴¹

Discourses that reaffirmed the role of teachers as molding disciplined children repeated throughout the country. In 1906 during a graduation celebration at the Normal School No. 3 in Buenos Aires, Pablo Pizzurno established that their role as teachers would be to “correct from children common defects and cultivate the most needed

¹³⁹ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1882-1898, Memoria 1888.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

virtues” for the country.¹⁴² Among the defects were dishonesty, insincerity, laziness, lack of love for work, excessive love of gambling, indiscipline, and lack of respect for the law. If the role of the school was to “contribute to the individual and collective happiness,” it was the task of teachers to dedicate their lives to accomplish this goal.¹⁴³

The principal was a crucial figure that embodied the authority and oversaw student-teachers compliance with the norm.¹⁴⁴ If student-teachers failed to comply with the rules, principals could implement disciplinary measures including suspension or expulsion.¹⁴⁵ Once a year, the principal wrote a report sent to the National Council of Education that included the number of students and of fellowships distributed, the students’ grades, the funds available in the school, the programs of study, and the state of discipline within the school. Discipline was a recurring theme in the reports since principals equated an orderly and disciplined body of students with progress in the institution. At ENP, Principal Ferrary wrote in 1887:

The severity with which the student is required to fulfill his duties, the zeal with which his conduct is monitored inside and outside the School, the frequent advice of the Director, Vice-Director and Teachers, authorized by the zeal and rectitude with which he tries to fulfill his duties, the example of correction that is offered to the student in all the functions of the School, gives the desired result: intelligent submission to rules, strengthened by the desire to get used to it.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Pablo Pizzurno, “Consejos a los maestros,” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 404, Aug. 31, 1906, 108.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ The *Reglamento General de Escuelas Normales de la Nación* established the director’s duties in the first chapter. The eight articles included duties such as approving the reading materials and supervising that professors did not teach in other schools. Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción, *Reglamento general de Escuelas Normales de la Nación*.

¹⁴⁵ As we will see in chapter three, the threat of being expelled from the school remained a constant even after student-teachers graduated. The CNE designed a mechanism carried out by national inspectors to surveil, investigate, and eventually punish teachers.

¹⁴⁶ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1882-1898, Memoria 1887.

Ferrary's report highlights the duties of the student-teachers—to be submissive to the rules—as well as the disciplinary habits that the normal school imposed on students. The role of professor and principals, as understood by Ferrary, was to monitor and advise students to fulfill their duties. Professors and principals closely observed students and reprimanded them when their behavior was not appropriate.

The principals of the ENP exhibited pride in the discipline acquired by the student-teachers. In 1890, Principal Carbó stated “the number of well-disciplined classrooms is greater than previous years.”¹⁴⁷ In 1902, Herrera recognized that “without believing that discipline is perfect, we are accompanied by the conviction that student-teachers will emerge with the skills to establish good school governance in the exercise of their ministry.”¹⁴⁸ In 1908, Principal Victoria proudly announced:

Regarding discipline, the practice school continues to govern healthy discipline that has prevailed for some time, based on the principle of maximum freedom compatible with order. We try to ensure that our students reach their own government and it is gratifying to achieve that, to keep them within the duty, we had to resort to few measures of a coercive nature.¹⁴⁹

As stated in Victoria's report the ideal discipline would be achieved by student self-government and not through coercive measures, a discipline that was imposed from the inside not from the outside.

Normalistas learned to embrace the disciplinary discourse that positioned them in a moral hierarchical position vis-a-vis “abnormal” people. While giving a speech at the Normal School of La Plata in 1913, Raquel Camaña asserted with pride that in the normal

¹⁴⁷ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1882-1898, Memoria 1890.

¹⁴⁸ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1901-1925, Memoria 1902.

¹⁴⁹ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1901-1925, Memoria 1908.

school they learned to “obey and give orders, but above all, we learned to govern ourselves.”¹⁵⁰ She recalled a conversation with her “severe” U.S. mentor and school principal, Mary O. Graham, who explained the lack of a school doorman, by saying that only “the amoral, the immoral, the apathetic, the insane, the imbecile, the degenerate need vigilance.”¹⁵¹ As Graham suggested, the school doorman was needed in other disciplinary institutions such as prisons or hospitals, but in normal schools student-teachers could “govern themselves.” Through these quotidian messages, student-teachers came to internalize that there were two types of disciplines, the one exercised in prisons coming from outside and the one that student-teachers embraced coming from self-control.

The discourse of self-control lived together with a series of regulations that threatened students’ permanence in the school in case of indiscipline. Student-teachers had to comply with the school regulations if they wanted to keep their fellowship. The system of fellowships contributed to disciplining student-teachers since their misconduct could result in the discontinuity of their fellowship.¹⁵² Student-teachers were aware that in order to keep their fellowships they had to demonstrate good behavior, pass final exams, and commit to serve for the state once they graduated.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Raquel Camaña, “XXV Aniversario de la Escuela Normal de La Plata,” *Revista de derecho, historia y letras*, vol. 46, Sept. 1913, 27.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Libro copiadador “correspondencia común” 1881-1894.

¹⁵³ If the student left the school or was expelled due to a lack of discipline, he or she had the responsibility to return the money to the national treasury. Figueroa, *Escuela Normal de Paraná. Datos históricos*, 84. Alejandro Carbó, *En Defensa de las escuelas normales* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta y Encuadernación de Castex y Halliburton, 1899).

Fear of the principal was an important factor to make students behave according to the rules. An anecdote from a first year student-teacher contrasts with the positive view of Raquel Camaña. Marta Samatán recalled her first experience in the principal's office:

Nervous and intimidated, I presented myself to her because her figure filled me with fright. I saw her outside the circle of humanity. She looked at me with that impassive look that I have only seen among teaching people, which is like an iron mask that reflects nothing, neither in the eyes nor on the lips. Then, with a slow voice, without emotional inflections, she strictly told me the inescapable need to modify my behavior from now on because it was inappropriate for a student teacher. I laughed too much.¹⁵⁴

Samatán's memory opens the door of the principal's office, a disciplinary space where students were called there to be reprimanded. The principal's advice to a first year student went beyond the written regulations of punctuality, hygiene, and good academic performance. Student bodies needed to be reeducated in order to perform as authoritative teachers. Through the relationship with professors, student-teachers learned that respect and admiration for their superiors co-existed with some level of fear and intimidation. As a student of U.S. teacher Mary Conway recalled: "Our love for her was full of respect and even of a huge fear."¹⁵⁵

Samatán and Camaña had almost opposite visions of their paths through the normal school.¹⁵⁶ From the very title of her book, *Campana y horario* (Bell and

¹⁵⁴ Marta Samatán, *Campana y horario* (Rosario: Editorial Ruiz, 1939), 17.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Ramos, *Las señoritas* 109.

¹⁵⁶ I understand the divergence between the two narratives as a result of the different moments in which their work was published. By the 1930s, when Samatán wrote her book, many teachers were criticizing normal training, including the most popular publication by teachers, *La Obra*. The contrast I am suggesting in both narratives does not suggest that Camaña did not offer a criticism of the school system and state-sponsored education. In fact, as we will see in chapter 5, Camaña was an avid advocate of a structural school reform that aimed to incorporate sex education in the schools. It is also important to recognize the discursive genres in which these memories are inserted. In the case of Samatán, she wrote the book once she was retired from the school. Camaña's anecdote comes from a speech she gave in the context of the anniversary of the school and as the president of the Mary O. Graham organization. In this sense, it is understandable that she portrays her teacher and her education as exemplary.

Schedule), Samatán critiques the rituals and strictness of the administration of time, space, and bodies under the rule of *normalismo*.¹⁵⁷ She portrays the normal school as a factory dedicated to “manufacturing standard teachers.”¹⁵⁸ In fact, Samatán’s critique compares the experience of the normal school with that of confinement when she says the normal school “imprisons the spirit in a pedagogical tangled mess.”¹⁵⁹ In Samatán’s view, the norms that normalist teachers were told to follow and respect “governs as supreme goddess their normalist conception of the world and of life.”¹⁶⁰ Camaña embraces her education to position herself almost as Sarmiento's granddaughter. Repeatedly she recalls that she learned the profession “from the best,” a U.S. educator that Sarmiento chose to direct the normal school in his own province.¹⁶¹ While the experience at the normal school differed from student to student, both narratives demonstrate that learning the rules and behaving according to the norm was an important aspect of what school authorities expected student-teachers to incorporate.

¹⁵⁷ Marta Elena Samatán was born in Chile in 1901. When she was four years old, she moved to Santa Fe, Argentina. In 1918 she graduated from the Normal School and soon she became involved in the protests of the teachers’ union in Santa Fe becoming the President of the *Asociación del Magisterio* (Teacher’s Association) in her province. Samatán also reflects the paths that some school teachers took in their academic formation, graduating from the Universidad del Litoral with a degree in law. Samatán’s political activity continued in the 1930s when she participated in the *Frente Comité Popular Antifascista Santafesino* and directed the *Unión Argentina de Mujeres* in Santa Fe. Samatán published novels, poetry, and articles for the feminist magazine *Vida Femenina*. Silvia Zenarruza Clément, “De género y traducciones. Tres personalidades en la cultura de Santa Fe: Marta Samatán, Lina Beck Bernard, Philippe Greffet,” *Transfer* XV: 1-2 (2020), pp. 451-473; Mariela Alejandra Coudannes Aguirre, “Tradición y cambio social en dos regiones de América del Sur. Mujeres elquinas y santafesinas en la narrativa de Marta Samatán,” *Sudhistoria* (2011): 1-22.

¹⁵⁸ Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 44.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

¹⁶¹ Camaña, “El prejuicio sexual y el profesorado en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras.” Camaña, “XXV Aniversario de la Escuela Normal de La Plata,” and Raquel Camaña, “Verdades,” *Revista de derecho, historia y letras*, vol. 48, August 1914.

At the normal school, student-teachers were disciplined at the same time they learned how to discipline children. A series of pedagogical devices were put into practice to teach student-teachers on the importance of discipline. One of these tools was the pedagogical conferences.¹⁶² In 1890, the principal of the practice school at ENP delivered a talk for the student-teachers. She provided a questionnaire with twenty-five questions presented using the first person, that encouraged student-teachers to reflect about their own practice. The first question was: “Are my disciples disciplined?”¹⁶³ The rest of the questions suggested the expectations around children *and* teachers. According to the questionnaire, teachers should pay special attention to how things were organized in the class, whether children’s language was “suitable” and whether their “manners were cultured.”¹⁶⁴ The questionnaire asked teachers to observe if children were “attentive and respectful to each other and to their superiors.”¹⁶⁵ A last set of questions suggested the expectation posed on teachers inside and beyond the classroom. One question reads: “Am I sure that at all times and in all possible circumstances, my way of being and being in front of the class is the one that corresponds to a perfect model?”¹⁶⁶ There is no historical record of how student-teachers replied to these questions but the questionnaire evidences the type of discourses that defined the role of teachers in the classroom.

¹⁶² Pedagogical conferences consisted of talks in which experienced educators, principals, or national inspectors dissertated around a theme that would contribute to teachers’ training. According to article 10 of the 1903 regulation, one of the principal’s tasks was the delivery or organization of conferences mandatory for students in the final years. The principal had to meet once a week with third and fourth year student-teachers in order to give advice to the students or celebrate a conference. These meetings counted for credits towards the pedagogy class. *Reglamento general de Escuelas Normales de la Nación*.

¹⁶³ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1882-1898, Memoria 1890.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Another device to teach student-teachers how to discipline children were manuals of pedagogy that dedicated entire sections to the topic. A common concept in this section was school tactics, a term that came from *Dirección de las escuelas*, written by U.S. educator Joseph Baldwin, published in 1885.¹⁶⁷ According to Baldwin, the school tactics provided a system in “harmony with modern education,” in which the point of departure was children’s nature and condition.¹⁶⁸ His principles show that children’s nature was conceived as one that teachers needed to educate to create habits of obedience and rapid response to the adult’s commands. Baldwin’s principles were based on a series of movements and signals that emulated military discipline. Baldwin wrote that “every movement should be executed quickly, silently, and with military precision.”¹⁶⁹ Teachers used signs to indicate when students should talk, do homework, and use the board. Children were not allowed to speak without the teachers’ permission. If children wished to speak, a specific signal should be performed: “The hand should be raised to the height of the head and held still. Snapping your fingers will never be tolerated.” For teachers, there were specific directions on how to direct the signals: “the signal must be given by lowering the voice, in a deep and firm tone. The elocution of the teacher is an important thing in the direction of the school. Raising the voice, when it is high-pitched and

¹⁶⁷ James Baldwin, *Dirección de las escuelas* (Buenos Aires: Angel Estrada, 1885). Baldwin was principal of the normal school in Kirksville, Missouri. The text was originally published in 1881 and titled *The Art of School Management* was meant for reading material in normal schools and reference work for state officials.

¹⁶⁸ While the author did not expand on the meaning of children’s nature, it is clear that his system assumed that children were undisciplined, did not know how to behave in the school, and required specific commands to move within the school and the classroom. His proposal, a school tactic proven successful in hundreds of schools in the U.S., defined “the system of signals and movements appropriate to the school work. The good tactic saves time, communicates strength, improves the aspect and spirit of the class, and gets them used to obeying strictly and promptly.” Order was the natural result of this system, in which teachers were conceived as military leaders. Baldwin, *Dirección de las escuelas*, 100.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

insecure, makes even children smile; but good elocution inspires respect and obedience.” The reference of a high-pitched voice targeted female teachers who were taught to project a deep tone in order to be respected in the classroom.¹⁷⁰

Another aspect of Baldwin’s school tactic system was the way in which children’s bodies entered, behaved, and left the classroom. For example, according to Baldwin’s tactics, children entered the classroom by marching in lines when the school bell rang. The march was a moment for what Foucault has called hierarchical observation. Like asylums and prisons, schools had the military camp as an ideal model, an “artificial city, built and reshaped almost at will; the seat of a power that must be all the stronger, but also all the more discreet, all the more effective and on the alert in that it is exercised over armed men.”¹⁷¹ Baldwin suggested teachers observe children’s bodies and walking: children were supposed to “stand straight, with the shoulders back, the hands at the sides and the sight straight ahead.”¹⁷²

Baldwin’s school tactics were applied in the Normal School of Paraná. In 1890, Principal Carbó requested the regent of the practice school to write down the main principles and distribute them so it can be applied in a “uniform way in every classroom” by teachers of the practice school and student-teachers alike.¹⁷³ According to Carbó, the “principles and general rules established by Baldwin in regard to the ‘school tactic’ had served as *the norm* to establish the Practice School.”¹⁷⁴ Carbó evaluated that “the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 103.

¹⁷¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 171.

¹⁷² Baldwin, *Dirección de las escuelas*, 103.

¹⁷³ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1882-1898, Memoria 1890.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

application of this ‘Tactic’ has produced very good results, notably facilitating all the orderly movements of the classes; uniforming movements and signals in all grades and banishing some already unnecessary.”¹⁷⁵ The influence of U.S teachers at Paraná and other normal schools suggests that the pedagogical practices developed in Argentina was the result of a confluence of discourses that were appropriated by principals as they looked for practical solutions to the daily problems. At Paraná and other normal schools, U.S. teachers played a leading role in the practice school teaching children and guiding student-teachers in their first steps acquiring teaching skills.¹⁷⁶

Although respect towards authority was a major principle that the normal school aimed to instill in their students, student-teachers did not passively accept the regulations imposed on them. The normal school gave them a certain level of autonomy to criticize the professors, complain about grades, and push back disciplinary measures. For instance, in 1903 the Principal of ENP Leopoldo Herrera called five students to his office to interrogate them regarding the misbehavior of Pedro Cáceres during Professor Alumni’s class.¹⁷⁷ Cáceres spoke in class and continued laughing after the professor’s warning. The professor forced the student to leave the classroom and reported the incident to the principal, arguing that the student left the classroom making bodily gestures and dragging the chairs. In his office, the principal asked multiple students to confirm the accusation but Cáceres’s classmates did not recall any movement that incriminated him, although

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes*.

¹⁷⁷ Leopoldo Herrera directed the school between 1894-1906 after Principal Torres’s second term (1892-1894). Herrera was born in Villaguay, Entre Ríos. After graduating from the Normal School of Paraná with a diploma of professor in 1884, he participated in the foundation of the Instituto del Profesorado Secundario de Buenos Aires and worked at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata. Rocha, *Simiente y mies*; Pérez Campos, *Escuela Normal de Paraná: construcciones discursivas de la nacionalidad argentina*.

they witnessed Cáceres' response to the professor —“then, ok Sir.”— which constituted a lack of respect to his superior. The principal asked Cáceres if he “made a gesture or manifestation as if he did not care” and the student assured him that such a thing never happened. He declared that he “only followed an order” from the professor to remove the chairs that were obstructing his steps.¹⁷⁸

Another conflict between Professor Alumni and a student occurred the same day. Eduardo Vásquez was asked to leave the classroom because he said “very good!” after a classmate finished her lesson. Not only did Vásquez speak out of turn without the professor’s permission, he ventured to make a judgment about the lesson, undermining the professor’s authority to evaluate the students. During the break, when the professor was inside the classroom talking with another student, Vásquez grabbed the books he had left in the classroom, despite the professor’s warning to not enter the classroom. Once in the principal’s office, Vásquez affirmed that the professor “had no right to order him to leave the classroom when the class was finished” and had no right to remove students “in the way and tone that Mr. Alumni employed.”¹⁷⁹ The principal repeatedly asked Vásquez if he did not “recognize the authority of the professors to make indications and give orders” to which Vásquez replied that he only recognizes the professor's moral influence.¹⁸⁰ Eventually —he said— he would follow the indications that he would receive from the professor outside the classroom; but he did not believe that the professor

¹⁷⁸ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1901-1925, Memoria 1903.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

“has the same authority over the student as when they are in the classroom exercising their functions.”¹⁸¹

Male students seemed to participate in open conflicts with the professors while female students developed distinctive strategies to challenge the authority of *normalismo*. Principal Herrera characterized girls as more obedient and responsible and therefore were called to testify as reliable witnesses of the conflict that occurred in class. In his report he explained that student-teachers Laferriere and Delzar had excellent behavior and were never admonished in the school. These two “model students” did not challenge professor Alumni in front of their peers. Yet, in front of the principal, they undermined Alumni’s performance. Doubting the professor’s ability to manage the class, Laferriere declared that she could not understand why the professor got upset since students behaved better than in the other classes.¹⁸² Delzar agreed with Laferriere that there was nothing extraordinary in the student's behavior that justified the disciplinary measures. Moreover, Delzar used the conversation with the principal to affirm that “Professor Mr. Alumni is currently in a nervous state that prevents him from quietly giving his lessons.” While Cáceres and Vásquez challenged Alumni’s role in and outside the classroom, by laughing, potentially dragging chairs and ignoring him in front of their classmates, Delzar’s comment was potentially more damaging for the professor’s reputation. Delzar doubted that the professor had the mental stability that teaching required. The interrogation conducted confirms a characteristic of the disciplinary power described by Foucault where power is “everywhere and always alert, since by its very principle it

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

leaves no zone of shade and constantly supervises the very individuals who are entrusted with the task of supervising.”¹⁸³ Student-teachers could at any moment testify against their peers and their professors who performed under the students’ observation.

These conflicts between students and professors illuminate both the expectation of student discipline and the imperfect nature of the hierarchical system imposed by *normalismo*. In the classroom, students were not allowed to talk without permission and students’ deference to their superiors had to be proven with silence and appropriate bodily movements. Yet, the conflicts show that students challenged the professor’s authority and pushed against the passive and silent attitude of a model student. Although student-teachers used different strategies to challenge authority, normal schools gave both girls and boys the tools to observe and criticize the professor’s authority. Cáceres laughed during the lesson and even replied to the professor’s warning. He had a clear idea that his role as a student was to obey his superior, as his declarations in the principal’s office suggest. Utilizing that knowledge, Cáceres performed as a good student who, despite his initial act of defiance, followed the school’s norms by accepting the punishment and leaving the room. Vásquez ignored the professor’s commands and later judged the correct tone that a professor should use with the students. While defying the teacher’s authority, Vásquez showed Herrera that he knew as a future teacher that in a modern educational setting, the professor was supposed to treat students with respect and restraint. Regardless of the sanctions implemented after the investigation, the exchanges with the principal had a pedagogical function. Even if the students were not punished with suspensions, the practices of investigation that included the interrogation of

¹⁸³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 177.

witnesses in the principal's office and the writing of a report sent to the national inspector, reminded students of the hierarchical relationships in the school, and encouraged them to behave following the school's regulations. Students learned that discipline was not only about language, what they said in class, but about the minimal gestures in a student's body and attitudes towards the norms. They learned that acts of indiscipline were not to be ignored and further investigation might follow after a conflict with a professor.

A discourse at a graduation ceremony at a normal school for women in 1913 encapsulates the obedience and the empowerment that normal training represented for many student-teachers. Principal Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano asserted: "Be someone, take possession of yourself, within the most perfect obedience and discipline; have a heart of your own, a brain without guardianship; be someone, obey your directors, abide by regulations, orders and decrees; but do it with your soul."¹⁸⁴ The moral discourses that students encountered in the classroom, in the principal's office, and in the pedagogical conferences lived together with a learning experience that put student-teachers in contact with scientific practices of observation and experimentation. The next section will delve into another manifestation of positivist influence in teacher's training –paying attention to the learning experience at the practice school.

¹⁸⁴ Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano, *Consejos a las futuras maestras* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta y Casa Editora Coni, 1923), 32.

“The Alert Eye and the Sharp Pencil:” A Scientific Pedagogy in the Practice School

While the normal school introduced students with rigid norms and hierarchical relationships, it also opened the opportunity for acquiring new knowledge and for socialization. Student-teachers spent numerous hours of their daily lives studying and learning amongst peers. Between the normal course and the practice school, student-teachers spent almost 40 hours a week learning and practicing teaching skills. During the morning, student-teachers took classes while in the afternoon they exercised their pedagogical skills in the practice school, teaching children and discussing teaching methods with their peers.¹⁸⁵ This section investigates normal training, paying attention to the tools student-teachers learned through pedagogical theory and practice. It shows that influenced by positivist thought, student-teachers acquired tools to experiment with teaching methods and to observe children’s bodies.

Unlike the Colegios Nacionales, normal schools aimed to provide a practical education that prepared student-teachers for a job. The programs of study reflected this emphasis on a practical education.¹⁸⁶ In 1887, the Ministry of Justice and Instruction,

¹⁸⁵ Normal teachers’ narratives point to the difficulty of the content they learned in school. In reference to the classes of Pedagogy in the normal school, Samatán wrote: “My first contact with this matter was one of deep surprise: I did not understand anything, but I liked to repeat that exotic terminology. It had the effect of funny tongue-twisters on me. Then the study bored me a lot. I still didn’t understand anything. I repeated the cumbersome concepts from memory without being able to reach the object of all those strange names.” Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 18. Camaña listed the scientific theories learned by first year students in the school including evolutionary theories. She asserted that after finishing 6th grade, first year normal students could recite from memory concepts but were not able to “interpret, compare, criticize philosophical theories.” Camaña, “Verdades.”

¹⁸⁶ The programs were regulated by national authorities. The Ministry of Justice and Instruction regulated the curricula of the normal schools through the National Council of Education. While the publication of national programs sought to homogenize teachers’ training, the programs were not crystal clear reflections of what happened in the classroom nor did they make specific references to the textbooks used by the professors. Still, the programs defined the general structure of teacher training. For example, they listed the subjects to be taught per year, the amount of hours of instruction, and the main topics to be taught. As historians have shown, the unified curriculum was a crucial component for the establishment of common education. Inés Dussel and Marcelo Caruso, *La invención del aula* (Buenos Aires: Santillana, 1999).

under the leadership of Filemón Pose, published the first programs addressing that “it was the duty of the government to imprint a national character upon instruction in public institutions, especially as it concerned national language, history, and geography, as well as the rights and duties that the nation recognized.”¹⁸⁷ The Ministry made clear that because normal education was subsidized by the national government, it was their duty to shape the curriculum. As the 1887 program shows, student-teachers received theoretical and practical training in language, history, geography, mathematics, natural sciences, and foreign language. Practical education included calligraph, drawing, music, gymnastics and handcrafts.

In 1903, a transformation in the program expanded the practical character of teacher’s training.¹⁸⁸ The 1903 program increased the amount of hours dedicated to science classes.¹⁸⁹ In 1907, the principal of the ENP, Victoria, proposed a new curriculum design. Defining practical education as one where students learned from experience, Victoria asserted that practical education should be prioritized, and that the character of education should be spontaneous and intuitive, based on the daily experiences in the practice school. From kindergarten to the sixth grade teaching was “susceptible to objectification of coordination and application rather than bookish ideation and subjectivation.”¹⁹⁰ Finally, Victoria believed it was necessary to establish a balance

¹⁸⁷ Departamento de Instrucción Pública, *Escuelas normales. Plan de estudios y programas* (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1888), 5.

¹⁸⁸ The 1903 program expanded the teaching training to four years but it reduced the weekly hours in the first year. Students in the first year attended twenty-eight per week; while in the fourth year, they attended thirty-two hours. Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, *Plan de estudios y programas para las escuelas normales de la República Argentina*.

¹⁸⁹ Students dedicated nine hours a week learning natural sciences, physics, and chemistry.

¹⁹⁰ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1901-1925, Memoria 1907.

between mental and physical discipline.¹⁹¹ As a result, student-teachers learned about histology, physics, and chemistry in the laboratories from the experiences of observing and experimenting.

A scientific education encouraged students to observe nature. In his classes of natural history, Pedro Scalabrini led outdoor activities where student-teachers collected objects that would later form the school museum. Doing so, Scalabrini innovated in the teaching methods by promoting student activity.¹⁹² In March 1892, Principal Torres supported Scalabrini's innovation and requested the National Inspector to allow excursions around the city in order to gather objects for the School Museum. Torres wrote: "I attach great importance to this initiative because I have faith that the hard work of the aforementioned Professor will have a healthy influence on the student-teachers, fostering observation and research habits in them, stimulating them in the study of Nature and providing them activities on the days they do not attend School, a useful and moralizing occupation."¹⁹³ From Torres's perspective, outdoor exploration was not only useful for instructing student-teachers into scientific knowledge but it also occupied them during the weekends thereby preventing indolence and amoral activities.

Normal training emphasized scientific education beyond the classes of natural sciences. Outdoor activities, for instance, were part of student-teacher's training in

¹⁹¹ Twelve out of the thirty six hours of instruction were allocated to physical and practical education composed of gymnastics, drawing, and agriculture or home economics.

¹⁹² Hentscke argues that Pedro Scalabrini converted to positivism around 1888 when he published *Materialismo, darwinismo, positivismo: diferencias y semejanzas*. Previously, Scalabrini was influenced by Krausism, a movement that developed from the writings of Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832). Hentscke, "Argentina's Escuela Normal de Paraná and Its Disciplines: Mergers of Liberalism, Jarusims, and Comtean Positivists in Sarmiento's Temple for Civilizing the Nation, 1870 to 1916."

¹⁹³ Escuela Normal "José María Torres," Sala Museográfica Archivística, Libro Copiador. Correspondencia común (1890-1892), fol. 304.

multiple subjects. Camaña gleefully narrated that Graham promoted in her students a love for nature and encouraged them to observe the school garden.¹⁹⁴ Samatán remembered preparing for her classes at the practice school as a moment of activity and fun amongst peers. They walked around the city in search of objects that would illustrate their lessons. Samatán wrote: “We frequented vacant lots, workshops, orchards, libraries, whether in search of a cow's head or steel shavings, or a tobacco plant, or a strange paronym. Once all the staff had been mobilized, the mail was sent under the pretext of examining the telegraph devices and another time, we walked more than twenty blocks in the field to get a copy of the Leghorn hen.”¹⁹⁵

The normal training put students in contact with evolutionary theories that challenged religious beliefs. Recalling Scalabrini's lessons Mercante wrote: “He spoke to us about Ameghino, about transformism, about the descent of man, about evolution, and concluded by advising us to read *Force and Matter*.”¹⁹⁶ Coming from a religious home, Mercante described his encounter with scientific theories as follows: “I felt that the building of my beliefs fell and that on top of the rubble another one rose, solid and superb.”¹⁹⁷ For Mercante, Scalabrini “opened a wide horizon for my spirit.”¹⁹⁸ Other

¹⁹⁴ Camaña, “El prejuicio sexual y el profesorado en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras.”

¹⁹⁵ Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 24.

¹⁹⁶ Mercante, *Una vida realizada*, 84. Originally born in Italy, Florentino Ameghino (1853-1911) moved to Argentina when he was a child. He became a prominent figure in the Argentine scientific community due to his work studying fossil mammals in Patagonia. Ameghino developed a phylogenetic chart where he explained the evolutionary process from the perspective of the American man. Influential in the foundation of multiple scientific institutions, Ameghino worked at the Department of Zoology at Universidad Nacional de Córdoba and was the founder of the National Museum in La Plata. Alfredo Castellanos, “Trascendencia de la obra de Florentino Ameghino,” *Revista de la Facultad de Ciencias Naturales de Salta*, no. 1, 1959. Florentino Ameghino, *La antigüedad en el hombre del Plata* (Buenos Aires: La cultura argentina, 1918).

¹⁹⁷ Mercante, *Una vida realizada*, 84.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

students recognized in Scalabrini a turning point in their intellectual development. In an homage, his students described him as an “exponent of a wise awakener of consciences” from whom they learned “a method, an orientation, an open route to the spirit for subsequent intellectual and moral speculations.”¹⁹⁹

Pedagogy was another subject where student-teachers encountered scientific theories. Even during the first year, student-teachers read authors such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Charles Darwin, Florentino Ameghino, Giuseppe Sergi, and Enrico Ferri.²⁰⁰ In 1910, Camaña listed some of the topics covered in the class of pedagogy:

spontaneous generation, the physical foundation of matter and life, the evolution or transformism, the origin of the men, his placement in the zoological scale, Darwinism, the theory of Ameghino, monism, the soul as the result of the functioning of the brain, adaptation laws, selection and inheritance of acquired characters, the hereditary influence of moral instincts, the hereditary force of education, atavism, theories about the formation of character.²⁰¹

These topics reflect that student-teachers were aware of the scientific debates around the origins of life and the evolution of species and studied concepts such as inheritance, adaptation, and selection.

Pedagogy was the subject where student-teachers learned the science of teaching. According to the 1887 program, pedagogy taught students about physical, intellectual, and moral education, methodology of teaching, and school organization. The 1903 program gave more detail on the subjects covered including general concepts on education, teaching methods, school organization and legislation, and history and

¹⁹⁹ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, “Homenaje póstumo a los profesores Pedro Scalabrini y Ernesto A. Bavio,” September 20, 1931.

²⁰⁰ Camaña, “Verdades”, 455.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

philosophy of education.²⁰² The 1907 program designed by Principal Victoria followed the same structure. First year students learned about the theory of physical, moral, and intellectual education, second year students, methodology; and third year students delved into school organization, administration, and inspection.²⁰³ In this subject, teaching was portrayed as a set of knowledge that could be systematically organized, learned, and implemented. The science of teaching could be mastered by learning a series of laws. Scientific theories and the new categories that entered the classroom provided tools to understanding what factors intervened in children's education, to what extent were bodies malleable to the environment, and how inheritance affected children's learning abilities. In Torres's words pedagogy taught student-children "the subjects they need to teach, the nature of who is going to be educated, and the best methods of teaching. This knowledge, acquired through effort and painstaking study, along with the best methods of teaching, constitutes teachers' education"²⁰⁴

Education was, as student-teachers learned in manuals of pedagogy, the means to improve children. This idea gave teachers a crucial role in the future of the country. Manuals of pedagogy explained how the different types of education contributed to child development. According to the *Curso completo de pedagogia* by José María Santos, intellectual education had the goal of "perfecting mental faculties;" physical education's goal was to "preserve health and the development of the organs," and moral education aimed to "conveniently direct the will for the perfect exercise of the duties and rights" of

²⁰² Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, *Plan de estudios y programas*.

²⁰³ Escuela Normal "José María Torres," Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1901-1925, Memoria 1907.

²⁰⁴ Escuela Normal "José María Torres," Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1882-1898, Memoria 1887.

students.²⁰⁵ Education, as manuals suggested, made children “agile and robust” and “moderated the effervescence of certain passions and the precocious and violent desires of the young man.”²⁰⁶ Along with physical, moral, and intellectual education, manuals of pedagogy taught student-teachers about religion. The references to religious education suggests that scientific theories that challenged religious ideas lived together with discourses that emphasized the importance of teaching children a love for God. A religious sentiment was, according to the *Curso completo de pedagogía*, the “main foundation for education.”²⁰⁷ A manual used at the ENP written by José Bernardo Suárez asserted that only with religious education could a teacher’s role be complete “because only through religion can man reach plenitude and human dignity.”²⁰⁸ Santos asserted that the school would make children merciful and would teach them to “love and fear God”²⁰⁹ José María Torres, who introduced the teaching of religious education in Paraná, explained that religious education would be imparted by a priest in the school only to those students authorized by their parents.²¹⁰ Yet, religious sentiments such as abnegation and sacrifice provided an important foundation of the moral education imparted by teachers.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ José María Santos, *Curso completo de pedagogía* (Madrid : Librería de la Viuda de Hernando, 1893), 14-15. Another type of education that appeared in the text denotes the religious orientation of his manual, called aesthetic education or education of the feelings that aimed to develop in students the idea of God.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ José Bernardo Suárez, *Guía del preceptor primario y visitador de las escuelas* (Santiago: Imprenta de la unión americana, 1868), 39.

²⁰⁹ Santos, *Curso completo de pedagogía*, 15.

²¹⁰ Adriana Puiggrós argues that religion was present in the school through textbooks, pedagogical lectures, and the quotidian discourse of schoolteachers. Adriana Puiggrós, *Sujetos, disciplina y curriculum: en los orígenes del sistema educativo argentino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1990).

²¹¹ José María Torres, *Curso de pedagogía. Primeros elementos de educación* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de M. Biedma, 1888).

The education imparted in the practice school constituted one of the most clear manifestations of a scientific education. While manuals provided theoretical pedagogical knowledge, professors and principals believed that it was through actual experience that student-teachers learned. In 1902, a professor of pedagogy at ENP asserted that “just as the doctor, for the acquisition of professional skills, needs the greatest possible amount of time to go to the hospital and the amphitheater, to apply his technical knowledge, the teacher needs an analogous time to dedicate to the observation and practice of teaching.”²¹² At the practice school, student-teachers learned by “experimenting” with the methods they learned in pedagogy classes. In 1887, Torres defined experimenting as putting into practice “the various methods and ways of teaching and directing children.”²¹³

Following a systematic and orderly approach, principals put substantial effort into developing the logistics.²¹⁴ In order to allow student-teachers to practice teaching skills, professors divided the class into sections so each student-teacher could teach different subjects and children of different ages. The professor assigned a topic to each practitioner

²¹² Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1901-1925, Memoria 1902.

²¹³ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1882-1898, Memoria 1887.

²¹⁴ At times, principals found material limitations to scientific training. In his role as national inspector, Torres explained that experiential learning by students was far from being easy to achieve in practice. He complained that the practice school had more classrooms than professors in charge; three professors for four classrooms, which meant that one professor was responsible for two classrooms simultaneously. Torres’s main concern was that the irregularity weakened the discipline of the practice school, and frequently tested the “zeal, intelligence, and skill with which Ms. Francisca E. Allyn, and Mr. Francisco Romay, and Mr. Tomás Milicua carry out their duties.” Finally, since the professors were not present in the classroom to cultivate relationships with the student-teachers and therefore “they don’t feel the entire freedom to criticize their lessons.” Torres unfolded the core issues faced in the practice school, and the educational system at large. The pedagogical modern ideas that encouraged experiential learning required an appropriate budget that accompanied the many material and human resources required for this endeavor. José María Torres, “Memoria del Ministerio de Justicia, Culto e instrucción,” 1878.

two days in advance. The student-teachers had twenty-four hours to submit the class plan, a roadmap that included the questions to be asked in the classroom. Only after the plan was approved, the practitioner taught the class. Torres welcomed that in normal schools student-teachers practiced “the art of teaching under the immediate and constant critique of experienced professors.”²¹⁵ Vice-Regent of the practice school at Paraná, Amy Wales, explained that “preparing a detailed plan with a complete questionnaire, previously criticized and many times written before presenting the lesson “would improve student discipline.”²¹⁶

From the perspective of the school authorities, a fruitful experiential learning for student-teachers endangered the discipline and the quality of education received by children. Principal Ferrary considered that “teaching imparted by young people who are not yet teachers would be very harmful to children and of little benefit to their preparation, without the severity with which it is required to the practitioner to prepare for the act of teaching.”²¹⁷ To overcome the tension between student-teachers’s experiential learning and the orderly classroom expected in the school, school principals tried to control the variables. Wales explained that “the number of children per class has been limited to ten, and generally choosing the most capable students, in this way the young practitioner had to overcome fewer difficulties at the same time, thus being free to direct all his attention to carry out the plan.”²¹⁸ Torn between providing teaching

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1882-1898, Memoria 1889.

²¹⁷ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1882-1898, Memoria 1887.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

experience to students at the normal school while not damaging children's education, Principal Victoria considered: "The remedy would easily be found by changing the practitioner, or handing over the delayed class to the main teacher; but this way we would not give students the time and opportunity to acquire the skills that they lack and that are not achieved in a day, and the Practice School would stop responding to one of the highest purposes for which it was created."²¹⁹ Therefore, student-teachers experimented with teaching within a structured system that organized their practice and the close examination of the professor. The professor of Practice remained in the classroom in case the practitioner needed help to "establish their authority, sustain the order and gain the respect and the affection of children."²²⁰ This assistance, according to Ferrary, happened sporadically, since professors only intervened to prevent a serious mistake. Professors gradually stopped assisting students, giving them the entire responsibility of classroom instruction.²²¹ The organization of the practice school reveals a tension in the normalist discourse regarding the level of autonomy that teachers had to exercise their profession and the lack of flexibility that a disciplinary system imposed on children and student-teachers alike.

Observation played an important role in teachers' scientific training as a disciplinary technology. As they performed in the classroom, student-teachers were under the scrutiny of the professor of Practice. This practice reinforced hierarchical positions between the professor and the student-teacher. Samatán affirms "I did not find it so

²¹⁹ Escuela Normal "José María Torres," Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1901-1925, Memoria 1908.

²²⁰ Escuela Normal "José María Torres," Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1882-1898, Memoria 1887.

²²¹ Ibid.

difficult to teach. The terrible thing was to teach before that large public that gathered, with a watchful eye, to point out methodological flaws.”²²² Samatán remembers:

I suffered deeply every time I had to act in front of all those people who watched me in silence, with the alert eye and the sharp pencil. At first, the impression was so huge that I only saw half of the class; the other half was lost in a kind of nebula. With my voice muffled and broken by the emotion, I managed to make the methodological steps in front of the students who, crushed on their benches, let their distracted glances wander from the blackboard to me.²²³

Samatán’s narrative points to the fear she experienced in front of her professor who was “installed arrogantly behind her desk. She witnessed as a cold spectator our pitiful efforts. Her cold gaze didn’t miss a single one of our movements.”²²⁴ Student-teachers learned that observation required a distant positionality of the viewer. Samatán’s emotions in the class, her insecurity, and her “broken” voice contrasted with the “cold” and distant position adopted by the professor behind her desk.

Through scientific training, student-teachers were trained to observe the classroom through an impartial view that created a distance between teachers and children.²²⁵ The separation translated into material realities in the classroom: a platform from where the teacher delivered the lesson, or the desk that clearly differentiated those who have knowledge and those who needed to be civilized.²²⁶ Under this scientific paradigm student-teachers incorporated a method that separated them from children, in

²²² Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 19.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 22

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

²²⁵ Feminist historian of science Sandra Harding has pointed out that “conventionally what it means to be scientific is to be dispassionate, disinterested, impartial, concerned with abstract principles and rules.” Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 47.

²²⁶ Within the required materials in the classroom, manuals listed a platform from twenty to thirty centimeters where the teacher’s desk was located. Santos, *Curso completo de pedagogía*, 290.

the same way science differentiates between the knower and what is known. Samatán narrates with dissolution, that after spending hours looking for objects to illustrate their lessons, practitioners “showed them from afar with infinite precautions.”²²⁷ The physical distance projected respect as much as the seriousness that Samatán was warned to maintain in front of the children. Criticizing this approach she asked: “Those teachers that we saw daily in front of us, who repeated our names day by day following their call order, did they know us? Did they know what was stirring inside of us? Were they interested in our lives as girls? Were they trying to understand us?”²²⁸

Observation had effects in student-teachers’ bodies. Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck assert that observation “educates the senses, calibrates judgment, speaks out objects of scientific inquiry, and forms thought collectives.”²²⁹ Observation molded the student-teachers’ body and guided the observer’s attention on a few chosen objects at the expense of all others.²³⁰ While leaving behind important pedagogical variables that affected the classroom such as children’s background and previous knowledge, the trained scientific vision of the normalist teacher observed the most apparent observable facts of the classroom such as children’s bodies and movements. As Samatán explained “children had to remain seated on their benches without moving. They had to raise their hands without making a sound, extending only three fingers. They had to come very clean and I was responsible for that cleaning.”²³¹ Samatán would

²²⁷ Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 25.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

²²⁹ Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck, *Histories of Scientific Observation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

²³⁰ Daston, Lorraine, and Peter Galison. *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 234.

²³¹ Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 46.

criticize the training of teachers by asserting its superficial character. Remembering her first principal she wrote: “that director of mine was the finished prototype of the *normalista*. She spent her time examining the outside of things: the sweeping of the floors, the cleaning of the windows, the varnish of the furniture, the lining of the notebooks, the children’s overalls, their position in class.”²³²

Normalist training shaped student-teachers’ observation. Children’s bodies and postures were one target of scrutiny. Drawing on medical discourse, Torres explained that teachers “can observe the postures that his disciples assume in the execution of the various exercises, and prohibit those that are detrimental to health or to the symmetrical regular development of the body.”²³³ Torres suggested that it was necessary “to prevent children from bending their bodies and resting their chests on the desk; for such a posture is the cause of many evils, if it becomes habitual.”²³⁴ According to Torres, it was the teacher’s duty to “know the original defects of the child’s faculties, and to seek to amend them by effective exercises.”²³⁵ Like a doctor, teachers could intervene in improving children’s health. Cleanliness was another important factor that student-teachers were encouraged to observe.²³⁶ Increasing rates of child mortality and the emergence and consolidation of a society characterized by the fear of transmittable diseases, the school became both a place of dissemination of hygienic principles and of potential contagion.²³⁷

²³² Ibid., 48.

²³³ Torres, *Curso de pedagogia*, 33.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ From the 1420 Law to the manuals that circulated in the classroom, hygiene appeared as the main principle that should rule time, space, and bodies in the school. In its second article, the law states that “primary instruction must be compulsory, free, gradual and given in accordance with the precepts of hygiene.

²³⁷ Diego Armus characterized Argentine society in this period as one “marked by fear of contagion, state intervention in private life, and by various attempts to reform, care for and control people’s

Thus, preventing the spread of diseases in the school was an important task of teachers.²³⁸

Student-teachers learned that they had to closely inspect children's personal hygiene including their clothes. The lack of cleanliness of the skin and clothes —manuals of pedagogy explained— harmed children's bodies because it prevented the pores from breathing.²³⁹

Observation at the normal school promoted pedagogical critique. Student-teachers observed their peers teaching at the practice school and took notes of the teaching methods. After the lesson, observers handed their notes to the professor of Practice and shared their evaluations in the Critique class. Torres asked student-teachers to observe on “a) the lessons given by the student, in accordance or not with the plan and with the principles and rules of the art of teaching; b) the criticisms according to the more or less exact observation of each one, and the general reasons for their criticism; and c) the common benefits and deficiencies of the criticisms.”²⁴⁰ In their critique, student-teachers considered the practitioner's “natural ability, sufficient erudition, special preparation, attention to class order, interest, civility, convenient animation, correct language, and

morality, sociability, sexuality, and daily habits.” Diego Armus, *The Ailing City: Health, Tuberculosis, and Culture in Buenos Aires, 1870-1950* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2. On child mortality see Marcela Nari, *Políticas de la maternidad y maternalismo político*.

²³⁸ Torres asserted that teachers “must be very vigilant in their inspection to prevent any disease from invading the school.” Torres, *Curso de pedagogía*, 44.

²³⁹ Torres asserted that it was: “essential that the teacher pay constant attention to the personal hygiene of each of his disciples (...) Cleanliness is necessary everywhere and especially at school, both because it tends to prevent illness and because it contributes to the purity of the school atmosphere; therefore, the teacher must also take care of the cleanliness, with particular reference to the skin, hair and clothing of the disciples.” Symptoms such as excessive heat of the skin, flushing of the face, propensity to sleep, extraordinary thirst, trembling, coughing, watery eyes, rash and pain in the limbs or in any other part of the body, were” reasons to suspect the presence of fever, measles, smallpox, whooping cough, herpes, scabies or inflammation.” Ibid., 44.

²⁴⁰ Escuela Normal “José María Torres,” Sala Museográfica Archivística, Serie Memorias de director 1882-1898, Memoria 1889.

teaching method.”²⁴¹ 1878 Torres wrote that critique should be: “1) Scrupulously observant of what each practitioner does in conformity or in disagreement with the principles and rules of the art of teaching, 2) reasoned and circumspect, 3) Impartial and personable, 4) Daily and constant and 5) Given with details and in general.”²⁴²

While school authorities like Torres aimed to fix teaching rules, the practice school opened a space for critique, debate among students, and sharpened students’ abilities of observation. The Critique class provided students with analytical tools to make arguments about proper teaching. A scene narrated by Samatán exemplifies the type of intellectual exercises that the practice school made possible. One day, Juanita Villegas raised her hand and “taking out a bundle of papers from among her utensils she began to read, with categorical tone, a long series of annotations.”²⁴³ Juanita criticized the practitioner for formulating tricky questions. She asserted that some children did not raise their hand correctly, and the teacher did not insist on the scientific purposes of the topic to be taught. In other words, the class lacked “vigor.”²⁴⁴ Juanita accompanied his observation with the evidence collected during the class through her observations and annotations. She impressed Samatán and her classmates with her eloquence, vocabulary, and gestures. Samatán describes Villegas as a student from the province who mastered the science of teaching embodying the authoritative voice.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² José María Torres, “Memoria del Departamento de Justicia, Culto, e Instrucción Pública.”

²⁴³ Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 29.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ There are similar accounts from U.S. normal schools. Students recalled the critique class: “Of critics there was no lack, for in each classroom was stationed an able body of Senior A’s and B’s, each individual armed with a pencil and open notebook, all ready for an attack upon order, neatness, manner, or discipline.” Quoted in Christine Ogren, “‘A Large Measure Of Self-Control and Personal Power:’ Women Students at State Normal Schools During the Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 3-4, (Fall-Winter, 2000): pp. 211-232, 217.

There was tension at the core of *normalismo* between a discourse that privileged distance, objectivity, and impartiality and other that emphasize teacher's passion and affection toward children and peers. Torres required student-teachers to perform the critique with: "deep fervor, great sympathy, desire to see the practitioner advance, tact and delicacy so as not to cause unnecessary pain to the person criticized."²⁴⁶ Torres promoted pedagogical critique from a humanistic perspective that prevented student-teachers to be harmed and valued as positive sympathy and tact. This tension can be read in an ambiguous definition of teaching as both a science and an art. José Bernardo Suárez defined pedagogy as the "art of cultivating the intelligence and to form children's hearts."²⁴⁷ Yet, in the same text Suárez refers to pedagogy as a "science occupied of the principles and means to educate and instruct men."²⁴⁸ José María Torres' definition of pedagogy included the "science and art of guiding children in the school," but his manual proposed a distinction between the art of teaching related to practice and facts and the science of teaching; related to theory and rational thought.

School principals promoted teachers' affection towards children within the framework of motherhood. In 1913, Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano reinforced the discourse of motherhood and sacrifice by telling her disciples: "From now on, with the diploma, with the years of intellectual training that is conferred, the most sacred obligations will start."²⁴⁹ She claimed that teachers should work for the love of children, not for the salary. As motherhood, teaching was an act of love and caring. She urged the students:

²⁴⁶ Torres, "Memoria del Ministerio de Justicia, Culto e Instrucción Pública."

²⁴⁷ José Bernardo Suárez, *Guía del preceptor primario*, 2.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Guillén de Rezzano, *Consejos a las futuras maestras*, 35-36.

“While being teachers, be mothers, but having in mind that to be a mother is not only to have children. Motherhood is love, commiseration, and sacrifice.”²⁵⁰ In Guillén de Rezzano’s view the maternal role of teachers was more needed in those schools where children lack maternal love in their homes. To those children, teachers had to give them “their entire heart.”²⁵¹

The different visions of the normal school that appeared in teachers’ narratives demonstrate the disciplinary and emancipatory effects of *normalismo* as experienced by student-teachers. According to Samatán, the normal school “mutilated the spirit in a crime against humanity.”²⁵² She wrote: “wanting to demand from teachers the non-correspondence between body and soul, is equivalent to creating dehumanized beings, to forming an amorphous guild, without a beating heart, without a brain that radiates light towards the routes of the future.”²⁵³ From a different perspective, Camaña asserted that in the normal school: “The teaching was so deep, so individual, so personal that it made each student an eternal student of life, on the march towards truth, towards goodness.”²⁵⁴ Describing Graham, Camaña wrote: “she was a strong and courageous woman, teacher, forger of souls, and loving mother.”²⁵⁵ But even Samatán’s critique of the school was learned in part within the classrooms of the normal school. As we saw in the previous section, the disciplinary measures of *normalismo* encountered resistance from student-teachers who contested the professor’s authority. The practice school through the

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 8.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

²⁵² Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 75.

²⁵³ Ibid., 75-76.

²⁵⁴ Camaña, “XXV Aniversario de la Escuela Normal de La Plata,” 29.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

practices of observation and the critique class encouraged students to disagree, make arguments, and write devastating critiques such as the one made by Juanita.

Conclusions

This chapter sheds light on the knowledge that circulated in normal schools in the origins of the school system. The obsession with discipline in the school corresponded with a moment of national organization when elites sought to govern an increasingly diverse population. Born in a context of national consolidation, normalist teaching discourses and practices illuminate broader political concerns regarding how to organize the Argentine population through children's education. I demonstrated that, influenced by positivist thought, a central part of what student-teachers learned was centered on discipline. Discipline was part of the everyday life of the school through manuals of pedagogy, pedagogical conferences, and conversations in the principal's office. Student-teachers learned that their role as future teachers was to mold children into responsible, hardworking, clean, and patriotic citizens. They also learned that they taught through the example. For this reason, they had to maintain an exemplary moral life to inspire new generations.

The influence of scientific theories had another impact on normalist training. I showed that the changes in the program of study promoted by the CNE and through individual endeavors led by professors, student-teacher education was conceived as practical, connected to facts, coming from experience. The practice school was the corollary of this practical education that assumed that student-teachers would only become teachers by teaching. The practice school prepared student-teachers to observe children, scrutinizing their gestures and postures in front of the classroom. A scientific

education translated into a distant relationship between teachers and children reinforcing hierarchical roles in the school. Observation led to pedagogical critique which constituted a tool for student-teachers to analyze whether teachers were successful in their teaching methods. Both observation and experimentation of teaching methods became the cornerstone of teachers' training in the practice school. This practice led student-teachers to develop new tools that at times they strategically utilized to judge and challenge their professor's authority.

While the normal school contributed to disciplining young students and children, normal training provided working class students, mostly women, a unique opportunity to continue their studies and find a job. For these students, normal schools opened the doors of social mobility to a generation of students who otherwise would not have accessed secondary education. Under a model of popular education prompted by Domingo Sarmiento and continued by subsequent presidents, governmental fellowships encouraged the incorporation of women and working class students to embrace an important role for the modern nation. *Normalistas* embraced their pedagogical mission but not uncritically since the normal school provided tools to observe, to investigate, to experiment with teaching methods. The next chapter traces how teachers put into practice what they learned in the normal school to advance the scientific study of childhood in the classroom.

Chapter 2: Building the Norm: The School Laboratory for the Eugenic Study of Children (1890-1920)

Introduction

The previous chapter explained how school teachers were trained in the normal school under a disciplinary system that, although challenged by student-teachers, aimed to mold young students into model citizens. It also showed that under a positivist influence, student-teachers acquired the tools of observation, critique, and experimentation. This chapter expands on how a modern pedagogy was developed through the scientific efforts of studying children in the classroom. I trace the links between pedagogy and eugenics through the study of childhood developed by normalist teacher Víctor Mercante (1870-1934). Originally from Merlo, province of Buenos Aires, Mercante studied in the Normal School of Paraná under the influence of positivist professor Pedro Scalabrini. In Paraná he came into contact with readings, experiments, and a network of influential families.²⁵⁶ Once he graduated in 1890, he became Principal of the Normal School of San Juan where he began his first observations.²⁵⁷ His scientific studies continued in the 1890s at the Normal School of Mercedes and consolidated at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata (UNLP) where he founded the Pedagogical Section. In 1915, the Pedagogical Section became the Department of Education where Mercante served as Dean. The scientific study of children in the school has its origins during a period of increasing European migration and universal primary education schooling. In the school, children spent multiple

²⁵⁶ Víctor Mercante, *Una vida realizada. Mis memorias* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ferrari Hnos, 1944).

²⁵⁷ Víctor Mercante, "La ecuación personal," *La Obra*, no. 1, July 5, 1921.

hours a day, providing valuable information to the trained eye of the normalist educator. Between the 1890s and 1920s, Mercante observed children, published his results in articles in scientific journals, contributed to the founding of educational and scientific institutions, and influenced a generation of teachers.

This chapter traces how Mercante transformed the classroom into a laboratory. In the classroom, he measured children's intelligence through a series of tests. The school became more than an institution that instructed the new generations. It was utilized as a site to understand human difference and practice the appropriate procedures to better discipline the population. Ultimately, Mercante believed that studying children's abilities would contribute to teachers' pedagogical tasks. Mercante's laboratory pioneered the type of research conducted by biotypologists in the 1930s at *Asociación Argentina de Biotipología, Eugenesia y Medicina Social* (Argentina Association of Biotypology, Eugenics, and Social Medicine, AABEMS). Mercante contributed to the AABEMS in the pedagogical section until his death in 1934. The fact that a normalist educator became an important figure in the scientific community is telling of the direct links between science and teaching.

Conceptualizing the classroom as a site of power and knowledge to discipline children's bodies, I ask what type of knowledge emerged from the classroom and what type of teaching practices Mercante modeled for student-teachers.²⁵⁸ I demonstrate that the laboratory practices led by Mercante had both profound and lasting consequences. They reinforced a relationship between the knower and what is

²⁵⁸ As Michel Foucault puts it: "power produces knowledge (...) power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations." Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 27.

known that subjected children to hierarchical relationships. The laboratory isolated children to be tested while teachers arrived at general conclusions about the school population without considering the children's backgrounds. One of Mercante's major legacies was the dissemination of a discourse that conceptualized children as potential criminals and classified poor and immigrant children according to their intelligence. Thus, Mercante provided new concepts for teachers to reproduce racial hierarchies in the classroom. Mercante also modeled a series of classroom procedures that reinforced Sarmiento's ideas of civilization and barbarism, adapting the modern scientific technologies of the twentieth century.²⁵⁹ Recognized and valued in the pedagogical and scientific community of his time, Mercante critically contributed to the disciplining of children under *normalismo*, putting in dialogue the science of teaching with experimental psychology, criminology, and medicine. Thus, the history of disciplining in the school cannot be understood without looking at Mercante's work.

The scientific study of children flourished in a moment in which scientists from multiple disciplines were trying to understand racial and gender differences. As thousands of student-teachers and children learned in the school to behave according to the norms, the characteristics of "the normal" were being constructed in opposition to the figure of the deviant, abnormal, and perverse.²⁶⁰ It is not a coincidence that

²⁵⁹ I draw on Inés Dussel who asserts that Mercante used epistemological and political categories of the nineteenth century with the instruments, languages, and networks of knowledge of the twentieth century. Inés Dussel, "Victor Mercante y la producción de un discurso científico sobre la educación" *Archivos de Ciencias de la Educación* 8, 2014.

²⁶⁰ Jorge Salessi, *Médicos, maleantes y maricas* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2000); Gabo Ferro, *Degenerados, anormales y delincuentes: gestos entre ciencia, política y representaciones en el caso argentino* (Buenos Aires: Marea Editorial, 2010); Lila Caimari, *Apenas un delincuente. Crimen, castigo y cultura en la Argentina, 1880-1955* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2004); Kristin

Mercante's research in the school was conducted simultaneously while he was studying prisoners. Drawing on positivist criminologists in the field of psychiatry, Mercante's studies promoted a vision of childhood that associated children with criminal and violent instincts. Therefore, the school was conceived as an institution to control humans in the supposedly primitive stages of their development.

This chapter puts in conversation historiographies of education and eugenics in order to understand the relationship between teaching practices and racial thought. Mercante has been portrayed as a normalist professor who advanced a positivist and authoritarian notion of the school.²⁶¹ Recent studies propose a more nuanced study of Mercante and his historical context when nineteenth century positivists entered into dialogue with the reformist ideas of the new school of the 1930s and 1940s.²⁶² Mercante's work as a biometrist appears in works by historians of eugenics especially in the 1930s and 1940s.²⁶³ By putting in conversation these historiographies I suggest that the school was not just a repository of racial thought produced somewhere else but a central place where categories of racial and sexual differences were constructed.

Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh. Medicine, Law, and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Argentina* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

²⁶¹ Juan Carlos Tedesco, *Educación y sociedad en Argentina, 1880-1945* (Buenos Aires:Hachette, 1986); Adriana Puiggrós, *Sujetos, disciplina y curriculum en los orígenes del sistema educativo argentino, 1885-1916* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 1990); Lucia Lionetti, "V́ctor Mercante: agente político e intelectual del campo educativo en la Argentina de principios del siglo XX," *Prohistoria* 10, no. 10 (2006): 93-112.

²⁶² Dussel, "V́ctor Mercante y la producción de un discurso científico sobre la educación."

²⁶³ Gustavo Vallejo, "La hora cero de la eugenesia en la Argentina: disputas e ideologías en el surgimiento de un campo científico, 1916-1932" *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos*, vol.25 supl.1 Aug. 2018. Marisa Miranda and Gustavo Vallejo (eds.) *Una historia de la eugenesia: Argentina y las redes biopolíticas internacionales, 1912-1945* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2012); José Antonio Gómez Di Vincenzo, "El talle justo del alumno. Biotipología, eugenesia y pedagogía en Argentina (1930 – 1943)," *Archivos de Ciencias de la Educación* 6, no. 6, (2012).

In doing so, I contribute to positioning schooling within a broader history of eugenics in Latin America²⁶⁴

The first section investigates the school laboratory from the first classroom experiments at the Normal School of San Juan in 1890 to the more extended pedagogical research developed at Mercedes and UNLP. It discusses the classroom procedures, the intellectual influences, and the questions that guided Mercante as he utilized experimental psychology to study children's aptitudes. Starting in 1906, Mercante expanded the study of children by mentoring student-teachers conducting pedagogical research and by directing the journal *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines*. Anthropometric devices entered the classroom to assist with teachers' experiments. Educators systematically published their results providing empirical data of children's attention, memory, vision, among other psychological abilities of pedagogical interest. These studies pioneered the eugenic studies on child populations made by the AABEMS in the 1930s. The second section illuminates the links between the study of the "normal" and the "deviant" children by tracing Mercante's research on child criminology at the prison of Mercedes. Teaching experience gave Mercante the tools to position himself as an authority in the study of childhood beyond the borders of the school and the field of pedagogy. The study on prisoners

²⁶⁴ Jerry Dávila, *Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1917-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Okezi T. Otovo, *Progressive Mothers, Better Babies: Race, Public Health, and the State in Brazil, 1850-1945*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016); Julia Rodriguez, "A Complex Fabric: Intersecting Histories of Race, Gender, and Science in Latin America," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (2011): 409–29; Diego Armus, "Eugenesia En Buenos Aires: Discursos, Prácticas, Historiografía," *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 23, no. suppl 1 (December 2016): 149–70; Marisa Miranda and Gustavo Vallejo, *Una historia de la eugenesia; Galak, Educar los cuerpos al servicio de la política*; Marcos Cueto and Steven Paul Palmer, *Medicine and Public Health in Latin America: A History*, New Approaches to the Americas (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

demonstrates Mercante's interest in understanding whether inheritance or the environment determined children's behavior. His conclusions demonstrated that both factors could lead to criminality but the school played a central role in adapting immigrant children to Argentine society. The third section explores the legacies of Mercante's laboratory in the practice of teaching and the study of children. It shows that from the perspective of teachers, the psychological study of children aimed to better understand children's bodies in order to adapt teaching methods to the students' learning capacities. Yet, the laboratory practices promoted an oppressive learning experience where children were subjected to constant examination and were forced into silence.

Psychological and Anthropometric Studies of Children

Son of Italian immigrants, Mercante at the age of six moved to Bell' Aria, Italy, but returned to Buenos Aires in 1880. In his memoir Mercante wrote:

On February 21, 1870 I was born, in the diapers of poverty from which my father fought without success and from which we had to recover after many years of healthy struggle, although not without fatigue and suffering, thanks perhaps to that ancestral heritage that never abandons the descendants, appearing sooner or later, with values that seemed to be lost by the thankless action of unknown whims.²⁶⁵

Mercante's description of his suffering as a poor immigrant encapsulates the promise of social progress that normal training provided to first generation Argentinians at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁶⁶ His narrative also illuminates how ideas of

²⁶⁵ Mercante, *Una vida realizada*, 26-27.

²⁶⁶ Inés Dussel asserts that Mercante "certifies the fulfillment of the immigrant's dream of 'making America.'" Inés Dussel, "Victor Mercante: La adolescencia como categoría escolar. La emergencia de

inheritance influenced teachers. Mercante looked to his family and upbringing to understand his own success. His mother was Filomena Lombardi, coming from a wealthy family “distinguished by their tall, erect, blonde and beautiful type.”²⁶⁷ His father was Antonio Mercante, from a family of farmers with a “faultless honesty, devoted to work from dawn to dusk.”²⁶⁸ Mercante inherited from his father the work ethic of the farmer and from his mother an “encouraging instinct that promised to elevate me, devoting myself to study and work.”²⁶⁹ Although impossible to prove, the attribution of his success to his whiter inheritance, speaks to Mercante’s eugenic thought, which he maintained until his death in 1934 when he was returning from the II Pan-American Congress of Education in Santiago, Chile.²⁷⁰

Mercante, who studied in the prestigious Normal School of Paraná due to a national fellowship, graduated in 1890 with a professor’s diploma. Once he graduated, Mercante started his first classroom experiments to measure intelligence. Using his authority as the principal of the Normal School of San Juan, one day he entered the 6th grade classroom of the practice school and asked children to do a series of exercises. One by one children performed the exercise, an addition of six three digit numbers, at Mercante’s desk so he could closely scrutinize the results and measure their time. Surprised by this unusual practice, the arithmetic teacher asked him: “what are you going to do with that? They add very fast.”²⁷¹ Mercante replied: “I

una problematización” in Víctor Mercante, *La crisis de la pubertad y sus consecuencias pedagógicas* (Buenos Aires: Unipe, 2014).

²⁶⁷ Mercante, *Una vida realizada*, 25.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁷⁰ Horacio Malter Terrada, “Prólogo” in Mercante, *Una vida realizada*.

²⁷¹ Mercante, “La ecuación personal,” 4.

have no doubt about it but I want to see.”²⁷² Mercante likened the skill of adding to flying but insisted, “there are birds that fly higher than others.”²⁷³ He wanted to quantitatively measure “who added better? Who was smarter?”²⁷⁴ Mercante’s experiment, which equated intelligence with speed, was part of a broader impulse in the international scientific community to measure people’s mental capacities.

It was in Buenos Aires where Mercante found opportunities to participate in intellectual networks that granted him recognition and resources to study children. In 1894, Mercante received a telegram from the Ministry of Education offering him the directorship of the Normal School of Mercedes, a school outside the City of Buenos close to Merlo, his hometown. He accepted the offer without hesitation, probably believing that living in the center of Argentina, scientific knowledge production would open new opportunities for his aspirations, since San Juan represented a “reduced field.”²⁷⁵ Indeed, in Buenos Aires he met two important allies and friends. At the Normal School of Mercedes, he met Rodolfo Senet, a normalist professor from the Colegio de Profesores of Buenos Aires, Secretary and Professor of Drawing in the school.²⁷⁶ Senet would become an important ally in promoting the school as a laboratory to study children and followed Mercante when he was hired at Universidad Nacional de La Plata. In Buenos Aires, Mercante also met José Ingenieros, who in 1908 became professor of psychology at Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires and

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Mercante, *Una vida realizada*, 153.

²⁷⁶ Mercante and Senet developed a friendship that lasted forty years. About this relationship, Mercante writes: “I could not be without him; or he could not be without me.” Ibid., 160.

the director of *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología*, where Mercante and Senet published multiple articles on child psychology.

Together, Mercante and Senet advocated for an active role for teachers in studying childhood. Mercante criticized pedagogical theories that came from a “seat in a library chair” instead believed such theories should derive from “a seat in the back of a class.”²⁷⁷ In 1901, Senet published *Evolución y Educación* (Evolution and Education) based on conferences given at the Normal School of Dolores. Senet pointed out a gap in the study of children and encouraged student-teachers to draw on anthropology (as the study of biological factors) and psychology to study human behavior. Characterizing Argentine education as being in an embryonic period, Senet was convinced that teachers were capable of making notable advances if they dedicated their time to investigating children, an object of study that physiologists and anthropologists failed to see.²⁷⁸ Mercante agreed that teachers could and should use their role to collect evidence in the classroom. The various congresses of psychology had discussed hallucinations, hypnotism, inheritance, the senses, anatomy, the physiology of the brain, memory, attention, association of ideas, and emotions. To these advances, Mercante posited, teachers could contribute psychology that focused on the collective rather than the individual. A “virgin field” opened to teachers who were able to create “a laboratory from the classroom, taking advantage of the wonderful elements that he handled over the course of nine months.”²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Víctor Mercante, *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño* (Buenos Aires: Librería del Colegio, 1904), x-xi.

²⁷⁸ Rodolfo Senet, *Evolución y educación* (La Plata: Talleres Sesé y Larragañaga, 1901).

²⁷⁹ Mercante, *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño*, 77.

Primary and practice schools proved to be a crucial laboratory to study children in a context of mass migration. Around six million European immigrants arrived at the port of Buenos Aires between 1870 and 1914, half of whom stayed in the country.²⁸⁰ Therefore, Buenos Aires presented a unique opportunity to study human evolution due to its heterogeneous population.²⁸¹ Massive schooling provided a unique opportunity for the study of children of different ages, sexes, and social backgrounds. Senet doubted that the conclusions drawn from statistics coming from Italy, France, and the U.S. could be applied to Argentina.²⁸² Because of the country's massive influx of immigrants, Argentine teachers not only could understand children's development in the country, but also arrive at general conclusions about the human species more broadly. In the school, teachers shared ideas about children's bodies. In the principal's office or during lunch time, Mercante and Senet discussed evolution, positivism, inheritance, selection, and sociology.²⁸³ Avid readers of Charles Darwin, Ernst Haeckel, Herbert Spencer, Cesare Lombroso, and Giuseppe Sergi, Mercante and Senet talked about contemporary evolutionary theories. Their experience as educators observing children and their families provided the opportunity to test scientific theories. One day, the two colleagues wrote a diagram

²⁸⁰ Lila Caimari, *Apenas un delincuente*.

²⁸¹ From the end of the nineteenth century and until the advanced 20th century, La Plata and its surroundings were known for its immigrant population. Its proximity with the port and the establishment of the salting house and later meatpacking industry gave the area a diverse population, as shown in Mercante's article. La Plata will be called "the Capital of the Immigrant." See: Daniel James, *Doña Maria's Story. Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

²⁸² Rodolfo Senet, "Investigaciones antropológicas. Estadística de la talla, tronco, abertura de brazos, extremidades inferiores y peso por edades y sexo," *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines* 1, no. 3, 1906.

²⁸³ The authors included Charles Darwin, Ernst Haeckel, Herbert Spencer, Cesare Lombroso, Giuseppe Sergi, and Benedict Morel.

with the characters transmitted from parents to children. Mercante recalled they admired “the mixture produced by the extremely varied proportion that contributed to fixing the physical, intellectual, and moral similarities.”²⁸⁴ Reflecting on the students’ “mixture,” Mercante asserted that in the school teachers could find “a son of indigenous features with a European behavior, in the case of a Spanish father with a *charrúa* woman.”²⁸⁵

The interest in studying children in schools was a global phenomenon connected with the history of eugenics. In 1865 Francis Galton published “Hereditary Talent and Character,” and four years later he wrote a book on hereditary genius. Combining Charles Dawin and Adolphe Quetelet, Galton conceived of intelligence as inheritable. In 1882, Galton went further in measuring intelligence. For a small fee, he tested auditory and visual sensory discrimination, reaction times to stimuli, and the ability to hand-squeeze pressure on the dynamometer at his laboratory in the South Kensington Museum of London. One of Galton’s ideas on intelligence was that people with high intelligence had a keener capacity to discriminate than those individuals with low intelligence. Galton’s work influenced James McKeen Cattell, a U.S. student of Wilhelm Wundt who in 1890 wrote a paper entitled “Mental Tests and Measurements.” Among others, Cattell measured tactile discrimination and reaction time for auditory stimuli. In the 1890s, the *mental tests* continued in the University of Wisconsin and Clark University, under the leadership of anthropologist Franz

²⁸⁴ Mercante, *Una vida realizada*, 161.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 161-162. Churrúa refers to indigenous people from South America, today present in Uruguay and the adjacent areas in Argentina (Entre Ríos) and Brazil (Rio Grande do Sul).

Boas.²⁸⁶ It was in this context and within this paradigm that schools became a crucial site for testing children's reaction to external stimuli.

Laboratory experiments gave intelligence a new meaning. In 1870, French positivist Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893) published his book *De l'Intelligence*. Although intelligence had long been referred to as "the faculty of cognizing," his contribution opened a new understanding of intelligence as "scientifically analyzable, biologically based entity that different groups and perhaps even individuals could manifest to various degrees and in a variety of ways."²⁸⁷ A positivist approach to the mind, as defined by Taine, would require observation and clinical investigation. From this perspective, psychology became the science of facts and intelligence, and intelligence could be investigated empirically. After Taine, many philosophers and psychologists would study intelligence in relation to human difference, including Théodule-Armand Ribot (1839-1916), Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), and Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893).

The studies of intelligence at the transnational level, the intellectual networks of Buenos Aires, and the context of mass migration, gave Mercante a new impulse to continue his studies. For Mercante, the early 1900s marked a turning point. He was in search of a "more precise and convincing experimental pedagogy, useful not only to the professor but to the school teacher from the more distant rural school."²⁸⁸ In order to involve rural teachers, he devised experiments that required nothing more than a

²⁸⁶ Nathan Brody "History of Theories and Measurements of Intelligence" in Sternberg, Robert J. *Handbook of Intelligence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16-33.

²⁸⁷ John Carson, *The Measure of Merit. Talents, Intelligence, and Inequality in the French and American Republics, 1750-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 113-114.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

chronometer, two blackboards, boxes and rulers. Associating speed with intelligence, with a chronometer in one hand and a pencil in the other, Mercante began his classroom experiments to study children's psychological aptitudes.²⁸⁹ Aware of the scientific debates of his time, Mercante drew on the studies of intelligence to conduct his research on children. Unlike scientists in the U.S. and Europe, Mercante could not count on material resources, but he utilized what resources were available in the school to pioneer Argentina's first studies in the field using simple procedures that did not require expensive devices. His innovative practices gained national and international recognition when in 1901, during a presentation in Paris, Horacio Piñero addressed Mercante as a pioneer in the field of experimental psychology.²⁹⁰ As in Europe, the methods practiced by Mercante, gave psychology a new scientific character. Relying on biological sciences, eugenic statistics, and anthropometric measuring, positivists like Mercante transformed psychology, the science of the "spirit," into the study of exterior, observable, and therefore, objective mental characteristics. At the same time, the study of children's minds through experimental psychology gave pedagogy a scientific status and led teachers to believe that through

²⁸⁹ Historian of science Loraine Daston affirms that an integral part of scientific observation was the practice of journaling. Scientists since the XVII century, have kept a daily journal with their observations, the experiments, and reflections. The assumption beyond keeping a journal was that nature was too variable and therefore a single observation could not reveal the truth. Instead, routine observations were needed to closely understand nature. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

²⁹⁰ Horacio Piñero was the first professor who taught psychology at the Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires. His successors in the course were important figures in the field of psychology in Argentina such as Francisco de Veyga (1906) and José Ingenieros (1908) Vezzetti, Hugo. *El nacimiento de la psicología en la Argentina: Pensamiento psicológico y positivismo* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur Editorial 1988). In 1910 José Ingenieros addressed: "Large is the group of scholars who have contributed their indirect assistance to the development of psychology, although almost all of them have specialized in related sciences: mental pathology, pedagogy, sociology, anthropology, criminology, etc. We will add to this nucleus of scientific writers that of teachers, who also made a generous effort." Quoted in Vezzetti, *El nacimiento de la psicología*, 55.

classroom observation they could contribute to production of knowledge about children's development.

Mercante's methods to measure intelligence were a hybrid between two competing ideas debated among researchers. Following Galton, some researchers like Cattell, focused on the measurement of children's reaction to external stimuli. But French psychologist Alfred Binet, opposed the idea that intelligence should be studied by focusing on elementary cognitive processes. He drew on German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus whose tests focused on more complex mental processes including memory of digits, calculation, and cancellation.²⁹¹ Overall, Binet argued that in order to assess intelligence, it was necessary to study complex mental skills such as imagination, comprehension, ability to understand abstract words and create aesthetic judgements.

In 1905, Binet published a paper with Théodore Simon that popularized a scale to measure children's intelligence. The study was funded by the Ministry of Public Instruction in France to determine whether some children should be provided with special education. The study tested complex mental functions and different kinds of abilities without any special equipment.²⁹² Binet's scientific method consisted of a pre-arranged list of questions given to those who were examined. He believed that

²⁹¹ A cancellation test consisted of providing children with a list of items randomly distributed on a page. The participant was required to cancel out digits or letters. For instance teacher Heredia asked students to write some words and then she requested to cancel out all the "a" and "e." Celia Z. de Heredia, "Estudios psicopedagógicos. Investigaciones acerca de la atención," *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines* 3, no. 8, 1907.

²⁹² Binet's article responded to research published the previous year by Charles Spearman who conducted a study with children at Columbia University in Cattell's laboratory. The study related sensory discrimination with academic advancement and concluded that "common and essential elements in intelligence coincide with the common and essential element in the sensory functions." Brody "History of Theories and Measurements of Intelligence."

this method would ensure that even conducted by different examiners, it was possible to obtain identical results.²⁹³ For the pedagogical purposes of the study, Binet and Simon concluded that “retarded” children performed at a level that was comparable with “normal” children at a younger age. But beyond the application within the French educational system, Binet and Simon’s study provided psychologists a scale to that “began a new means of diagnosing idiocy, imbecility, and feeble-mindedness”²⁹⁴

In the same year that Binet and Simon published his work on children’s intelligence, Mercante published the results of his classroom experiments. Like Binet and Simon’s studies, Mercante’s research had clearly pedagogical goals. Between April and November of 1902, Mercante observed children in the practice school of the Normal School of Mercedes, divided into seven grades from first to sixth (3rd grade divided into two levels) each composed of thirty to forty children. The tests conducted without special equipment were adequate for Mercante’s purposes since they could be performed despite the lack of resources available to Argentine teachers. Mercante’s *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño* (Psychology of the Mathematical Aptitude of the Child) was an almost four-hundred-page book that was divided into eight chapters that explained the history, the importance of teaching mathematics to children, and the definition of the mathematical phenomenon from a psychological perspective. The teaching of mathematics was considered a privileged subject for psycho-pedagogical observations. The mathematical phenomenon, Mercante explained, started with a perception either visual or acoustic and concluded

²⁹³ Carson, *The Measure of Merit*.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

after a complex internal process of comparison, abstraction, and generalization. In this process organs such as the eye or the inner ear connected with the brain in charge of making the associations that facilitated the children's correct responses. The "ease" to learn or do was associated with the promptness to which the brain connected the exterior stimulus with the interior reasoning. The number of cells in the brain as well as the number of associations made within the cerebellum determined aptitude. Under these conceptions, children's intelligence was understood as the external manifestation of the associations happening at the cellular level in the brain.

Children's reactions to the tests represented observable facts to understand their minds. In the case of arithmetic exercises, tests aimed to measure the "grade of mathematical culture and their natural or acquired intelligence."²⁹⁵ Mercante affirmed: "aptitude is due to varying degrees of habit," and it was the teacher's task to develop these habits.²⁹⁶ Thus, in the laboratory teachers' tasks were twofold: to analyze, test, and measure children's aptitude and to exercise the brain through continuous mental work.²⁹⁷ The exercise provided in the school could affect children's development since it created new and more extended connections in the brain.²⁹⁸ Mercante's tests measured children's reactions to multiple exercises including adding numbers, reading numbers out loud, and writing numbers dictated by the teacher. In one experiment Mercante wrote on the board the four numbers

²⁹⁵ Mercante, *Psicología de la aptitud matemática*, 84.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 55-67.

²⁹⁸ Mercante's ideas on brain connections were informed by Spanish neuroscientist and Nobel Prize winner Santiago Ramón y Cajal who stated that the process of learning could be explained through the ability of neurons to create new connections. Mercante encountered Ramón y Cajal's work around 1898 while he was conducting his studies at the Normal School of Mercedes. Mercante, *Una vida realizada*.

listed as follows:

1010
2101
2934957
10110101

Then, he asked children to stand two meters from the board and read the numbers out loud. Meanwhile, Mercante counted the time between the moment the children looked at the board and the moment where they finished reading the last number.

Other tests measured attention spans. The teacher prepared a piece of paper with horizontal blue lines and one vertical line in the middle of the page and then put the paper at the center of the blackboard calling the students to count the lines. Mercante observed that around the fifth or the sixth line children hurried up thinking that the operation was too easy. In regular intervals, they rested trying to hold their hand on the board or the desk, almost as if looking for some stability for their bodies.

Counting objects was defined by Mercante as a “phenomenon of visual accommodation” where the eye executed movements and breaks that coincided with the enunciation of the number, an unconscious fact from the perspective of the child.

To make sense of the data collected in the classroom, Mercante drew on the scientific methods of his time, especially statistics.²⁹⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century, statistics had become an important tool for hygienists to gather information regarding diseases. As put by Claudia Daniel “periodic statistics emerged as the instrument capable of taking the pulse of society, of measuring the vitality of the

²⁹⁹ The history of statistics from political arithmetic in the mid seventeenth century, to the rise of biometrical statistics in the 1900s has been studied by Theodore Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking 1820-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

‘social body’.”³⁰⁰ Incorporated in the national census of 1895 and gaining legitimacy through the Dirección General de Estadística of Buenos Aires Province directed by Emilio Coni (1854-1928), statistics had among its enthusiasts doctors who saw counting as a path to curing.³⁰¹ Similarly, Mercante’s use of statistics aimed to provide solutions for the school population based on the idea that teachers could better carry out their work by understanding the group rather than simply the individual. While the tests had to be conducted on individuals, the results needed to be analyzed collectively in order to arrive at useful conclusions. Statistics offered a stability that the individual could not. He asserted that when looking at the groups and not the individuals the variability and oscillation diminished. Seeing the statistics Mercante learned that “even in the simplest phenomena equality was impossible; that the individual offers in them his mental coefficient.”³⁰² Statistics could be translated into charts and graphs that clearly conveyed the results. He wrote: “detailed experiments mean little pedagogically; but united and computed, they give the mathematical aptitude in all the phases of its immense reflex arc.”³⁰³ The numerical computation of the experiments gave Mercante’s “psychometric investigation” the validation of scientific knowledge.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁰ Claudia Daniel, “Contar para curar: Estadísticas y comunidad médica en Argentina, 1880-1940,” *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos* 19, no. 1, (January-March 2012): 89-114, 94.

³⁰¹ Emilio Coni was a prominent hygienist who conducted public health surveys, gathering information on prison populations, hospital services, legitimate and illegitimate births, and the incidence of prostitution and venereal diseases. Julia, Rodríguez. *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

³⁰² Mercante, “La ecuación personal,” 4.

³⁰³ Mercante, *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño*, 74.

³⁰⁴ When decades later Mercante compared his work with those published in the U.S. by Binet y Simon, Decroly and Buyse, he criticized that the authors did not explain the results. He asserted: “The statement of the test does not matter if it is not accompanied by the corresponding statistics or curves.”

To analyze the results, Mercante classified children according to their sex and age. Based on his classroom experiments, Mercante believed he was arriving at an “exact notion of the mathematical mentality of each grade and each sex; delays, oscillations, crises, positivity, reaction times, primary and central processes, hours of activity and depression.”³⁰⁵ The attention to students’ sex speaks to scientific questions regarding the psychological distinctions between men and women that interested the scientific community.³⁰⁶ Mercante reinforced such distinctions concluding that boys counted more rapidly and precisely than girls, their attention was stronger, and they tired less. The differentiation between grades, indicated how children’s aptitudes changed according to their development and the exercise they acquire in the school.³⁰⁷ For this reason, Mercante believed that teachers should conduct these exercises repeatedly throughout the year to measure if the data varied as a result of the exercise.

As in other parts of the world, the introduction of experimental psychology in the classrooms of Buenos Aires aimed to rank children’s minds on a hierarchical scale. Binet and Simon’s scale ranked children from normalcy to idiocy. Prior to their work, Taine had proposed an intelligence spectrum from idiot to geniuses. Mercante explained the value of experimental psychology as similar to mathematical knowledge in that it allowed the teacher to know “in a given moment, the aptitudes of

Víctor Mercante, “La investigación psicopedagógica y los tests. Atrasados, anormales y superdotados,” *Anales de biología, eugenesia y medicina social*, no. 12, September 15-October 1, 1933, 4.

³⁰⁵ Mercante, *Psicología de la aptitud matemática*, xxii.

³⁰⁶ Rodolfo Senet, *¿Es superior el hombre a la mujer?* (Buenos Aires: Cabaut y Cia., 1912). Reflecting on his first experiment in San Juan, Mercante asserted that there were big differences between boys and girls. We wrote: “I would like at this moment to affirm the superiority of the female sex; but the data favored the stronger sex.” Mercante, “La ecuación personal,” 4.

³⁰⁷ Mercante, *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño*, xii.

the students for a task, their preparation at a determined moment; the intelligent and the retarded; the benefits and the defects of a procedure; which parts required more exercise and which required less.”³⁰⁸

Mercante’s scientific study of childhood fell under a paradigm of a universal and objective science that obscured children’s realities and classified children into hierarchical categories. Because Mercante was concerned with the school population rather than with individuals, his tests did not consider children’s particular realities that could affect their performance in the classroom. For instance, Mercante did not ponder children’s migratory experience in a country with a growing Italian population. Mercante’s own experience in primary school as a son of immigrants was challenging since when he came back to Argentina, his Spanish was deficient.³⁰⁹ The language of many immigrant children attending the school in Buenos Aires could have, for instance, affected their “auditive reactions.” There is no complementary information on the children that he studied. With a scientific study of childhood, Mercante intended to universalize and homogenize a diverse population of students. Ultimately, the goal was to arrive at a set of nationally applicable teaching procedures, but Mercante’s supposedly universal methods failed in recognizing the complex realities of Argentine schools.

Mercante’s privileged position enabled him to advance the scientific study of children. As the principal of the normal school he had the authority to enter the classroom, interrupt teachers’ lessons to conduct the tests, and call on individual

³⁰⁸ Ibid., xii-xiii.

³⁰⁹ In his memoirs Mercante narrates that when arrived in Argentina at ten years old, he was registered in the second grade since he “possessed bad Spanish.” Mercante, *Una vida realizada*, 57.

students outside of the classroom. It is not clear from the sources if Mercante asked children's families permission to be studied. But his book detailing the tests conducted demonstrates that school authorities and the teaching community knew of his classroom experiments. Mercante's work represented a major achievement and was welcomed by both educators and the scientific community. Beyond his position as principal, Mercante was able to process the information he collected over months because he was a male teacher. Father of seven children, his wife Julia Pozo took care of the children during the summer of 1903 so he could write the book.³¹⁰ In his memoirs he recalled: "I worked fifteen hours and did not go out except for lunch and dinner; my family had gone to San Juan and I felt the pleasure of this solitude full of promises."³¹¹ When finally Mercante told his wife he finished writing, she replied: "At last you will go to bed early and accompany us to the park."³¹² As this passage exemplifies, while all teachers could test and study children within the classroom, male teachers had more advantages than women with children in analyzing data and producing knowledge based on their experiments.³¹³

In 1906, Mercante's studies took another turn when he was hired to found the Pedagogical Section in a moment of scientific expansion at Universidad Nacional de La Plata. Along with the university, other institutions such as the Museum of Natural

³¹⁰ At the end of his memoir, Mercante mentioned his seven children. Many of them studied in the university and graduated as professors or doctors. I do not have information of how many of his children were born in the summer of 1903 but he refers to multiple children.

³¹¹ Mercante, *Una vida realizada*, 190.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 191.

³¹³ I draw on Sandra Harding's work that recognizes the multiple and often invisible forms of participation of women in the production of scientific knowledge including the organization of salons that allowed male scientists to fund their investigations. Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

Sciences and the Melchor Romero Hospital gave an impulse to experimental science.³¹⁴ In his new role, Mercante expanded the institutional resources of the school laboratory. UNLP's laboratory was equipped with anthropometric devices that measured children's bodies. Among the instruments that composed the "Gabinete Normal" (Normal Cabinet)³¹⁵ was an anthropometer to measure children's height and weight, a Broca's compass to measure the head's diameter, a dynamometer to measure muscular strength, and a spirometer to measure pulmonary capacity.³¹⁶ New devices, beyond the chronometer, entered the classroom to assist teachers in their research.

At UNLP, Mercante expanded his influence in the study of children by mentoring a generation of professors doing research at the laboratory of psychopedagogy.³¹⁷ Mercante's Psychopedagogy class generated multiple studies conducted by student-teachers at Escuela Anexa (annex school), a practice school.³¹⁸

³¹⁴ Gustavo Vallejo, "Damiana en la ciudad de Atenea: Ciencia, género y raza en Argentina," in *Las locas. Miradas interdisciplinarias sobre género y salud mental*, Marisa Miranda ed. (La Plata: EDULP, 2019).

³¹⁵ While cabinet refers to the piece of furniture used in normal and primary schools to store teaching supplies, in context of the school the "gabinete" refers to an auxiliary unit within an institution that provides supplementary or additional help and support. The "gabinete" became known as a "psychopedagogical cabinet" composed by experts on child psychology who analyze children with learning disabilities.

³¹⁶ Inés Dussel, "Víctor Mercante y la producción de un discurso científico sobre la educación." Víctor Mercante, "El examen psíquico," *La Obra*, no. 30, May 20, 1922, 9-10. The Broca compass was developed by French physician, anatomist, and anthropologist Paul Broca (1824-1880). Broca developed the compass as part of his studies on craniometry.

³¹⁷ Lucía Lionetti states that this was a laboratory of psychology. However, researchers counted with anthropometric devices to measure different bodily reactions and it was not reduced to the type of intelligence tests that Mercante used to conduct in the Normal School of Mercedes. As a member of the AABEMS in the 1930s, Mercante recognized his laboratory within the tradition of biotipologists. Lucía Lionetti, "Víctor Mercante: Agente político e intelectual del campo educativo de siglo XX." On Mercante's mentorship see María Cecilia Aguinaga, "Mercante y los alumnos de la sección pedagógica de la UNLP: La formación de discípulos," 5to Congreso Internacional de Investigación de la Facultad de Psicología, La Plata, 2015.

³¹⁸ Mercante described the Colegio and Escuela de Aplicación as "experimental annexes" with three thousand children. This number of students positioned Mercante in a unique position vis-a-vis the

Unlike his experiments at San Juan or Mercedes, at UNLP Mercante was able to organize a network of professors, student-teachers, and devices to study children. His friend Rodolfo Senet, joined his scientific efforts and published numerous articles in *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines*, the journal founded by Mercante in 1906. The journal, which today continues to publish scholarship on education, became an important medium to disseminate the knowledge produced by student-teachers and professors.³¹⁹ The expansion of pedagogical research at UNLP opened publishing opportunities for women who disseminated the results of the classroom experiments.

Classroom experiments at UNLP replicated some procedures of the Mercedes school laboratory, but they also deployed new methods. The experimenters continued to eliminate any element from the desk that could distract children or help them to develop their answers. But the procedures at La Plata presented a more collective approach. At the Liceo de señoritas, Heredia read a story aloud for thirty minutes while children sat at their desks with no items, minimizing potential distractions. Meanwhile, three collaborators sat in the back of the classroom with their pencils, chronometers, and notebooks. Lucía Pereyra, Bertilda Ayarragaray, and Manuel

experiments conducted in other countries. Inés Dussel, “V́ctor Mercante y la producci3n de un discurso cient́fico sobre la educaci3n.”

Archivos de Ciencias de la Educaci3n, no. 8, 2014.

³¹⁹ After 1915 the journal changed the name to *Archivos de Ciencias de la Educaci3n*. *Archivos de Pedagogía* published about a broad range of topics related to education such as the teaching of geography, Spanish, history, geometry, and zoology. Many of the articles that showed how to teach came from Europe, especially England. The most recurring subject of the journal was child psychology. Articles were written by recognized psychiatrists such as Jos3 Ingenieros and Santiago Ram3n y Cajal. Other contributors included important figures of Argentine normalismo such as former principals of the Normal School of Paran3, Leopoldo Herrera and Maximio Victoria, and U.S. teacher Jennie Howard. Mercante’s students were also avid contributors. Leopoldo Herrera, “La popularizaci3n del saber,” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines*, no. 2, 1906; Jennie Howard, “La paz y el arbitraje en las universidades nacionales y colegios norteamericanos,” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines*, no. 3, 1906; Maximio Victoria, “Orientaciones de la educaci3n argentina,” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines*, no. 8, 1907.

Blanco were each in charge of observing one row of desks. Every time a student got distracted, they wrote a horizontal line next to their names, or two lines if the distraction was longer. This collective approach facilitated observation since the experimenters were able to pay more attention to every child's movement.

At La Plata, women actively participated in the study of children. Thus, female teachers were not just implementers of a knowledge developed by their male counterparts. On the contrary, women developed experiments in the classroom and published the results in the scientific journal directed by Mercante. Reflecting gendered hierarchies in the production of knowledge, in some cases, women assisted Senet in the classroom while the latter wrote articles for publication.³²⁰ However, many women built authoritative voices by publishing on experiments that expanded the knowledge of children. Almost twenty women published studies in vision, attention, muscular strength, hearing; psychological pathologies such as phobias, hallucinations, and stigmas alongside those of recognized intellectuals in the field of education and psychology such as José Ingenieros, Santiago Ramón y Cajal, and Gustave Le Bon.³²¹

In comparison with Mercante's previous studies in Mercedes, the new laboratory relied more heavily on anthropometric measurements. Mercante explained that his "anthropometric exam" included a subject's weight, the diameter of the

³²⁰ Rodolfo Senet, "Investigaciones antropológicas. Estadística de la talla, tronco, abertura de brazos, extremidades inferiores y peso por edades y sexos," *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines* 1, no. 3, 1906. For this study Senet counted with the assistance of Isabel Chamans who was in charge of taking the measurements.

³²¹ The list of female contributors include Ana Mauloi, Elvira Gonzalez, Valeriana Astelarra, Evangelina Ayagarray, Isabel Chamans, Celia Heredia, Paulina Stagliano, Celia Gilbert Bergez, Julia Caillat, Victoria Altube, Maria Rachou, Marcelina Astelarra, Sofia Lovera, Maria Teresa Cuello y Lucia Bosque Moreno.

thorax, breadth of the shoulders, circumference of the head, muscular strength, nutrition, hair, eyes, and skin. The ultimate goal of this exam was to determine if a child was “normal.”³²² For this reason, the examiner paid attention to the “stigmas” defined by Mercante as the physical marks that denoted abnormalities. Among the physical characteristics that Mercante advised to register in the notebooks were a narrow forehead, a big and deviated nose, open ears, or a disproportionate mouth, chin, and harelip. Every deviation and irregularity in the face, head or hands were closely scrutinized by the teacher.³²³ Like other researchers of intelligence, Mercante studied cephalic indexes to find connections between bodily characteristics and intelligence. In collaboration with Senet and Chamans, Mercante took measurements of twelve hundred children.³²⁴ The results showed a great variety of measurements among “mesaticephalic,” “brachycephalic” and “hyper brachycephalic” that Mercante understood as a product of the racial mixture of the country.³²⁵ Senet analyzed the size, trunk, arms opening, extremities, and weight according to the age and sex of 548 girls and 623 boys.³²⁶ His goal was to understand at what moment children grew, in

³²² Víctor Mercante “Examen Antropométrico,” *La Obra*, no. 27, April 5, 1922.

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ Víctor Mercante, “Investigaciones craneométricas en los establecimientos nacionales de La Plata (1906),” *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines*, no. 1, 1906.

³²⁵ Following criminologists of his time Mercante explained that the more advanced races were closest to the braquiocefalica because “beyond the intellectual disposition they had impulsivity or energy to translate the act into ideas.” Mercante itemized the children’s race considering only the children’s fathers. There were 102 Spanish, 13 English, 37 Italians, 3 Swiss, 19 Orientals, 2 Germans, 15 French, 1 Portuguese, 3 Belgians, 1 Brazilian, 4 Russians, 1 Greek, 149 Argentinians, and 1 denominated as “autochthonous.”

³²⁶ Rodolfo Senet, “Investigaciones antropológicas. Estadística de la talla, tronco, abertura de brazos, extremidades inferiores y peso por edades y sexos,” *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines* 1, no. 3, 1906.

what periods they grew more rapidly, and the difference between the bodies of girls and boys.³²⁷

The anthropometric studies conducted at UNLP were complemented by psychological exams. Among the factors analyzed in this type of exam were vision, hearing, tactile acuity, sense of location, attention, and memory.³²⁸ Professor of psycho-pedagogical experiments, Isabel Chamans, studied children's vision at the Liceo de Señoritas to determine if children suffered from color blindness.³²⁹ Chamans also studied girls' hearing, asserting that the hearing exam was crucial for educators since it was through this sense that children came into contact with their surroundings.³³⁰ Teachers studied hearing and vision in relation to memory. E. Boscolo and R. Biglieri measured children's visual and auditory memory at the application school for boys.³³¹ Boscolo and Biglieri concluded that students

³²⁷ Other studies of this type include Celia Gibert Bergez "Músculos. Fuerza muscular. Dinamometría. Investigaciones del Colegio de Señoritas," *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines* 4, no. 11, 1908; "Dinamometría. Investigaciones hechas en los establecimientos nacionales de educación de La Plata" *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines* 3, no. 7, 1907; Paulina Stagliano "Estesimetría táctil" *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 4, no. 10, 1908.

³²⁸ Mercante, "Examen psíquico." The experiment on power of localization consisted on the experimenter touching a point in the student's face. Then, students had to recognize where they were touched. The experimenter noticed that children were able to recognize the exact point and in the case of not recognizing the point, they took notes on the distance between the point marked by the experimenter and the point located by the student. Victoria Altube, "Poder de localización," *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 5, no.13, 1909.

³²⁹ Chamans "Visión de los colores. Investigación en niñas de 7 a 14 años de edad," *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 3, no. 7, 1907. Other studies on vision included Valeriana Astelarra, "La visión. Investigaciones en alumnos de la Escuela Normal" *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 4, no. 10, 1908; Evangelina Ayarragaray, "La visión" *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 4, no. 11, 1908; Celia Z. de Heredia "La visión y sus perturbaciones," *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 5, no. 14, 1909.

³³⁰ Isabel Chamans, "La audición. Investigación en el colegio de señoritas," *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines*, vol 4, no 11, 1908.

³³¹ For the study of visual memory, the examiners asked the students to have their hands on the desk and observe with "utmost interest" the fifteen words they showed in signs. Once the examiners gave the order, students were asked to write down all the words that they could remember. The experiment on auditory memory was the same but instead of showing signs, the experimenters spoke the words. E.

reproduced more words when listening than when reading. These studies provided an understanding of children's bodies and minds that showed how the senses affected the process of learning. Thus, they provided knowledge that teachers could use to be attentive to the multiple factors that affected their pedagogical task.

Attention was of particular importance for teachers. They put considerable effort into understanding the circumstances under which children paid attention, how long they could listen to the teacher, and when they experienced fatigue. The results varied. Chamans emphasized children's effort. When children put more effort into paying attention, they identified the sound better. Victoria Altube underscored the teacher's active role. She concluded that when the teacher asked the students to actively pay attention, children were better able to complete the task.³³² Senet concluded that interest was related to attention and suggested that to achieve more stable attention, children needed to be interested in a topic. Senet also measured the duration of attention.³³³ Comparing children with adults, he explained that children had an unstable attention span that "evolved" as they matured.³³⁴ Attention was more stable in adults who could maintain focus on the same topic for longer periods of time. Senet explained this distinction based on the plasticity of children's brains in which the impulses circulated more rapidly. Adults, on the other hand, could remain

Boscolo and R. Biglieri "Memoria visiva y auditiva. Investigación de los alumnos del curso de metodología," *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 1, no. 2, 1906.

³³² Altube, "Poder de localización."

³³³ Senet's experiments were conducted in two grades at the same hour at the beginning of school. The test consisted of Senet's assistant reading aloud a text while Senet took notes when children got distracted. Rodolfo Senet, "La atención y su evolución" *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines* 5, no. 15, 1909.

³³⁴ According to a previous study by Senet, children from 7 to 10 years old paid attention for 20 minutes while attention increased by five minutes in children from 10 to 14 years.

focused for a longer time because of the hardening of the brain's tissues.

Complementary to Senet's studies, Celia Z. de Heredia and her assistants noticed that students paid more attention after the tenth minute, when the reading was more interesting. Heredia noted that the period of attention after the first distraction was shorter while the period of distraction increased.³³⁵ While the results did not determine the type of teaching practices teachers should adopt in the classroom, the articles shaped the conception that teachers should ask children to pay attention and consider children's natural inclination to get distracted as they prepared their lessons.

The emphasis on attention, reflects the approach of Argentine teachers to study intelligence from the analysis of complex intellectual abilities. Celia Heredia linked intelligence to attention in a study conducted at the Liceo de Señoritas using the "cancellation method." The method consisted of providing a piece of paper with text to students and asking them to cross-out all the letters "a." The teacher measured how quickly the student executed the task, their accuracy in canceling the letters, and their level of attention. Each day Heredia took four students out of the classroom and asked them to conduct this exercise while she timed it. After the students finished, she counted the errors and then calculated the percentage of errors. Heredia confirmed that "non-intelligent" children made more mistakes than the "intelligent" ones. Yet, the distinction between intelligent and non-intelligent students was based on students' grades and behavior. In this sense, the study seemed to confirm what the teachers already thought about the students. Heredia's study on intelligence differed from Mercante's first experiments in the sense that intelligent students were defined not

³³⁵ Heredia, "Estudios psicopedagógicos. Investigaciones acerca de la atención."

only by their knowledge or response to a specific test but depended on a more integral evaluation of the student. Heredia concluded that attention was “the key to acquiring knowledge.”³³⁶ She also observed that attention is the medium through which we remember the known things and asserted that “exercise leads better and more easily to the synergy on which practical skill depends; necessary for the perfection of art, industry, science; that is indispensable for the progress, not only of a class, but of science in general.”³³⁷ Drawing on other studies on attention, Heredia observed when students made more mistakes and found that fatigue caused errors and habit led to better answers. Observing one student Heredia explained: “At first, until she got used to work, she made many mistakes that decreased in the second part and increased in the last, an effect of the fatigue that all continued work produces.”³³⁸

Studies on intelligence provided teachers with scientific categories to characterize children and to identify the “abnormal.”³³⁹ Chamans affirmed that it was important for teachers to know whether children were “mentally awake or slow” in order to give them the appropriate education.³⁴⁰ Celia Z. de Heredia agreed that the teacher’ responsibilities was to know children’s “abnormalities.”³⁴¹ The classifications used by teachers included intelligence but also expanded to other concepts coming from psychological and physical observations. For instance, Heredia

³³⁶ Ibid., 239.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid., 236-237.

³³⁹ Inés Dussel argues that one of Mercante’s important legacies is the construction of a laboratory related with the construction of knowledge where new categories and subjects were created. Inés Dussel, “V́ctor Mercante y la producci3n de un discurso cient́fico sobre la educaci3n.”

³⁴⁰ Isabel Chamans, “La audici3n. Investigaci3n en el colegio de seńoritas,” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines*, vol 4, no 11, 1908, 204.

³⁴¹ Heredia “La visi3n y sus perturbaciones,” 178.

labeled students as “attentive” or “*viva/o*” (vivacious) in order to denote intelligence.³⁴² Heredia described one of her students as “intelligent, *viva*, although somewhat restless, she cannot be still; this itself indicates an easy perception and quick assimilation.”³⁴³ Another student was the “type of attentive girl, lover of work, eager to satisfy her teachers, always follows orders and complies well; she has self-esteem and does everything she can not to detract from the concept of her superiors.”³⁴⁴ In contrast to these students, Heredia described a student who made more mistakes on the cancellation test as “mediocre” and “inattentive.” Reproducing Mercante’s vision of what counted as knowledge, these classifications failed to consider other factors that could interfere with children’s attention. For instance, the same girl that Heredia described as “inattentive” wanted to finish the test quickly in order to go back to the classroom where they were teaching math. Thus, the student’s lack of attention to the exercise could have reflected her interest in returning to class with her classmates. Moreover, through the experiments teachers gave a scientific character to what they conceived as positive characteristics in a student, such as assimilating knowledge and respecting superiors.

Through experimental studies, teachers sought to find formulas that assured disciplined, attentive, and motivated students. The school had to prepare children for life, and for the majority of the children attending public schools, their destiny after finishing school was work. Thus, teachers believed that discipline was beneficial for

³⁴² In Spanish “*viva*” literally translates to “alive,” but it was used as a category to define children considered as attentive and expressive.

³⁴³ Celia Z. de Heredia, “Estudios psicopedagógicos. Investigaciones acerca de la atención,” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 3, no. 8, 1907, 238.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 237.

their students' future. Julio Moreno looked for teaching formulas that could counteract what he considered an undisciplined classroom, a product of the "heterogeneity of subjects."³⁴⁵ He wrote: "I need a simple treatise that tells me what the best disciplinary means are; how to proceed in this or that case; how the heart is moved and feelings are awakened; how character is formed and intelligence is disciplined."³⁴⁶ While the experiments showed the obstacles in defining and classifying intelligence, educators continued looking for formulas that could simplify their pedagogical labor. Moreno recognized that it was difficult for teachers to conduct experiments but the attempt to better understand children was worth it. In 1907, Moreno published the results of his experiments on fifth grade boys in an article titled "Psycho-Moral Study." To show his findings, he created seven tables, although not all of them were published. Moreno evaluated students based on their "tendencies" to steal and lie along with their "feeling of property" and "cruelty instincts." His chart included the category "abnormality" and compliance with duty.

To assess children's abilities to work, Moreno combined anthropometric, psychological, and humoral frameworks. Under the title "Organic Exam" Moreno studied physiognomy, nutrition, temperament, skin color, bodily constitution, muscular strength, weight, height, and resistance to intellectual fatigue (See figure

³⁴⁵ He wrote "a simple inspection of the preceding tables clearly demonstrates the complete heterogeneity of the subjects. An extensive curve, within which the most varied types can be placed, whether they are considered physically, morally or intellectually." Julio del C. Moreno, "Estudio psico-moral de un grado. El 5to de la Escuela Graduada Anexa," *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 2, no. 7, 1907, 292.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 292,301.

1).³⁴⁷ The chart demonstrated the varied methods utilized to classify children. Physiognomy, nutrition, and skin color were filled out based on Moreno's observations on children's bodies. Moreno observed bodily characteristics and classified students since he believed children "carry in their faces the seal of all trends and all races."³⁴⁸ Moreno asked questions about children's inheritance and social environment at home.³⁴⁹ For the anthropometric exam, Moreno measured cephalic indexes, muscular strength and weight. Under the category "physiognomy," he assessed children's personality by classifying them into twelve categories that included "apathetic," "indifferent," "humble," "viva," "intelligent," "happy," and "stupid."³⁵⁰ Nutrition was classified on a scale of four categories from "optimal," to "bad." From the thirty nine children studied, eighteen exhibited "good" nutrition according to the teacher, and only one was classified as "optimal." Moreno, however, did not reflect on the fact that, at least from his perspective, half of the classroom lacked appropriate nutrition nor did he consider the effects that hunger could have on children's muscular strength or attention. Humoral ideas can be observed in categories such as temperament where he classified students as "lymphatic," "bilious," and

³⁴⁷ Skin color was divided into "black," "white" and "morena" (dark-skinned). Within the constitution Moreno classified children into four groups: strong, good, regular, and weak. In "resistance to fatigue," Moreno divided his students into five categories from "good" to "very few."

³⁴⁸ Moreno, "Estudio psico-moral de un grado," 301.

³⁴⁹ The "conditions of the home," included the parents' professions and their religions. Although Moreno noted that it was a hard aspect to study since "it was not correct to directly ask children about the economic, moral, or hygienic conditions of their homes." Yet, Moreno asserted: "Companions who responded to skillfully directed questions, the dress, the care, order and cleanliness of the students, as well as some experiences recommended by Mr. Mercante with happy results, have provided me with precious data." Moreno, "Estudio psico-moral de un grado. El 5to de la Escuela Graduada Anexa," 290.

³⁵⁰ The entire list of categories were: complex, happy, cuasi-indifferent, indifferent, uninterested, humble, irascible, *viva*, *viva*-movible-variable, indefinite, cuasi-stupid, and intelligent.

“sanguineous.”³⁵¹ Along with other articles published in *Archivos de Pedagogia*, Moreno’s article is illustrative of the broad range of variables that teachers considered to study childhood and the methods they utilized to arrive at general conclusions about the school population.

This section showed that Argentine teachers were avid participants in the study of globally developed intelligence. The study of children’s minds suffered transformations from 1890, when Mercante conducted his first experiment in a normal school classroom of San Juan, to the prolific studies published at *Archivos de Pedagogía*. While not all studies arrived at the same conclusions, Mercante’s influence on the study of children gave teachers a new scientific status as producers of knowledge. The next section links the study of normal with “abnormal” children, following Mercante’s study on criminalized children. The classroom laboratory expanded outside the borders of the school.

³⁵¹ Rebecca Earle studies how since the colonial period humoral ideas shaped racial understanding of racial difference. Humoralism stated that the human body was governed by a balance of four humors (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, black bile). These humors in turn possessed certain qualities (hot/cold, dry/moist), as well as seasonal and astrological associations. Humoral theory believed that the balance of humors determined the health, character, and bodily qualities of an individual. Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race, and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

EXAMEN GENERAL ORGÁNICO

Tabla N° 3

| Nº de orden | APELLIDO Y NOMBRE | Fisonomía | Nutrición | Temperamento | Calor de la piel | Constitución | Fuerza muscular (U) | Peso (a) | Altura (b) | Resistencia á la fatiga intelectual |
|-------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------------|----------|------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | A. H. | compleja | regular | linfático | blanca | regular | 17 | 31.90 | 1446 | regular |
| 2 | A. C. | alegre | buena | bilioso | negra | buena | 21 | 50.20 | 1555 | buena |
| 3 | A. P. | cuasi-ind. | > | cuasi-sang. | blanca | > | 18 | 40.30 | 1461 | poca |
| 4 | A. A. | indiferen. | escasa | indefinido | morena | regular | — | 31.30 | 1384 | muy poca |
| 5 | A. C. | apático | regular | > | blanca | > | 19 | 42.20 | 1483 | regular |
| 6 | A. A. | humilde | buena | > | morena | fuerte | — | — | 1546 | buena |
| 7 | B. P. | irascible | mala | linfático | blanca | débil | 31 | 50.00 | 1640 | poca |
| 8 | B. M. Z. | > | > | > | > | > | 12 | 31.10 | 1413 | regular |
| 9 | B. R. | apático | buena | cuasi-sang. | > | fuerte | 15 | 30.95 | 1432 | escasa |
| 10 | C. C. | viva | regular | indefinido | morena | regular | 16 | 28.10 | 1347 | buena |
| 11 | C. L. | apático | > | > | > | buena | 28 | 48.35 | 1465 | escasa |
| 12 | C. G. | alegre | buena | > | blanca | > | 17 | 36.80 | 1441 | regular |
| 13 | C. A. | apático | mala | cuasi-linf. | > | débil | 14 | 34.00 | 1441 | escasa |
| 14 | D. J. | indefinida | escasa | linfático | > | > | 15 | 37.00 | 1314 | regular |
| 15 | D. O. | indiferen. | buena | indefinido | > | fuerte | 21 | 45.40 | 1606 | > |
| 16 | E. S. | apático | > | > | morena | regular | 17 | 31.30 | 1068 | — |
| 17 | F. J. | viva-movible variable | > | sanguin. | blanca | fuerte | 20 | 37.70 | 1493 | regular |
| 18 | G. R. | irascible | regular | indefinido | > | regular | 17 | 36.05 | 1455 | buena |
| 19 | G. M. | alegre | buena | sanguin. | > | fuerte | 21 | 41.70 | 1525 | — |
| 20 | G. J. | indefinida | > | indefinido | > | > | 28 | 57.30 | 1640 | regular |
| 21 | G. B. | intelligen. | regular | nervioso | > | regular | 18 | 36.60 | 1578 | grande |
| 22 | L. J. | > | buena | cuasi-nerioso | > | > | — | 31.400 | 1412 | > |
| 23 | M. A. | alegre irascible | regular | indif. | > | > | 16 | 33.70 | 1428 | regular |
| 24 | M. L. | irascible | mala | > | > | débil | 21 | 40.05 | 1575 | escasa |
| 25 | M. J. | viva | óptima | > | > | fuerte | 21 | 38.70 | 1465 | buena |
| 26 | M. D. | intelligen. | buena | cuasi-sang. indif. | morena | regular | 16 | 27.25 | 1315 | > |
| 27 | M. C. | apático | regular | > | blanca | > | 16 | 34.40 | 1500 | escasa |
| 28 | N. T. | indefinida | > | > | > | > | 23 | 48.00 | 1567 | bastante |
| 29 | P. J. | apático | buena | > | > | buena | 40 | 56.80 | 1656 | > |
| 30 | Q. R. | indefinida | > | > | > | regular | 16 | 30.90 | 1399 | escasa |
| 31 | R. T. | indiferen. | regular | > | > | > | 18 | 33.75 | 1405 | regular |
| 32 | S. J. | cuasi-estúpida | escasa | > | morena | débil | 31 | — | — | escasísima |

Image 1: Examen general orgánico

Source: Julio del C. Moreno, “Estudio psico-moral de un grado. El 5to de la Escuela Graduada Anexa,” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 2, no. 7, 1907.

From the School to the Prison: Mercante’s Study on Child Criminality

Parallel to the founding of schools, the national government built another type of disciplinary institution. Just as the schools offered a space to study childhood, the prison opened the door for the study of criminals. In the 1870s Cesare Lombroso, the father of modern criminology, had provided a model to understand the connections between bodily characteristics and criminality. Criminals, as his study apparently

proved, had the same physical and moral traits as primitive man.³⁵² Doctoral dissertations in medicine and public lectures in criminal law contributed to the study of criminals.³⁵³ Argentine criminology developed with the introduction of new technologies. In 1899, the Office of Anthropometric Identification implemented, for the first time in Latin America, a system created by Alphonse Bertillon for identifying and archiving prisoners' corporal measurements.³⁵⁴ Anthropologist Juan Vucetich advanced the study of criminals by pioneering the use of dactyloscopy.³⁵⁵ As Lila Caimari explained, criminologists believed that from knowing the particularities of each criminal, it would be possible to arrive at the ultimate causes of their actions. The promise of individualization of criminals and the ability to identify them, defused the fear of crime in cities around the world.

Argentina was the home of the most prestigious Latin American journal in the study of criminals. *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines* (heretofore *Archivos de psiquiatría*) disseminated scientific knowledge regarding the “abnormal, especially the criminal man and the mentally ill.”³⁵⁶

³⁵² Andrés Galera, “La escuela criminológica italiana. Determinismo y patología del delito” in Gustavo Vallejo and Marisa Miranda ed. *Políticas del cuerpo. Estrategias modernas de normalización del individuo y la sociedad*, (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI editora, 2007).

³⁵³ The first of dozens of medical theses started in 1883 with Pedro Alacer's “Madness and crime.” Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina*.

³⁵⁴ Caimari, *Apenas un delincuente*.

³⁵⁵ Juan Vucetich was born in 1858 in what today is Croatia. He learned about the first dactylary experimentations by Galton published in *Review Scientific* in May 1891. In order to develop dactyloscopy, he drew on mathematics and representations of the body along with photography. Vucetich developed his activities in the Buenos Aires Police Department. He was a co-founder of the Museo Social Argentino. Gustavo Vallejo and Marisa Miranda, “Los saberes del poder: Eugenesia y biotipología en la Argentina del siglo XX,” *Revista de Indias* 231 (2004): 425-444.

³⁵⁶ The journal was founded under the title *Archivos de criminalología, psiquiatría y medicina legal*. Later the italian word “criminalología” was changed to “criminología” and in 1903 changed again to *Archivos de psiquiatría, criminología y ciencias afines*, making explicit the centrality of psychiatry. Moreover they added the subtitle “Legal Medicine, Sociology, Law, Psychology, Pedagogy.” In 1908 the title changed to *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines*. Alejandra

Archivos de psiquiatría was born in 1902, out a collaboration between Francisco de Veyga and José Ingenieros, who worked together under the mentorship of José Ramos Mejía in the Sala de Observación de Alienados (Mentally-Ill Observation Room) founded in 1899 by the Buenos Aires Police.³⁵⁷ Mercante met Ingenieros in 1898 and years later he invited him to contribute to the journal.³⁵⁸ Other collaborators contributed to the study of deaf, “retarded,” and criminal children.³⁵⁹

Mercante’s study of children was influenced by the conversations circulating in the field of criminology. The Mercedes prison, founded in 1877 by Nicolás Avellaneda, offered Mercante the possibility of expanding his studies on childhood.³⁶⁰ He tested the theories of Italian criminologists Lombroso and Enrico Morselli (1852-1929). The latter was a professor of psychiatry and experimental psychology in the University of Genova. Morselli taught his students that regardless of the exaggerations and gaps in Lombrosian theory, there was still value in conceptualizing criminality as caused by “a particular constitution, physical and of

Mailhe, *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología. Concepciones de la alteridad social y del sujeto femenino* (La Plata: UNLP, 2016), 15.

³⁵⁷ The “Observation Room” gathered people considered a threat to public order. It functioned as an appendix of the Legal Medicine course taught by Francisco de Veyga at Universidad de Buenos Aires. Hernán Gustavo Elcovich and Pablo Rodríguez Sturla, “Medicina y criminología: la sala de observación de alienados,” VI Congreso Internacional de Investigación y Práctica Profesional en Psicología, XXI Jornadas de Investigación Décimo Encuentro de Investigadores en Psicología del MERCOSUR, Facultad de Psicología, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, 2014.

³⁵⁸ Mercante, *Una vida realizada*.

³⁵⁹ Bartolomé Ayrolo, “Educación de sordo mudos en Argentina,” *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines*, 1902; Víctor Mercante “Estudios de Fisiopatología Infantil” *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines* 5, 1906; José Picado “Educación de los niños retardados,” *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines* 6, 1907.

³⁶⁰ “Unidad 05. Mercedes,” Servicio Penitenciario Bonaerense, last accessed May 13, 2022, <http://www.spb.gba.gov.ar/site/index.php/unidad-05-mercedes>.

the personality.”³⁶¹ For this reason, it was convenient to study the complete individuality of criminals in their somatic, physiology, and mental characters.”³⁶² As criminologists, Mercante adhered to Lombroso’s ideas, and Morselli’s approach that combined the physical and psychological analysis of criminals.³⁶³ In Mercante’s words, the prison proved to be a “field of unexploited richness for the complete study of men, whose childhood is generally ignored.”³⁶⁴ It represented a unique opportunity to further investigate the factors that influenced intelligence and the role of schooling shaping children’s behavior. In the prison, Mercante was able to study “another type” of children who deviated from the norm, different from those he encountered in the classroom.

Children were, according to the positivist school of criminology, potential criminals. Mercante conceptualized children following phylogenesis, a branch of evolutionary biology that associated childhood with a primitive humanity and a natural tendency to criminality. In his first article on the topic published in *Archivos de psiquiatría*, Mercante asserted that children were not models of goodness; on the contrary, positivists had demonstrated their defects including envy, vanity, and selfishness. He defined children as “an abundant and nuanced flora of cruelties,

³⁶¹ Enrico Morselli, *Antropologia generale, l’ uomo secondo la teoria dell’ evoluzione*, quoted in Galera, “La escuela criminológica italiana. Determinismo y patología del delito,” 134.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Dussel, “Víctor Mercante y la producción de un discurso científico sobre la educación.” According to Alfredo Ferreira, Mercante’s laboratory was based on Lombroso’s experimental psychology. Horacio Malter Terrada, “Prólogo” in Mercante, *Una vida realizada*, 9.

³⁶⁴ Víctor Mercante, “Notas sobre criminología infantil,” *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines*, vol. 1, 1902, 34. I consulted this source at the National Library in Buenos Aires where the multiple issues of the journal are compiled in volumes. I could not access information regarding the month of publication or the issue number. Mercante published a total of four articles in 1902, some of them with the same title.

intrigues, ambitions, hatred, revenge, depredations, lies, jealousy, anger, betrayal, whims, brawls, vices, violent desires, sudden impulses, unstable and fickle consciences, that at a given moment conclude in crime”³⁶⁵ Unlike children, adults had developed “inhibitory centers” that reduced the impulses to a latent state and therefore even the criminal or mentally ill adult was better than children. However, along with other collaborators in the journal, Mercante believed that children could overcome their primitive stage with the proper education and home influence.³⁶⁶ It was through education, Mercante asserted, that children could eliminate the “defensive weapons” that were not useful in a “civilized world.”³⁶⁷

Drawing on his experience conducting intelligence tests in the classroom, Mercante expanded his research to understand criminals. Mercante suggested that “no regularly trained teacher, who when observing the class carefully for the first time, fails to point out the quarrelsome, the inattentive, the liar, the intelligent, the quiet, the shy and other types of the school flora.”³⁶⁸ The practice school trained teachers to closely observe children and the pedagogical research developed by Mercante provided the methods to classify children into mental and moral categories. In the prison, Mercante paid attention to factors that did not appear in his *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño*. His main goal was to determine the factors that explain

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ For instance, a legal professor at Universidad de Córdoba asserted that the solutions to criminality should be preventive and asserted that with a modern education, immigrants arriving to the country could be properly adapted to Argentine society. Moyano Gacitúa “Sobre la delincuencia argentina ante algunas cifras y teorías” *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología*, 1905.

³⁶⁷ Mercante, “Notas sobre criminología infantil,” 34.

³⁶⁸ For instance Mercante argued against the investigation of León Maupate who conducted a study based on fifty five children. The author arrived at conclusions that contradicted Lombrosian theories that associated criminality with physiological characteristics. Mercante asserted that based on the number of children studied, his conclusions were “more adventurous than true.” Ibid., 36.

children's criminal behavior. In order to do so, he pondered the influence of inheritance and the environment. The methods utilized in the prison differed from the ones he used in the classroom laboratory. He tested prisoners on language, mathematics, history, and geography, but he also conducted personalized interviews with the prisoners asking for information about childhood, the family's clinical history, previous working experiences, and the specifics regarding the crimes they had committed. Unlike his research in the school, he did not conduct tests on a broad population. Instead, he interviewed four male prisoners, all of whom were sons of poor immigrants or immigrants themselves between 15 and 18 years old, who arrived in Buenos Aires at an early age and were imprisoned under accusations of robbery and homicide.

In the study of child criminality, race was a factor of enormous importance. As historian Julia Rodríguez asserts, the term race in criminological thought referred to phenotypic categories as much as ethnic or national groups.³⁶⁹ In Mercante's articles, race appeared as the first variable mentioned to describe the prisoners. It is possible to assume that this hierarchy of information as presented in the articles, suggested that inheritance and not environment played a more determinant role in explaining criminality. Yet, Mercante's conclusions did not present an unilateral explanation for criminal behavior. Drawing on Dr. Angiolella of Italy, Mercante defined race as a group of individuals distinguishable from other groups due to their common physical characteristics, psychological organization, or habits. Under this section, Mercante included information about the parents' nationality, occupation,

³⁶⁹ Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina*.

and past diseases. In addition, Mercante described the prisoner's race along with other categories such as "temperament," "tendency," and "physical factor." Therefore, race was associated with bodily characteristics (both physical and psychological) as much as it was linked with the incorporation of certain habits. Mercante concluded that if racial differences affected science, art, politics, and religion, they also had an influence on crime.

Based on their facial features, Mercante classified prisoners under types. "Observable facts" such as their noses and mouths appeared in Mercante's description. Mercante classified prisoner D as a *zínvaro* (gypsy). J. M. was of the "pure *criollo* type" with the physiognomy of a "robust indian."³⁷⁰ He was of medium height with a slight prognathism and brachycephaly.³⁷¹ The only disease that J. M. had suffered was smallpox, since rural populations were, according to Mercante, "negligent in prophylactic measures."³⁷² J.M.'s facial features showed signs of abnormality such as having a thin and straight nose with "extraordinary development," protruding lower lip, small mouth with large teeth, and prognathism. Physical appearance gave the examiner at least some indicators that "latent impulses" had been carried over for generations. Criminal children could show signs of atavism, a trait that reappeared after being lost in previous generations.³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Víctor Mercante, "Estudios de criminología infantil," *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines*, vol. 1, 1902, 409.

³⁷¹ Prognathism refers to an extension of the lower jaw and brachycephaly also known as "flat head syndrome" happens when the back of the head becomes flattened, causing the head to widen, and occasionally the forehead bulges out.

³⁷² *Ibid.*

³⁷³ Mercante criticized León Maupate's reading of Lombroso when he concluded that there were no distinctive traits for each criminal variation and no lineal relationship between criminality and bodily characteristics such as malformations.

Under the scrutiny of the observer, the physical appearance of prisoners confirmed the assumption that Italians were a criminal race. For instance, D was a prisoner originally from Salerno. This place of origin was of crucial importance since Mercante drew on criminologists such as Scipio Sighele and Lombroso who concluded that there was more criminality in the south of Italy due to the past dominance of Phoenician, Arab, and Albanian peoples. D proved this hypothesis since he was a short, dark-skinned boy with the “ethnic characteristics” of the African and Arab races.³⁷⁴ D confirmed Ferri’s theories that the distribution of crime coincided with the distribution of races and that people of color were “more prone to crime than whites and the Latino race more than the Anglo-Saxon.”³⁷⁵ According to Mercante, D’s race was the main cause of his “abnormal nature” and explained the “the latent degree of certain instincts that any circumstance can quickly turn into active ones.”³⁷⁶

However, while Mercante pondered physical traits in uncovering atavism, he gave environmental factors a major importance. The environment played a decisive role in either awakening or keeping dormant children’s primitive instincts. Under the variable “social environment,” Mercante listed the prisoners’ nationality and whether they adapted to Argentina. Mercante introduced D as the most interesting of the minors due to the “diverse environments that he went through and because the crime

³⁷⁴ Victor Mercante, “Estudios de criminología infantil,” *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines*, vol. 1, 1902, 463.

³⁷⁵ Victor Mercante, “Estudios sobre criminalidad infantil,” *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines*, vol. 1, 1902, 568.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 569.

is due exclusively to adaptation factors.”³⁷⁷ D’s journey was similar to Mercante’s with the difference that D was born in Italy. After migrating when he was two and half years old, D moved back to Italy at age five, returning to Buenos Aires at age eight. For Mercante, D could not adapt properly to Argentine society. The local “social environment” was unknown to D, unlike Italy, where he “completely adapted” playing with children of the “same race, temperament and way of being.”³⁷⁸ But Mercante failed to see that D’s reason for imprisonment likely had less to do with lack of adaptation than with the violence that poor immigrant children encountered at the turn of the century in Buenos Aires. D’s story is representative of this violence. He was accused of homicide because he defended himself from an attack from twelve to fifteen men in his neighborhood. D asked Mercante: “What was I going to do? Was I going to be killed? Many surrounded me and I had to defend myself because I could not run away.”³⁷⁹

The domestic environment was another variable under consideration. For Mercante, education was the main tool to transform savage children into civilized adults and therefore the education children received at home influenced their behavior. The home had the potential to properly educate or to degenerate children. The influence of the home was a crucial factor of analysis in immigrant homes due to the threat posed by socialist and anarchist movements. Italian and Spanish immigrants joined socialist and anarchist activities in large numbers that could negatively influence children’s education. Accounts of the criminality of anarchists abounded in

³⁷⁷ Mercante, “Estudios de criminología infantil,” 463.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 465.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. The story of D is also narrated by Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh*.

periodicals and even in *Archivos de psiquiatría*. A collaborator asserted that the issue with immigrants was that they stayed in Buenos Aires and other capitals, “living in union and promiscuity with their countrymen, fomenting strikes and disorders, serving as agitating elements, and entering in contact with the worker that already existed there; and with this mechanism we see clearly the emergence of an oversaturation of homicides, injuries, indecent assaults, strikes, and, above all, fraud and theft in our big cities.”³⁸⁰ The concern about immigrants and strikes was a response to increasing organization among workers and strikes as an emerging practice of the first unions in the country.³⁸¹ Between 1902 and 1910 socialist and anarchist workers promoted numerous strikes.³⁸² In response, the government passed the Residency Law (1902) that banned immigrants from political activity and deported “undesirable” immigrants to their home countries. However, none of the children imprisoned confirmed the hypothesis that the home critically influenced child criminality.

Mercante’s analysis on the home environment considered whether children were taught to work, attend to mass, and avoid vices. For instance, Mercante described D’s home as having “no vices.”³⁸³ His father taught D to never get into

³⁸⁰ Gacitúa “Sobre la delincuencia argentina ante algunas cifras y teorías,” 172.

³⁸¹ Chapter four looks in more detail the emergence of a working class movement in Argentina and the relationship between the anarchist and socialist movement with the educational alternatives developed by educators.

³⁸² Juan Suriano mentions seven anarchist-led strikes during this period among them the streetcar workers in 1902, the port workers, machinist and ship stokers in 1904 and 1905, and the cart drivers workers in 1903 and 1906. Other contentious mobilizations in the streets included the May Day in 1904 and 1905 and the demonstration on behalf of political prisoners in 1910. Juan Suriano, *Paradoxes of Utopia. Anarchist Culture and Politics in Buenos Aires 1890-1910* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010). For more on the influence of anarchism in the emergence of Argentine unions see Iacov Oved, *El anarquismo y el movimiento obrero en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2013).

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

trouble with the police. He examined “D”’s breath and as a result D did not smoke. In addition, D attended mass every Sunday when he was not working. D had worked at several jobs including a hat factory, a carpenter’s workshop, and a beer factory. He attended his jobs with punctuality and worked from 6am to 6pm. At 7pm, when he arrived home he rested or visited his cousin who read the news out loud or taught him arithmetic. For this reason, Mercante portrayed D in a positive manner. He wrote that D had “respectable behavior with good moral principles.”³⁸⁴ Yet, despite all the positive influences of the domestic environment, D became a criminal, a reason that Mercante understood as evidence of the powerful effect of inheritance. In other cases, Mercante was ambivalent in describing the home environment. Prisoner G was a 16-year-old child of Italians whose father was, according to Mercante, an honorable man from Toscana, a “normal type” of “sanguineous temperament” and regular stature, tranquil, and attentive to his business. G’s mother, however, died due to tuberculosis. She was short, prone to ire, and did not present a “balanced functioning of her faculties, a consequence, no doubt, of her nervous weakness.”³⁸⁵ G did not gamble but had smoked tobacco since he was 15. G attended mass regularly and said his prayers daily. Mercante recognized a virtuous home of working parents since G’s father encouraged him to become a painter although he also asserted that G’s home was violent, “bilious,” and with continuous quarrels.

As prisoners told their stories, Mercante observed their tone and feelings attempting to arrive at a psychological profile of the interviewee. This was the case of

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Mercante, “Notas sobre criminalología infantil,” 37.

J.M., forced to live on a farm in Junín since he was three and a half years old. J.M. took care of the animals, “a primitive task,” according to Mercante. J.M. was not paid for his labor and was whipped frequently by the farm’s owner. In an ironic tone, Mercante described J.M.’s employer as “delicate” but he did not find in his abusive home environment a reason for J.M.’s criminality. In the end, Mercante concluded, the domestic environment was “rigid but could not be corrupting.”³⁸⁶ In addition, J.M. did not have vices. He barely left the farm during his 14 year stay. He never attended popular spectacles and his only friends were three workmen from the farm. J.M. was accused of robbery. Without knowing the value of money, J.M. declared that he thought he was grabbing twenty pesos when in fact it was a thousand pesos bill. J.M. used the money to buy clothing for himself and returned the rest of the money, a total of 600 pesos. He confessed to the crime and had no hard feelings or accusations. Mercante asked J.M. why he stayed even when he was a victim of the employer’s violence to which J.M. replied: “What do you want me to do?” assuring that he had “no heart” for escaping.³⁸⁷ Mercante concluded that J.M. had a tranquil character with human feelings of affection that could not get confused with the bestial instincts of a criminal.³⁸⁸

If the domestic environment played an ambivalent role in Mercante’s accounts, the role of the school became a central variable to explain prisoner’s behavior. He considered that the knowledge that children acquired in school was crucial for making decisions that could lead them into prison. To measure the

³⁸⁶Mercante, “Estudios de criminología infantil,” 409.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 410.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

school's influence, Mercante conducted a series of tests on prisoners. Unlike in the school experiments, Mercante did not provide details of the tests; he only communicated his conclusions. Yet, it is possible to assume that Mercante applied similar tests to the ones he conducted in the classroom. Mercante measured children's knowledge on multiple subjects such as writing and reading. For instance, he asked D to add, multiply, and write a composition about the factory where he worked. Mercante analyzed D's abilities to draw and read. Although Mercante did not contextualize the difficulty that Italian immigrant children experienced in the school due to language, he textually transcribed D's writing as evidence of D's multiple grammar errors.³⁸⁹ In other subjects such as history, anatomy, physiology, and geography D lacked knowledge. He read at the level of a first grade student and wrote with difficulty. Despite his almost nonexistent formal education, D learned from his cousin to add, subtract, and multiply. He also wrote and read numbers up to one million. Due to his mathematical knowledge, fundamental in Mercante's understanding of intelligence, D was characterized as having a "robust intellect."³⁹⁰ Mercante speculated that had he gone to school, D would have been among the best students in his class. But D worked at a factory and did not receive the benefits of schooling.

As in the case of D, other prisoners' stories proved that the lack of schooling put children in a precarious situation. J.M. attended school for nine days. As a result,

³⁸⁹ Today is February 7th. I was examined in various subjects such as reading and writing." In Spanish D wrote "joi-es-le-dia-7 fe-ve ro, fui e-sa-mi-na-do en va-rio-ra-mo-co-se-le-que-tu-ra e qui-tu-ratcue-ta." Mercante, "Estudios de criminología infantil," 467.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

Mercante described him as a “tabula rasa,” an image that characterized the children’s mind as a blank page with no knowledge.³⁹¹ Although J.M. developed an experiential knowledge that helped him to recognize the cardinal points and count sheep, Mercante labeled him as lacking knowledge. In Mercante’s words, J.M. was a “typical case of ignorance due to the lack of cultivation.”³⁹² J.M. confessed to Mercante that he would have liked to attend school if someone had sent him. That J.M. did not consider running away or consider the consequences of his actions, was explained through reference to J.M.’s “rudimentary logic.”³⁹³

Mercante interviewed the prisoners’ school teachers to assess their capacity to learn. According to his former teacher, G had attended school for six years but acquired only the knowledge of a regular second grade student. G’s teacher described him as of “obtuse intelligence,” the worst student in his class.³⁹⁴ Yet, the teacher recognized that G was not as “undisciplined, talkative, or turbulent as others.”³⁹⁵ G’s passiveness, however, was described as a negative characteristic according to his teacher. G had “no joy, emotions, activity, he did not laugh nor cry.”³⁹⁶ Based on these assertions, Mercante did not arrive at any positive conclusion about G’s physical and psychological abilities. G lacked memory and attention; he could not learn properly in school or at his job, and he even lacked developed senses. Mercante

³⁹¹ Mercante, “Estudios de criminología infantil,” 409.

³⁹² Ibid., 410.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Mercante, “Notas sobre criminología infantil,” 38.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

evaluated the prisoners' "perceptive attitudes." G did not distinguish between savory or sweet flavors, nor differentiate between rose and jasmine.

Mercante's practices in the prison resembled his studies at the school laboratory. Despite the importance of physical features, Mercante measured the prisoners beyond their physical traits, attempting to classify them by "mental age." This classification was almost the equivalent of the grade that D would have received after performing school exercises.³⁹⁷ Mercante's expertise in the school and the belief that experimental psychology led to revealing what was hidden in the child's spirit contributed to an explanation of crime that exceeded bodily characteristics measured by criminologists. The practices in the classroom laboratories allowed Mercante to classify the prisoners not only based on their appearance but on what prisoners knew, an equally measurable feature under the expert eye of the teacher. Still, Mercante diagnosed prisoners using the psychological terms used among his criminologist colleagues. Mercante's description of G included a long list of pathologies. Based on his physical and psychological analysis, Mercante recognized in G a victim of "fits of rage," violent impulses, psychic weakness, and color blindness. J.M. suffered from amnesia, slow reasoning, moral insensibility, and strabismus.

But as much as Mercante's articles complicated the understanding of the relationship between inheritance and environment, he also acknowledged that the school could not completely solve the issue of criminality. His articles demonstrate the tension present in the scientific community between inheritance and environment as determinants of behavior and evolution. Mercante explained J.M.'s criminality

³⁹⁷ During this period, grades were called "classifications"

because of his “rudimentary mind,” the product of both “inheritance and adaptation.”³⁹⁸ In other cases children's criminality was determined by inheritance and no environmental action could counteract what was already in the children's minds. This was Mercante's conclusion for G. He affirmed that the school “could do nothing against the coerced inheritance of the criminal.”³⁹⁹ For other cases, schooling became crucial. The ultimate cause for D's imprisonment was not his “race” but the fact that the school was “insignificant” in the prisoner's life. Because of the lack of schooling, D could not harmonically develop his aptitudes to reason and become familiar with Argentine children. At the same time, Mercante asserted that the prisoner showed “atavist stigmas” and his character was a result “almost exclusively” of the anthropological factor, “in other words, his race.”⁴⁰⁰

Even when the school could not always prove to be the only determinant of criminality, it was clear that at least the school had the possibility of positively influencing children. Aligned with the many contributors at *Archivos de psiquiatría*, Mercante defended the idea that the school could prevent criminality. With the appropriate training and constant work, children could be transformed. A school that properly developed skills to work could offer the solutions to poor and “primitive” children. Even in prison, children could be regenerated through work and education.⁴⁰¹ The school represented an answer to social problems because of its

³⁹⁸ Mercante, “Estudios de criminología infantil,” 310.

³⁹⁹ Mercante, “Notas sobre criminología infantil,” 38.

⁴⁰⁰ Mercante, “Estudios sobre criminalidad infantil,” 577.

⁴⁰¹ The journal that studied criminals, among other “abnormal” people, was printed through the free labor of the prisoners. The director of the prison of Buenos Aires proudly declared in 1907 that the prison was the only one in the world where prisoner's work produced the better benefits for the State. Gina Lombroso, the daughter of the famous criminologist, visited the prison and narrated with surprise for the Italian press that the only task of soldiers was not to surveil the prisoners but to “monitor the

potential to teach children to work. It is not surprising then that Moreno's study at UNLP, aimed to measure children's abilities for manual labor as well as to identify children's sense of property or tendencies for robbery.

Mercante's studies on the prison had effects on his conception of children. Mercante read the work and tested his theories. His reading of Italian criminologists shaped Mercante's attention to the physical features that he incorporated into the anthropometric exam at UNLP.⁴⁰² In addition, Mercante's classroom experiments measuring children's development in the school were informed by criminologists' conceptions of children as potential criminals. The premise that children were potential criminals as much as the promise that the school might save children from prison were interconnected ideas that shaped the teaching practice and the studies on children's intelligence. The legacies of Mercante's work both in the practice of teaching and the biotypological study of children are the subject of the next section.

The Legacies of Mercante's Laboratory: Teaching Practices and the Study of Children

In 1909, while conducting a study on the influence of the home environment on children, Celia Gibert Bergez noticed a harmful impact of parents on working

loading and unloading that takes place without interruption in that great factory, which is, as a whole, one of the most important in the Republic." Salessi, *Médicos, maleantes y maricas*. The director of the Penitenciaría Nacional Eusebio Gomez asserted that education could "reprogram prisoner's base instincts." He developed an educational program at the prison that consisted in reading and writing, morals, history, math, science, and manual arts. Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina*, 173.

⁴⁰² Prisons were not equipped with anthropometric devices. On some occasions Mercante complained about not having the devices to properly examine the prisoner. He wrote: "The lack of tools impeded us to apply the ability of his hands" or "I could not find out the tactile sensitivity due to lack of devices." Mercante, "Estudios de criminología infantil," 412.

class children. The teacher complained that a group of children refused to work because the music professor made them study fifteen minutes more than what was stipulated in the schedule.⁴⁰³ According to Gibert Bergez, the strike demonstrated the dangerous influence of working-class and immigrant homes.⁴⁰⁴ Reflecting on the ways strikers could be disciplined in the school, Gibert Bergez asserted that “corporal punishment should not be applied to the Latin race, specially the Hispano-American, because it causes rebellion, indiscipline, disrespectfulness, contempt, and revenge.”⁴⁰⁵ The study, conducted at UNLP, reflects how racial discourses circulating beyond the school influenced teachers’ conceptions regarding disciplining. Moreover, the statement suggests that racial discourses did not always translate into more authoritarian practices in the school. This section explores Mercante’s legacies, paying particular attention to the teaching practices and the eugenic study of children.

Mercante’s scientific study of childhood aimed to provide teachers with new tools to educate children. Mercante’s studies gave pedagogy a scientific character where teachers could find practical solutions to improve their teaching practice. Mercante sought to replace a form of teachers’ training that lacked specificity. In *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño*, Mercante criticized texts used at normal schools that made generalizations without stipulating how to teach: “You have to illustrate, yes, but with what illustrations? Presented to the students at what time? handled how? From the simple to the compound, yes. But what is simple in the

⁴⁰³ Celia Gibert Bergez, “La educación doméstica y refleja,” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 5, no. 13, 1909.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

number 9, in reading, and understanding a number?”⁴⁰⁶ To provide teachers with a specific set of procedures, following his *Psicología*, Mercante published *Cultivo y desarrollo de la aptitud matemática del niño*, based on the psychological study of children. Originally, Mercante desired to create such a book for each subject.

Although Mercante never concluded the ambitious project, his goal illuminates the extent to which he aimed to create a standardized methodology for teaching. His books were intended for professors of pedagogy, primary education teachers, and student-teachers of normal schools.

In *Cultivo y desarrollo de la aptitud matemática del niño*, Mercante disseminated a series of teaching guidelines.⁴⁰⁷ He further developed the three elements of a lesson —previously introduced to normal teachers by José María Torres— beginning, middle and end. Divided into three moments, teachers had to prepare a lesson that “gives directions, develops aptitudes, teaches little and well, and educates.”⁴⁰⁸ Mercante outlined the characteristics and the time for each moment. The beginning lasted from four to eight minutes and had two goals. The first goal was to remind children what was taught the day before, and the second goal was to refresh children with the knowledge needed to successfully understand the content of the lesson. The middle lasted twelve to fifteen minutes and had the goal to introduce children to new ideas. According to Mercante, it was crucial that teachers synthesize to save time. Mercante’s studies on children’s attention functioned as the basis for his

⁴⁰⁶ Mercante, *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño*, 74.

⁴⁰⁷ The book included the distribution of the program throughout the year, the specific language that teachers should use in the classroom, a detailed procedure regarding how to prepare a lesson, and how to teach mathematics grade by grade.

⁴⁰⁸ Víctor Mercante, *Cultivo y desarrollo de la aptitud matemática del niño*, (Buenos Aires: Cabaut y Cia Editores, 1916), 19.

pedagogical model. Regarding the teaching performance during the “middle,” Mercante wrote: “the teacher exposes the ideas or makes children discover them, one or another procedure according to the time he saves, to take advantage of the four or five minutes of intense attention that every well-presented novelty provokes.”⁴⁰⁹ The “end” of the lesson lasted five to eight minutes and had the goal to apply and generalize the ideas explained in the “middle.” There was a tension in Mercante’s pedagogical guidelines between making children active observers in the classroom, as many school reformers would advocate in the following decades, and creating lessons that were rigorously planned and timed.

Mercante’s strategic use of experimental psychology to study children’s minds encouraged teachers to know their students. He affirmed: “Without knowing the child, it is not possible to educate him.”⁴¹⁰ Through the charts and diagrams of experimental psychology, teachers would know the aptitude of the students for an assignment, previous knowledge, and the classification between “intelligent and the mentally disabled” students. By testing children throughout the school year, Mercante hoped that teachers would be able to discern what part of the exercise required more time, and what types of exercise provided better results. A more complex understanding of children as in constant change enforced the idea that teachers should be attentive to children’s changes and adapt their teaching accordingly. Mercante asserted that a young student was “a physical, mental and moral process, in constant

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁴¹⁰ Mercante, *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño*, xi.

evolution.”⁴¹¹ Moreover, teachers who counted with statistical information regarding their students, could make more informed decisions on how to group them. For instance, Mercante asked, “how would teachers place a new student registering to the school? A student could be fourteen years old but the tests would determine their mental age. After a series of tests, teachers would be able to place the student into the proper class.”⁴¹² However, there was a tension between Mercante encouraging teachers to study children to develop more efficient teaching methods and his attempt to arrive at standard teaching procedures that obscured particular realities in the classrooms.

Mercante’s work was crucial for teachers’ production of knowledge about children and for teachers’ pedagogical innovations. Through his editing role in *Archivos de pedagogía*, Mercante opened the door for many teachers and student-teachers to publish in a scientific journal along with recognized intellectuals. Contributors to the magazine presented evidence, made arguments on the characteristics of children’s bodies, and questioned whether teachers could improve their performance in the classroom. Mercante was recognized by his contemporaries as a pedagogical innovator. He wrote for multiple educational magazines including *La obra* edited by school reformers. Senet described him as an “innovator and evolutionist until becoming revolutionary in didactic matters.”⁴¹³ Inspired by his professor Pedro Scalabrini, Mercante believed that teachers should “rejuvenate

⁴¹¹ Víctor Mercante, “Apuntes de psicopedagogía,” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines*, no. 11, 1908, 271.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴¹³ Terrada, “Prólogo,” 10.

pedagogy” by experimenting. It was not enough to observe students as student-teachers were trained in the practice school and to conclude principles about children’s activity. Teachers needed to put into practice new procedures to measure individually children’s abilities to learn and incorporate new knowledge.⁴¹⁴ He wanted a “doctrine based on facts [that] did not offer a target for doubt; individual and collective facts that were the true expression of the capacity of the student considered at different times.”⁴¹⁵

Mercante and the many teachers who worked with him at Mercedes and UNLP believed that classroom experiments could lead to beneficial transformations in children’s education. For instance, tests that measured children’s visual attention, provided data regarding myopia or fatigue in the retina. Knowing which students had myopia helped teachers to position them at the front of the classroom.⁴¹⁶ Isabel Chamans explained that the psychological exam helped teachers to “choose the methods, the principles, and general directions of education.”⁴¹⁷ Chamans believed that the more knowledge teachers have regarding the students’ psychological functions, the more the programs, school schedule, and teaching methods could be adapted to address the students’ needs. In her study of children’s vision Heredia affirmed that even when it was not possible for teachers to know all the pathologies

⁴¹⁴ For instance, in the teaching of language Mercante explained that the experimental method can measure to what extent children were learning new vocabulary. If the richness of language relies on the number of words utilized in a composition, teachers could ask students to write a composition in thirty five minutes and count the number of words and many different words each student wrote. After two months, the teacher repeats the exercise and evaluates in what proportion children learned new words.

⁴¹⁵ Mercante, *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño*, 79.

⁴¹⁶ Isabel Chamans, “Visión de los colores. Investigación en niñas de 7 a 14 años de edad” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 3, no. 7, 1907.

⁴¹⁷ Chamans, “La audición. Investigación en el colegio de señoritas,” 205.

that children might have, they could identify some anomalies if not to correct them, at least to not increase them.⁴¹⁸

Mercante's studies on children led him to implement concrete reforms in the Normal School of Mercedes. The school, according to Mercante, "became a workshop and a laboratory."⁴¹⁹ Under his leadership, teachers from first to sixth grade, organized outdoor excursions where children learned from nature. On Sundays, children went with their teacher to excavate animal bones. On Thursdays, children visited the local fair and solved geometrical exercises. The questions that emerged in these trips inspired the weekly activities and research.⁴²⁰ This pedagogical approach aligned with the transformations that school reformers promoted in the following decades who would defend an education centered on children's movement.

However, not all the laboratory practices might have been beneficial for children's instruction. Mercante's laboratory reinforced hierarchical relationships between the teacher-observer and the student-object of study. Mercante's encouragement to create controlled environments that resembled scientific laboratories, isolated the object of study. For this reason, children were subject to a hierarchical observation that aimed to measure their performance in the classroom. According to Chamas, every single act or "manifestation of children's physical and mental activity," was a new revelation.⁴²¹ Mercante asserted that he observed children

⁴¹⁸ Heredia, "La visión y sus perturbaciones," 178.

⁴¹⁹ Mercante, *Una vida realizada*, 171.

⁴²⁰ Mercante rejected to be identified with the "new school," movement known in Europe as the "Ecole Nouvelle." In his memoir written in the 1930s, Mercante wrote: "The word new, justifies everything; it gives a reason to be bad and excludes the good things that have been done. The word improvement, on the contrary, excludes the bad and continues the good done." Mercante, *Una vida realizada*, 171.

⁴²¹ Chamans, "La audición. Investigación en el colegio de señoritas," 206.

“without the intervention of more than the student and myself, since I needed to have a personal impression of the phenomena that occurred in the moment of the subject's activity, with the precautions whose importance only I, interested, could appreciate.”⁴²² Mercante guided teachers to build a standardized classroom to compare the results throughout the year. Teachers had to use “the same numbers, the same boards, the same light, the same examiner, the same distances, in complete silence.”⁴²³

The laboratory promoted practices of surveillance. In order not to alter the test results, teachers treated children with suspicion, discouraging them from learning from each other and interacting in the classroom. According to Mercante, tests were conducted with a “reign of the greatest silence” in the classroom.⁴²⁴ The silent classroom and the individual responses that children needed to provide to prove their knowledge, discouraged dialogue among children and reinforced the authoritarian role of teachers. At Mercedes, Mercante observed children “isolated, removed from any foreign element that could cause a false process or precipitate an exact one”⁴²⁵ Although some tests were performed in the classroom, as later his mentees in UNLP continued, Mercante believed that the only way of knowing children was to examine the facts, their reactions, in an individual manner.⁴²⁶ For this reason, he preferred to conduct the tests alone without the disturbing presence of the classmate who could

⁴²² Mercante, *Una vida realizada*, 190.

⁴²³ Mercante, *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño*, 80.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁶ When Mercante conducted tests in front of the classroom he “asked for attention and prohibited any kind of movement that meant communication with the classmate” *Ibid.*, 90.

affect the children's answers and contaminate the supposedly pure laboratory. Mercante complained about "the snitch," who was "everywhere where least expected."⁴²⁷ While the silent and isolated experience of the classroom could benefit the study of children from the perspective of teachers, the laboratory practices could mean an oppressive experience from the perspective of children.⁴²⁸ As we will see in the next chapter, children were discouraged from and even punished for talking with their classmates.

Beyond the quotidian reforms that teachers could implement based on their studies, Mercante aimed to promote structural reforms in the school system. In his role as Inspector of Secondary Education, he cooperated with a reform implemented in 1916 during the government of Victorino La Plaza (1914-1916). The Saavedra Lamas reform, named after the Minister of Education who proposed it, was inspired by Mercante's investigations on childhood.⁴²⁹ However, it was implemented only briefly as the newly-elected president, Hipólito Yrigoyen, ended the reform.⁴³⁰ The reform aimed to reduce the amount of years children spent in primary education and to add intermediate education between primary and secondary education. In a context where children generally abandoned school after fourth grade, the idea behind the project was to extend practical education to better prepare children for manual labor.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 85.

⁴²⁸ Some evidence suggests that children did not enjoy performing the tests. For instance, Heredia mentioned that one student was making mistakes and hurrying to conclude the experiment since she wanted to come back to the mathematics class. Heredia, "Estudios psicopedagógicos. Investigaciones acerca de la atención."

⁴²⁹ Lionetti, "Víctor Mercante: agente político e intelectual del campo educativo en la Argentina de principios del siglo XX."

⁴³⁰ Marisa Alonso, "Víctor Mercante y su proyecto educativo: Reforma de Saavedra-Lamas" *Trabajos y Comunicaciones*, no. 35 (2009): 299-312.

Yet, the reform assumed that certain children were better fit for manual labor and did not need to continue the secondary education. Mercante promoted this reform in a book published in 1918, where he analyzed the transformations that children's bodies suffered during puberty. Advocating for a practical education he asserted: "Within each man there must be the worker, because the man is worth what he produces and accomplishes. A virile teaching reduces the idle to minimum levels because they will have a thousand occasions to occupy their hands."⁴³¹

Another legacy of Mercante's laboratory can be found in the eugenic study of childhood that flourished in 1933 under the umbrella of biotypology. The *Asociación Argentina de Biotipología, Eugenesia y Medicina Social* (Argentina Association of Biotypology, Eugenics, and Social Medicine, AABEMS), was born after the visit of Italian endocrinologist Nicola Pende (1880-1970) who traveled to Argentina in November 1930. Later, Octavio López and Arturo Rossi traveled to Italy to learn about the development of eugenics and social medicine under fascism.⁴³² During the inaugural speech of the AABEMS, Dr. Mariano Castex asserted that "the analytic study of the somatic and psychic personality of children and adolescents" would constitute the basis for modern eugenics.⁴³³ Biotypology was a field specialized in the study of somatic and psychic biotypes. Biotypologists believed that it was possible to classify people by taking into account the anatomic characteristics, hormonal,

⁴³¹ Víctor Mercante, *La crisis de la pubertad y sus consecuencias pedagógicas* (Gonnet: UNIPE, 2014), 66.

⁴³² For more on the connections between Argentina and Italy in this period see Marisa Miranda and Gustavo Vallejo, eds. *Una historia de la eugenesia: Argentina y las redes biopolíticas internacionales, 1912-1945* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2012); and Marisa Miranda and Gustavo Vallejo, *Darwinismo social y eugenesia en el mundo latino* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2005).

⁴³³ "Discurso de la S. inaugural en la Facultad de Ciencias Médicas en Buenos Aires," *Anales de biotipología, eugenesia y medicina social*, no. 1, April 1, 1933, 2.

humoral, inherited, environmental, and neuro-psychological factors.⁴³⁴ A legacy of the approaches and theories that tried to explain human evolution and people's behavior, biotypology combined discourses and practices that physicians, criminologists, psychiatrists, and educators had been implementing since the end of the nineteenth century. Within the theorists that developed biotypology, Pende traced a direct line between humoral theories of the ancient Greek and modern hormonal theories.⁴³⁵ Members of the AABEMS considered education crucial for their scientific project. President of the Educational Commission Nicolás Lozano, claimed: "if there is a vast field in which it is possible to modify concepts and adopt methods that are in accordance with the new biotypological orientations, it is precisely that of education."⁴³⁶

The corollary of the examination of children's bodies in the school was the *Ficha biotipológica escolar* (Biotypology School Chart) proposed in 1933. The goal of this chart was to establish eugenic diagnosis and prescriptions for labor roles. In the words of Arturo Rossi, the idea was to "guide the youth into the Sciences, Arts, Industry, Trade, and Manual Arts."⁴³⁷ According to Gómez Di Vincenzo, the first project to develop an anthropometric measurement of children at school age was

⁴³⁴ José Antonio Gómez Di Vincenzo, "Clasificar, seleccionar y prescribir roles sociales: imbricaciones entre biotipología, psicotecnia, psicopedagogía y medición de la inteligencia en Argentina (1930-1943)" in *Polifonías, Revista de Educación* 2, no. 3 (September-October 2013): 100-116.

⁴³⁵ Gustavo Vallejo, "Cuerpo y representación: La imagen del hombre en la eugenesia latina," en Gustavo Vallejo and Marisa Miranda ed., *Políticas del cuerpo. Estrategias modernas de normalización del individuo y la sociedad* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI editora, 2007).

⁴³⁶ Nicolás Lozano, "La educación y la doctrina constitucional," *Anales de biotipología, eugenesia y medicina social*, no 1, April 1, 1933, 10.

⁴³⁷ Arturo Rossi, "La ficha biotipológica escolar. Sus fundamentos," *Anales de biotipología, eugenesia y medicina social*, no 1, April 1, 1933, 15.

presented in the 1911 Congress of the Child and attributed to Mercante.⁴³⁸ Around those years, Romero Brest (1873-1958) developed a “physical bulletin” where physical education teachers took notes on the student’s age, size, weight, thorax and abdominal circumference, breathing capacity, velocity, muscular strength, among others.⁴³⁹ But it was in 1933, when the study of the Argentine biotypes became a national project approved by the national government. Rossi explained the benefits of biotypology and the benefit that teachers could enjoy with the professional assistance of doctors. He affirmed that “knowing the mentality of the student, will make educators the artisans of future life.”⁴⁴⁰ As suggested by Rossi, the knowledge acquired by the measurements taken by the doctor would have multiple applications, including “knowing and controlling” the muscular, psychomotor, psychosensorial, and intellectual aptitudes of children’s bodies.⁴⁴¹ The charts that teachers like Moreno created to better discipline children in the classroom became institutionalized under the efforts of biotypologists.

The “*Ficha biotipológica escolar*” aimed to establish a rational and scientific classification of children based on numerous questions that measured physical, psychological, and moral characteristics. Héctor Palma has pointed out that the

⁴³⁸ José Antonio Gómez Di Vincenzo “El talle justo del alumno. Biotipología, eugenesia y pedagogía en Argentina (1930 – 1943),” *Archivos de Ciencias de la Educación* 6, no. 6, 2012.

⁴³⁹ As we will see in chapter 4, Romero Brest was a school reformer, pioneer in modern physical education. Pablo Scharagrodsky, “Los arquitectos corporales en la Educación Física y los Deportes. Entre fichas, saberes y oficios (Argentina primera mitad del siglo XX)” *Trabajos y Comunicaciones* 42 (September 2015).

⁴⁴⁰ Rossi, “La ficha biotipológica escolar,” 15.

⁴⁴¹ The complete list of applications as proposed by Rossi was: “1. Knowledge of the harmonic form of the general type of the body; 2. Knowledge and control of muscular and psychomotor skills; 3. Elucidating by controlling the normality and abnormality of sexual development; 4. Know and control psycho-sensory and intellectual aptitudes and 5. Control of character formation and mental type.” *Ibid.*, 16.

almost three hundred questions on the questionnaire complicated the implementation of the study.⁴⁴² Among the questions were the racial characteristics such as race, skin color, skull and nose shape, color and type of hair. The questions included questions similar to what Mercante studied in the prison including the parent's "culture" and their customs. Within the psychological variables were attention, curiosity, memory and feelings. Under the classification of "instinctive will," biotypology measured "industriousness, tendency to leisure, impulses, intuition, preferred occupations, tendency towards games and sports, instinct of conservation, passive defense reaction, property instinct, imitation instinct."⁴⁴³ Adaptation to the environment, initiative, and self-control defined the children's character whose intelligence was classified into types: fantastic, analytical, and logical, among others.

Mercante, one of the consultants of the AABEMS Educational Commission, welcomed the impulse that biotypologists gave to the study of children that started in the Laboratory of Psychopedagogy founded in La Plata.⁴⁴⁴ In fact, he recognized his own work within the framework of biotypology. But among the members, he continued defending the independence and preponderance of the teacher's role vis-a-vis the medical orientations.⁴⁴⁵ Mercante did not participate much in the AABEMS

⁴⁴² Héctor A. Palma, "Eugenesia y educación en la Argentina," in *Historias de salud y la enfermedad en América Latina, siglos XIX y XX*, Carbonetti, A. y González Leandri, R. ed., (Córdoba: Centro de Estudios Avanzados, 2008), 231-252.

⁴⁴³ Rossi, "La ficha biotipológica escolar," 13.

⁴⁴⁴ Víctor Mercante, "La investigación pedagógica y los tests," *Anales de biotipología, eugenesia y medicina social*, no 1, April 1 1933. Other members of the education committee included influential educators and school inspectors such as Ernesto Nelson, Ángel Raffigna, and Julio Picarel.

⁴⁴⁵ Gómez Di Vicenzo argues that Mercante's approach to study children from a psychological perspective competed rather than complemented the study of children as proposed by biotypologists. Despite Rossi's assertions that psychopedagogy should be subsumed to a bio-pedagogy, Mercante maintained his position asserting a certain level of autonomy. Another difference between Mercante and the biotypologists at AABEMS was that the latter studied children as individuals while Mercante

since he died only a year after the association was founded. But until his death he continued advocating for the study of childhood.

Continuing his role as mentor of new generations of teachers, Mercante gave a series of talks under the auspices of the AABEMS. He explained to his audience that the investigations developed by teachers were “transcendental, since we measure the capacity to acquire knowledge of things.”⁴⁴⁶ As in previous years, these types of investigations based on tests, gave teachers an exact measurement of the children’s capacities and the success of the procedures utilized in the classroom. In his talks some teachers reacted to the mathematical measurement of their labor and asked him: “But what is the object of these investigations if we, after fifteen days of classes, know more or less which children are inattentive or diligent; intelligent or obtuse?”⁴⁴⁷ Mercante replied that the tests provided a more sophisticated and exact knowledge of children. He said:

The “more or less” cruelly deceives us. Your forty children raise their hands, some answer others are silent. You do not know why these are silent and those are exorbitant; you do not retain, from those who answer, the truth part of the answer and you have not calculated the influence of your suggestions and corrections; you have not noticed the intervention of the “*soplón*” (informer), or that of the household (...) We do not have, therefore, the certainty about the personal coefficient with which we constitute that of the group or grade.⁴⁴⁸

The exchange between Mercante and the teacher from the audience offers a window into the reception of the scientific study of childhood as shaped by Mercante. The

was interested in arriving at conclusions about the school population. Gómez Di Vincenzo, “Clasificar, seleccionar y prescribir roles sociales.”

⁴⁴⁶ Mercante, “La investigación psicopedagógica y los tests,” 2.

⁴⁴⁷ Víctor Mercante, “La investigación psicopedagógica y los tests,” *Anales de biotipología, eugenesia y medicina social*, no. 11, Sept. 1, 1933, 2.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

teacher doubted that systematic tests and complicated charts would offer different information than the one collected by the teacher via observation. Although Mercante dedicated his life to popularizing his methods among teachers, the audience member's reaction reflects the difficulties he might have confronted in advancing scientific procedures. Yet, regardless of how many teachers replicated these types of studies, classifications of the students as "intelligent," "inattentive," or "obtuse" demonstrate how pervasive the categories disseminated by Mercante became. These categories are evidence of the effectiveness of the school laboratory to create frameworks that shaped teachers' understanding of their role in the classroom.

Conclusions

During the 2020 pandemic, when schools were closed in Argentina, a meme referencing the harmful consequences of not attending school circulated on social media. The meme portrays Zamba, a cartoon from the show "The Amazing Excursion of Zamba" where the main character travels throughout history with the goal of teaching children about Argentine history from a perspective that centers women, Afro-Argentines, and indigenous people.⁴⁴⁹ The meme reads "Zamba after two years without attending school." The lack of schooling is, according to the meme, criminality. Zamba appears with a gun in his left hand and an outfit that stereotypes the image of the "pibe chorro" ("young thief"). Zamba does not wear the traditional white school uniform of the public school nor does he hold a backpack. Instead, he wears sports clothing and has some piercings. Even though the meme acquired some popularity, it

⁴⁴⁹ *Zamba para chicos* (Lomas de Zamora: Sudestada, 2019).

was also rejected by those who asserted that it discriminated against poor racialized young boys. The meme reflects the reverberations of the discourses about childhood and schooling analyzed in this chapter. Through his studies Mercante contributed to the discourses that associated the lack of schooling with criminality and the potential of the school to improve the poor and immigrant children that populated the schools of Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century. Yet, the importance of the school in preventing criminality also connects Mercante's work with discourses and slogans by leftist activists such as "Ningún pibe nace chorro" (No boy is born a criminal) that highlights that, with proper education, poor boys will not turn into criminals. There is an inherent tension between asserting that school can improve children or prevent them from ending in prison. While it asserts that children are subject to change and deserve proper education, it also implies that something is inherently wrong with poor children and, therefore, they need to be regenerated in school.

This chapter demonstrated that the school as a laboratory allowed teachers to study children and disseminate a discourse that racialized children's bodies. Mercante's work illuminates how experimental psychology and criminology contributed to framing the concepts and practices of Argentine *normalismo*. While Mercante participated in a broad network of intellectuals concerned about social issues such as migration and criminality, his main goal in studying childhood was pedagogic. In this sense, he entered into dialogue but distanced himself from the criminologists that studied children's individuality. Mercante's goal was to arrive at general conclusions about the average, the norm, the grade level, and later on, the type.

Mercante's scientific studies of children had lasting consequences in the teaching profession. Both trajectories are part of the same story of a discipline that found in children the first stage for the improvement of the race, and in the school a privileged space, where thousands of children spent their days in the aftermath of universalizing primary schooling. Ultimately, Mercante wanted to arrive at universal pedagogical procedures for teaching children, a systematic set of discourses and practices that regulated the science of teaching. His books *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño* and *Cultivo y desarrollo de la aptitud matemática del niño*, trained a generation of teachers who learned that the roots of the pedagogical solutions in the classroom could be found in the homogenization of the group. Testing students, categorizing them according to their intelligence and their abilities, became a goal that Mercante never abandoned. A generation of teachers and professors in the UNLP, including his friend Rodolfo Senet. These experts were influenced by a mentor who gained increasing recognition nationally and internationally.

Mercante's studies at UNLP had important consequences for the development of the eugenics movement in Argentina. By 1906, his experiments that started in the classroom of a Normal School in San Juan, had taken another shape. With the resources of one of the most important universities in the country, Mercante drew on anthropometric devices to measure children's bodies. The studies conducted by his students reflect some of the categories that physicians at the AABEMS would use later to measure abilities to work. Mercante, therefore, is a key figure who illuminates how the school became an institution that both served as a location to study children and construct a legitimate knowledge about their minds and bodies. At the same time, it

served as a space where children's bodies were racialized and disciplined to the needs of emergent capitalism. The next chapter investigates how teachers disciplined children applying norms that Mercante reinforced through the scientific study of children.

Zamba, después de 2 años sin ir al colegio...



Image 2: Zamba
Source: Image created by @lanataenel13, Facebook

Image 2: Zamba
Source: Image created by @lanataenel13, Facebook

Chapter 3: Applying the Norm: Conflicting Authorities in the Disciplining of Children and Teacher

Introduction

The previous chapter investigated the school laboratory developed by Víctor Mercante and other professors and student-teachers in Buenos Aires. The study of children Mercante pioneered sought general principles for the science of teaching. Yet, the local particularities, the daily conflicts in the school, and the material constraints teachers faced while implementing disciplinary measures complicated standardizing attempts coming from the national state. Despite the pedagogical theories repeated in pedagogical manuals for disciplining supposedly savage children, the practice of teaching presented a complex scenario that the statistics could not grasp. Teachers entering the classroom faced regulations and gendered expectations, resistance from the community, and surveillance and punishment from national authorities.

This chapter asks how teachers and school inspectors enforced the norms of appropriate behavior. How did children and parents react to the state project of civilizing Argentina? In what ways was teacher authority conveyed, achieved, and undermined? I show that positivist views on children as “savages” and potential criminals had pedagogical consequences in the school curricula and teaching methods that promoted quietness and obedience to superiors. In order to enforce the norms of proper behavior, teachers drew on the practices learned in normal schools to exercise authority over children. In doing so, teachers rapidly faced the contradictions of

putting into practice school regulations that did not align with the realities of poor students. By punishing students, they distanced themselves from the local community. Many conflicts that emerged in the school did not resolve harmoniously as in the tales that appeared in textbooks. On the contrary, they required the intervention of the national government and at times resulted in the teachers' expulsion from schools. At the same time, teachers participated in a hierarchical system that disciplined women's bodies according to notions of domesticity and sexual propriety. For teachers, asserting their authority inside and outside the classroom was a laborious task. Children challenged the school regulations, principals and inspectors monitored teacher's performance, and at times, the local community openly confronted teachers.

Historians have shown the impact of industrialization and modernization on women's labor in Latin America during the first decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁵⁰ My work contributes to this scholarship by focusing on how middle-class women put into practice a pedagogical theory that undermined immigrant and poor families. Teachers represent a window to understand how women's bodies were at the center of the state project as both enforcers and recipients of discipline.

The first section shows how teachers disciplined children by teaching them moral lessons, supervising their bodies and behavior, and by applying punishment

⁴⁵⁰ Ann Fansworth-Alvear *Dulcinea in the Factory. Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Elizabeth Hutchison, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex. Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile 1900-1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Barbara Weinstein, "Unskilled Worker, Skilled Housewife. Constructing the Working-Class Women in Sao Paulo, Brazil" in *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Daniel James, *Doña María's Story. Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

towards children who did not follow the rules. Through short tales and simple sentences, children not only learned how to read and write, but also incorporated the rules of proper behavior: do not lie, obey your parents and teachers, be punctual, and wake up in the morning to attend school (or work for adults). The conceptions of children as savage and therefore naturally undisciplined generated violent practices in the classroom that within the logic of masculine and normalist practices constituted a “pedagogy of cruelty.”⁴⁵¹ Like criminals, disobedient children suffered detention and interrogation. Through the narrative of teacher Herminia Brumana, we glimpse how women trying to exercise a maternal role in the school faced contradictions while applying the disciplinary measures of *normalismo*.

The second section investigates how school inspectors supervised the teachers. Within the school, teachers and inspectors performed gender roles by converting the school into a second home that reinforced the patriarchal family.

⁴⁵¹ Rita Segato defines *pedagogías de la crueldad* as “all the acts and practices that teach, habituate and program the subjects to transmute the living and its vitality of things.” The author used this category to conceptualize a very specific and contemporary process of gender violence, especially femicides. It refers to the effect of repetition of violence that “produces an effect of normalization of a landscape of cruelty that promotes in people the low thresholds of empathy essential for the predatory endeavor.” My use of the term refers to a set of practices and discourses that circulated in the school to discipline children and women’s bodies. As we will see in this chapter, this pedagogy shamed, traumatized, displaced children and teachers’ bodies. Aware of the different historical process that the term delineates in Segato’s definition there are points of convergence. For instance, a pedagogy of cruelty aimed to transmute the vitality of the school into an inert routine of automatized teachers and children. The fact that school reformers pointed out to the inert bell to epitomize the normalist practices and that they centered children’s vital experience such as joy and movement as a strategy to revitalize the school is evidence of how *normalismo* sought to transmute the vitality of human and non-human actors in the process of teaching and learning. Segato proposes a *contra-pedagogía* able to rescue the sensitivity and the bonds in a patriarchal society. This is a counter-pedagogy of power and patriarchy since it opposes to the “distinctive elements of the patriarchal order: mandates of masculinity, masculine corporatism, low empathy, cruelty, insensibility, bureaucracy, distance, technocracy, formality, universality, uprooting, desensibilization, limited bonding.” This characterization relates with the school as portrayed in this chapter under the disciplinary practices of *normalismo*. Rita Segato, *Contra-pedagogías de la crueldad* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2018), 13-18.

Teachers were not only in charge of educating children everyday but were also expected to arrange the classroom and keep the school clean and orderly. Not only clean floors, but also neat notebooks and reports would demonstrate the teachers' abilities. Like women in their homes, teachers' absence from the school represented the abandonment of children. Teachers' sexual behavior was scrutinized by principals, school inspectors, and local communities. The existence of this disciplinary system did not mean that all women complied with gender norms. However, the historical record shows that when women dared to challenge state expectations, the Consejo Nacional de Educación (National Council of Education, CNE) punished them with suspension and expulsion.

The third section examines how the local community undermined teachers' authority, and how teachers tried to defend their moral authority in front of the CNE. Parents reacted against authoritarian teachers and corporal punishments in the school. In other words, parents resisted state attempts to discipline their children. Many of the conflicts that emerged between teachers and communities involved rumors, arguments between neighbors, and local political differences. Aware of their authority as parents and the role of the teacher in the community, parents organized and reached out to the CNE looking for answers and further investigations. When inspectors arrived to conduct "summary investigations" that could lead to disciplinary measures against the teachers and principals, educators and parents alike developed a series of arguments, strategies, and alliances to defend their positions. Teachers, who embraced the morality taught in normal and primary schools, had a dismissive attitude towards working class families. They attempted to defend their authority by

positioning themselves in a hierarchical position vis-a-vis the angry parents who denounced them for being violent or irresponsible teachers. Women appealed to maternal behaviors to justify their actions and dismissed community members for being ignorant, liars, and drunkards. Both male and female teachers believed that the CNE would support their statements and disregard ignorant and illiterate parents who did not know how to read. But the CNE used the conflicts between teachers and the community to punish the teachers and fuel a disciplinary system from which they could not escape. In the end, regardless of the level of culpability of teachers or local communities in conflicts, (which in many cases could not be proven), teachers experienced the injustices of a system that imposed restrictions on their behavior and unfairly compensated their labor.

Teaching Morals to Undisciplined Children

During the organization and consolidation of the primary school system, there was consensus among the school authorities and the teachers that the teacher's duty was to discipline the new generations. The civilizing mission of teachers against barbarism abounded in teachers' accounts. The work of Mercante and other positivist theorists played a crucial role in disseminating a view of the child as a "little savage, with all the qualities of primitive humanity, qualities that he modifies as he grows and reaches the state of adulthood, but to a very variable degree, depending on the

hereditary sign that he brings and the external action.”⁴⁵² Thus, transforming savage children was one of teachers’ most important tasks.

From first to sixth grade, textbooks, carefully selected by state officials, taught children how to read and write at the same time they taught them how to behave.⁴⁵³ From the first and second grade textbooks that taught children simple sentences to the longer readings in fifth and sixth grade, children were exposed to notions of labor, gender roles, and proper attitudes in and outside the school.⁴⁵⁴ For instance, teaching on the use of the diminutive, a sentence from a second grade textbook reads “María irons a little shirt.”⁴⁵⁵ Other sentences include “Ángela makes food for her doll” and “The bell rang and the children formed a line again.”⁴⁵⁶ Expressions like “my mother spoiled me” or “My mother loves me” (in Spanish “Mi mamá me ama,” and “Mi mamá me mima”) to learn the letter M, appeared in textbooks in the 1920s.⁴⁵⁷ Once children learned the rudiments of the alphabet and grammar rules, they continued

⁴⁵² Víctor Mercante, *La educación del niño y su instrucción* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Mignot y Ortiz, 1897), 148.

⁴⁵³ In order to decide what knowledge circulated in the classroom, the CNE approved the textbooks and sent the provincial councils the list of books approved for every grade. For a study on the role of the state in the circulation and production of ideas through textbooks see: Roberta Paula Spregelburd and María Cristina Linares, *El control de la lectura. Los textos escolares bajo la supervisión del estado nacional (1881-1916 y 1941-1965)* (Luján: EdUNLU, 2017).

⁴⁵⁴ Scholars have studied textbooks to understand the construction of nationhood in Latin America. See: Cecilia Braslavsky, “Los usos de la historia en los libros de texto para las escuelas primarias argentinas, 1916-1930,” *Serie documentos e informes de investigación*, no. 144, 1993; Jens Hentschke, “Artiguista, White, Cosmopolitan and Educated: Constructions of Nationhood in Uruguayan Textbooks and Related Narratives, 1868–1915,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 44, no. 4 (2012): 733-64; Héctor Rubén Cucuzza, *Yo argentino: La construcción de la nación en los libros escolares (1873-1930)* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2007); Vom Hau, Matthias. “Unpacking the School,” *Latin American Research Review* 44, no. 3 (2009): 127-154; Luis Alberto Romero and Luciano De Privitellio, *La Argentina en la escuela: La idea de nación en los textos escolares* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores Argentina, 2004).

⁴⁵⁵ Originally in Spanish “María plancha una camisita,” Andrés Ferreyra y Jose M. Aubin, *El nene. Libro segundo* (Buenos Aires : Estrada, 1907), 19.

⁴⁵⁶ *Idem.*, 19-21.

⁴⁵⁷ Ernestina López de Nélsón, *Veo y Leo. Primer libro de lectura y escritura* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta y Casa Editora de Coni, 1920).

their learning journey through short stories that usually finished with a moral.

Therefore, beyond improving their reading skills, in textbooks children learned how to behave.

Textbooks characterized “good children” as obedient and studious.⁴⁵⁸ For instance, a tale in the textbook *El tesoro de la infancia* (The Treasure of Childhood) portrayed Teodoro, a judicious child who always made his parents happy.⁴⁵⁹ Teodoro never stopped studying and was constantly cited as an example, a way in which teachers rewarded those who stood out in the classroom. The narrator stated that due to his “docility as much as his progress in school, he never needed to be punished.”⁴⁶⁰ Published in 1897, *Compendio de urbanidad y buenas maneras* explained to children how to behave in different spaces such as Church, the streets, and the home. In the school, children were encouraged to “consider our teachers as occupying the same place as our parents.”⁴⁶¹ Raising one’s voice was a sign of disrespect. Even if the teacher for some reason left the classroom, children should behave in the same way they did in the presence of their teachers. It was not licit to treat the teachers badly, to talk about their defects, or to refer to matters that happened in their home.

Obedient children were portrayed even as heroes, saving their loved ones. *El nene* (The Boy) narrated a story of a boy traveling from Uruguay with his family

⁴⁵⁸ The representation of the good children in textbooks has been studied by Betina Aguiar who was an invaluable resource to discuss my original ideas for this chapter. See: Betina Aguiar Da Costa “Discursos y representaciones sobre la muerte en los libros de lectura en Argentina (1900-1930)” Tesis de doctorado, Universidad de Buenos Aires Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, March 2021.

⁴⁵⁹ The textbook was adopted as a textbook in schools throughout Argentina. By 1882, they published the 4th edition with 25.000 copies. *El tesoro de la infancia* (Buenos Aires: Igon Hermanos Editores, 1882).

⁴⁶⁰ *Idem.*, 15.

⁴⁶¹ Manuel Antonio Carreño, *Compendio del manual de urbanidad y buenas maneras* (París: Garnier Hermanos, Libreros Editores, 1897), 61.

when the boat caught fire. The father jumped first and asked the boy to follow his instructions: “My son, listen to me carefully, obey me promptly, as you have always done, and we will all be saved.”⁴⁶² The protagonist of the story had to hand over his two little siblings to his father and later he would be allowed to jump. Once the narrator assures that the family was safe, the moral says: “Without the obedience of that model child, perhaps a whole family would have disappeared (...) Of all the good qualities that can adorn a child, one of the best is obedience; since in addition to conquering the esteem of those around him, making him enjoy the happiness of being loved, it attracts the protection of heaven in the struggles and misfortunes of life.”⁴⁶³ Statements like this imposed on children the responsibility of obeying their parents and taking care of their siblings.

Believing that the school should counteract poor vice-ridden homes, textbooks emphasized lessons that prevented children from contact with vice. They portrayed the streets as a place of dangers, potential death, and vice.⁴⁶⁴ The school, on the other hand, was a refuge where children found the protection of the teacher and learned how to find happiness.⁴⁶⁵ Those in charge of writing and authoring textbooks at the CNE aimed to build the school as a shelter from everything considered dangerous for children. “Julio’s Ten Cents” tells the story of two friends, Julio and Enrique. The

⁴⁶² Ferreyra and Aubin, *El nene. Libro segundo*, 117.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁶⁴ Another tale along those lines from the same textbook was “The Mischief of Eusebio,” a tale of a boy who missed school and attended classes only when his parents forced him. One day he decided to play with the bees and ended up being injured by them.

⁴⁶⁵ For instance, in a discourse at a commencement celebration in the Normal School No 3 of Buenos Aires, Pablo Pizzurno asserted: The goal of the school is to contribute to individual and collective happiness. Pablo A. Pizzurno, “Consejos a los maestros,” *Monitor de la educación común*, no. 405, Aug. 31, 1906.

former was a beautiful boy, the joy of his parents, while the latter was “violent and with a dominating tendency.”⁴⁶⁶ Both boys received ten cents every day from their mothers but Julio saved the money and Enrique gambled it. At the end of the story, Enrique learned not only how terrible gambling was but also the value of saving when they came upon a group of beggars. Julio was able to give them ten cents he saved during the week and Enrique promised his friend that he would never gamble again. Smoking was another vice that textbooks recommended that children avoid. A story narrates the fight between two children over tobacco at the front door of a store. The owner, trying to understand why they were arguing, started a conversation about the dangers of smoking. He asked the children to pick up a heavy tool off the floor of the store and when the children were unable to do it, the owner explained that the same logic can be applied to smoking. Children should not smoke like adults do because their bodies are weaker.⁴⁶⁷

Another recurrent lesson for children was work. While childhood became increasingly associated with playing, it was important that children learn the importance of working. This message appeared in the introduction of the textbook *Nosotros*, when ten-year old Isabel said: “I try but I really like playing. I am sure that this happens to you. Playing is so nice! But don’t believe that I am always playing. This would be very wrong. I also work.”⁴⁶⁸ The benefits of working, as put in the textbooks, were infinite: “Work drives away disease, drives away sadness, excites the

⁴⁶⁶ Andrés Ferreyra and José M. Aubin, *El nene. Libro tercero* (Buenos Aires: Angel Estrada, 1904), 14. In the same book we find an exercise of declamation titled “Gambling” by Rubio Lorente that teaches young people not to gamble if they do not want to become criminals.

⁴⁶⁷ Ferreyra and Aubin, “Los pequeños fumadores,” *El nene. Libro segundo*.

⁴⁶⁸ Ernestina López de Nélsón, *Nosotros. Segundo libro de lectura* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Coni, 1920), 3.

appetite, and promotes sleep.”⁴⁶⁹ *El tesoro de la infancia* taught children that “Laziness is the key to poverty,”⁴⁷⁰ “Idleness is like illness; tiring more than work,”⁴⁷¹ and “Work during the day and you will have the right to rest during the night”⁴⁷² Textbook *Señorita Raquel* (Miss Raquel) reads: “Work today, because you do not know what impediments you will have tomorrow; Laziness goes so slowly that poverty soon overtakes it; Better one today than two tomorrow; Since you are not sure of a minute, don't waste an hour; Have an hour for each thing and do each thing in its own time.”⁴⁷³ Textbooks portrayed not working as leading to horrible results. On his way to the school, Teodoro met an old homeless man who begged him for money. As a good boy, Teodoro shared his only food—since he did not have any money— but he also refused to be seen by his classmates for his disinterested action. Teodoro's story finished with the homeless person visiting the school to tell children the mistakes he made during his childhood that put him in a precarious situation toward the end of his life, that included abandoning the school and later stealing when he had a job.

Working was not enough, since both workers and students needed to be punctual. A lesson in *Nosotros* entitled “During the morning” portrayed the beginning of the day with the mother waking up their children:

Let's go! Jorge, you're going to be late for school. Get used to being punctual from childhood. Isabel is already dressed and ready to have

⁴⁶⁹ Don Genaro del Valle, *Manual Completo. El educador de las niñas* (Madrid: La educación, 1879), 26.

⁴⁷⁰ In Spanish “Pereza llave de pobreza” rhymes making the moral easier to remember. *El tesoro de la infancia*, 87

⁴⁷¹ *El tesoro de la infancia*, 87.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ernestina López de Nélsón, *Señorita Raquel. Tercer libro de lectura* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Coni, 1920), 9.

breakfast. Let's go! Lazy. Come get some fresh air and exercise. Jorge is a bit sleepy, but when Mom reminds him that it's time to go to school, he falls out of bed and runs to the bathroom. The water makes you less sleepy. Jorge will thus lose an ugly habit that could be harmful to him. *Getting up early makes a child happy and healthy.*"⁴⁷⁴

The passage reveals how the norms that children followed during childhood had important consequences in their adult life. For teachers, punctuality was a recurrent issue that they attempted to correct in children's lazy nature. On the first day of classes, U.S. teacher and principal of multiple normal schools Jennie Howard recalled that fifty students were late. The students apologized and explained that they did not have clocks in their houses and that they lived too far from the church to be able to hear the bell. Howard suggested their parents should buy cheap clocks and "the following day the students who were late were only twenty and little by little the lack of exactitude was eliminated"⁴⁷⁵

Some teachers attributed the lack of punctuality to children's race. Howard characterized Argentine student-teachers as "lazy in matters of discipline and punctuality." She wrote: "I tend to believe that it is more difficult for Latinos to tell the truth than it is for some other races."⁴⁷⁶ Teacher Herminia Brumana asserted: "Punctuality is not, precisely, a creole characteristic. It is up to the teachers to create

⁴⁷⁴ López, *Nosotros*, 8. Italics in the original.

⁴⁷⁵ Jennie Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Raigal, 1951), 78. Jennie Howard traveled to Argentina in 1883. She directed the Normal School of Corrientes, worked as a professor in the Normal School of Cordoba and became principal of the Normal School of San Nicolás, Buenos Aires in 1888. Howard's journey and his pedagogical ideas will be analyzed in chapter 5.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

that habit in the new generation. That is why in the internal regulations of each school the issue of “punctuality” occupies a primary place.”⁴⁷⁷

In order to teach children to be punctual, teachers developed different strategies. Textbooks *Nosotros* (Us) and *Señorita Raquel* dedicated the first part of the books to introduce the use of time, clocks, and the specific tasks that need to be developed in different times of the day.⁴⁷⁸ If children did not know how to use the clock they could be late for school. In one lesson in *Señorita Raquel*, the teacher reprimanded a student for arriving late to school while the girl excused herself for not knowing how to use the clock which motivated a lesson on the differences between antique and modern clocks.⁴⁷⁹ An inspector encouraged teachers to bring newspapers for “unfortunate incidents” that demonstrated the advantages of punctuality. The inspector suggested: “You can make the children see all the inconveniences that the delay in the departure time of a tramway, a railway, in the time for lunch or eating.”⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ Herminia Brumana, *Obras Completas* (Buenos Aires: Amigos de Herminia Brumana, 1958), 9. Herminia Brumana was born in Pigue, province of Buenos Aires 500 kilometers from the city of Buenos Aires. After graduating from the normal school, she returned to her hometown to teach in primary schools. Between 1917 and 1918 she founded the magazine *Pigue* and in 1918 she published her first book to be used in the classroom, *Palabritas*. In 1932, Brumana wrote *Tizas de colores* composed of short stories that narrate quotidian scenarios in the school. Brumana also published in socialist, anarchist, and feminist magazines such as *Insurrexit*, *La Vanguardia*, *La Protesta*, *Nuestra Tribuna*, and *Vida Femenina*. Marina Becerra, “Un prisma original: Educación, género, amor y ciudadanía en Herminia Brumana,” *Anuario de historia de la educación* 17, no. 2, (2016): 80-113; Graciela Queirolo, “Herminia Catalina Brumana. La maternidad social a través del magisterio y de la escritura”, en *Mujeres en espacios bonaerenses*, Adriana María Valobra ed., (La Plata, EDULP, 2009), 95-109.

⁴⁷⁸ The clock as a “useful” tool for everyday life also occupies a couple of pages in López’s textbooks. In *Nosotros*, three pages are dedicated to the use of the clock. The first one is a more detailed explanation of the different clockwises, the second insists on the tasks that need to be done at certain moments during the day: 6:45am is the time to wake up, 8:00am is the time to enter the school, 12:00pm is lunch time, and 8:30pm is bedtime.

⁴⁷⁹ López, *Señorita Raquel*, 5.

⁴⁸⁰ “Gobierno de la escuela. A una joven maestra,” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 389, 1900.

While the historical record is obscure regarding many of the teaching practices developed in the classroom, textbooks hint at how they expected teachers to teach their lessons.⁴⁸¹ One of these practices was reading the stories aloud while reflecting with the children and reinforcing through conversation the morals children should remember.⁴⁸² In his book, *Lecturas morales e instructivas* (Moral and Instructive Readings), José Berruti suggested to teachers that in the classroom: “Reading should be slow, attentive, reflective: it should be suspended frequently to meditate on what is read; thus the substance of the author becomes his own substance; and an act similar to that of the nutritive functions of the body is performed in the understanding.”⁴⁸³ Learning was incorporating words, like food, to nurture children’s bodies. Teachers’ practice of reading slowly and interrupting the reading to ask questions was another way of making children incorporate the lessons. In order to cultivate children’s memory Berruti suggested not to write or take notes and instead repeat the words.

By reading out loud and practicing intonation, teachers sought to educate children’s voices.⁴⁸⁴ A widely used second grade textbook, *El nene* by Andrés

⁴⁸¹ Even when manuals do not account for the teaching and learning practices in the classroom, they offered a window to understand the knowledge that circulated in it. As Matthias Vom Hau states, “textbooks do not determine classroom activities. Not every statement in the text is taught and followed literally.” Even so, taking into consideration the divergences between textbooks’ discourses and the practice of teaching within the classrooms, textbooks are of critical importance in shaping what students learn. Vom Hau “Unpacking the School: Textbooks, Teachers, and the Construction of Nationhood in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru.”

⁴⁸² The practice of reading out loud was common among the working class. For Europe it has been studied by Roger Chartier in *Libros, lecturas y lectores en la edad moderna* (Madrid: Alianza, 1993). Mariana Di Stefano studies this practice in the reading of anarchist newspaper *La Protesta* in Buenos Aires. Mariana Di Stefano, *El lector libertario: prácticas e ideologías lectoras del anarquismo argentino: 1898-1915* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2013).

⁴⁸³ José Berruti, *Lecturas morales e instructivas* (Buenos Aires: 1902), 8.

⁴⁸⁴ Ana María Ochoa Gautier explores the relationship between listening, voices and power in nineteenth century Colombia. The author shows the importance of the voice and the practice of

Ferreya y J. M. Aubín, shows the importance of such practices. Along with the stories, there were exercises of “declamation” that children might have performed in the classroom. The title of the poems suggests the morals that these exercises sought to inculcate in children including “Study!,” and “Love Your Mother.” Others focused on work and were entitled “Tomorrow is Never.” Declamation exercises asked children to repeat, memorize, and then recite the poem. Another type of classroom activity that appears in *El nene* were exercises of elocution and composition by which children had to describe the drawings and write a description based on the theme. The prompts suggested teachers ask children for very detailed descriptions of people's attitudes, clothing, and physiognomy, and the feelings those people expressed. At the end, the prompt asked students to “formulate some thoughts” regarding the drawing. Some of the drawings included the poor abandoned elderly the customs and character of babies, filial love, life in the countryside, the way of living of boys who worked as shoeshiners and newspaper vendors, the school and its utility, the most salient characteristics of dogs, gauchos and their customs, and respect for the elderly.

The practice of reflecting on the reading and encouraging children to remember the lesson remained in the school for decades. In the 1920s, at the school of application of Normal School No. 1 in the city of Buenos Aires, a third grade teacher was teaching about the theme of “housing” during the class period dedicated to reading. While teaching about synonyms and encouraging students to incorporate new vocabulary, the teacher asked the students what other ways of saying ‘room’ they

listening to understanding how elites contrasted between human and non-human sounds, proper and improper voice during the reformulation of the national project. Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

found in the reading. When the teacher noticed that the children did not recall one of the synonyms, she mentioned that her favorite word was “aposento,” a Spanish word used in the period to refer to room. Suddenly, children repeated the word “aposento” agreeing with the teacher. The idea behind repetition was that new words that children encountered in the readings “will remain stamped” in their heads.⁴⁸⁵ Children knew that these were the expectations, since one student asserted that she or he would “put the word in her [his] head.”

Teachers sought to impart discipline through a series of rituals and quotidian gestures that regulated time, space, and children’s bodies. In the classroom, children were expected to sit in their benches, take notes in their notebooks, do the homework, and repeat the teacher’s lesson.⁴⁸⁶ In front of the classroom, the teacher was in a position that allowed her to scrutinize children’s bodies and movements.⁴⁸⁷ The desk in front of her clearly marked where knowledge was located, ready to be imparted. On her side too was the board that would help her teach children how to read and write. Children’s passiveness in the classroom, largely criticized by school reformers in the 1910s and 1920s, was a common practice in the school.

The bell was a crucial object used in the school for disciplinary purposes. An orderly school was one that had a clear organization of time and bodies within the space and it was the teacher’s task to make sure everything was in its place. Samatán

⁴⁸⁵ “Un día escolar,” *La Obra*, no. 155, Sept. 15, 1928, 566.

⁴⁸⁶ In the 1960s, Brazilian philosopher of education Paulo Freire denominated the instruction imparted in public schools as “banking education.” The metaphor refers to students as empty vessels where teachers deposit concepts and ideas later passively repeated by the students. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia Do Oprimido* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2013[1968]).

⁴⁸⁷ Second grade textbook, *El nene*, shows different images of the school where we can read the statement “The teacher is in the school.” The teacher is sitting behind her desk reading. Ferreyra and Aubin, *El nene. Libro segundo*, 23.

asserts: “I never would have imagined that the bell played such an important role in the life of the school. Actually, it is the one in charge. Hasn't it struck you that it is that inert metal thing that imposes its laws on all that life that seeps in the bodies of children?”⁴⁸⁸ The bell announced the change from one subject to the other and even more importantly, it announced the breaks when children left the classroom and moved to the patio. In Samatán’s narrative, children were not allowed to run, play, or laugh loudly during the break. Her principal had marked the patio assigning a specific space for each child and nobody was allowed to invade the neighbors’ territory. Samatán writes that every time the bell announced the end of the break “the entire school was left petrified, as if a sorceress had been touching everything with her magic wand. A second ringing was heard and in rigorous silence the children had to form lines, very straight lines, where a single head could be seen on stiff bodies. The principal paced like a stalking feline to see if she could discover some disproportion, some disorder, some indiscipline.”⁴⁸⁹ Under the principal’s surveillance, teachers had to mark the steps of “their children” when they entered and left the classroom, sat in their benches and opened their notebooks.⁴⁹⁰ Textbook exercises served as a tool for teachers to repeat these lessons. For instance, in teaching children how to write, a second grade textbook described different scenarios of quotidian life in the school.

⁴⁸⁸ Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 12.

⁴⁸⁹ Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 52. An inspector report confirms the expected behavior of children when the bell rang: “When the bell rings to announce the end of recess, students must be quiet, immediately suspend their games, and form quickly.” Archivo intermedio, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 12, Exp 3071, 1889.

⁴⁹⁰ Brumana complained: “There are teachers with the only concern of the mathematical order of the classroom. They want everything measured. Entering and leaving classes, taking out or putting away supplies, opening or closing notebooks, everything is done by almost military orders.” Brumana, *Obras completas*, 50.

One statement reads: “The bell rings and the children form lines again.”⁴⁹¹ As we see in these examples, being disciplined is essential for children to learn how to move according to time and space, when and how to raise their hand to ask a question, how to talk with their peers and the teacher, when and how to enter the classroom.

Teachers’ narratives on the first days of school demonstrate to what extent the disciplinary role that they learned in the normal school shaped their teaching practice. Remembering her first day as a teacher, Marta Samatán recalled that, unlike in the practice school where children used perfume, sat correctly on their benches, and knew the teachers’ command voices, in the primary school she encountered forty-five children who “in addition to being dirty and stinky, were never quiet. They raised their hands making a noise with their fingers, they stopped without permission, they pushed each other, they rudely questioned each other and even said profane words.”⁴⁹² Sharing his experience at a rural school in Chubut, teacher Eduardo Thames Alderete expressed that the first day of classes was crucial for teachers to set the basis for classroom discipline.⁴⁹³ Following U.S. educator James Baldwin, Alderete asserted that in order to fulfill his role, the teacher could not show weakness, while at the same time had to cause favorable impressions in children.⁴⁹⁴ The teacher

⁴⁹¹ Andres Ferreyra y Jose Maria Aubin, *El nene, libro segundo*, 21.

⁴⁹² Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 45-46.

⁴⁹³ In 1909, Alderete published his teaching experience in Chubut in a book entitled *La escuela en el desierto. Apuntes de un maestro* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta La Bonaerense, 1909). As the title suggests, Alderete followed the Sarmientian belief that the teacher was a missionary who brought civilization to rural populations. In his book, Alderete described the mission of the teacher as a soldier, ready to fight against the enemy, namely ignorance. The book was well received in *Monitor de la educación común* by Edelmiro Correa who recognized that Alderete’s labor was a model of primary instruction since not only provided children with the rudimentary of human knowledge but also modeled children to love work, the law, and the Fatherland. Edelmiro Correa, “La escuela en el desierto. Un libro que enseña y deleita,” *Monitor de la educación común*, no. 448, April 30, 1910.

⁴⁹⁴ “Guay del maestro que demuestra debilidad y no sabe causar a los alumnos impresiõnese [sic] gratas y favorables!”

“must first of all ensure that his frown does not disturb the serenity of his forehead, show himself vigilant, equanimous and firm in his purposes and resolutions, and awaken in the souls of children that pleasant impression that predisposes them to see in him the friend who will guide them along the path of happiness.”⁴⁹⁵

Textbooks further disciplined children by reminding them of the potential consequences of misbehavior. They warned students that children who lied to their parents, skipped school, or followed their mischievous friends put their lives at risk. *El tesoro de la infancia* portrays these types of children in the story “The Drowned Child” where the main character, Carlitos, is described as “scatterbrained, more enthusiastic to play than to work.”⁴⁹⁶ Carlitos was a child that liked to move, climb trees, and swim. One day, Carlitos disobeyed an adult's orders and swam in a dangerous river. The narrative that represented “bad children” as putting the lives of others and their own at risk continued in the following decades. In 1916, textbook *Faro* (Lighthouse) narrated the story of two friends who skipped school to play with guns resulting in one of them fatally injured.⁴⁹⁷ In a story of *El nene*, the main character confesses his remorse after putting his father in a risky situation that threatened his life. These types of morals abounded in textbooks, showing remorse and lifelong guilt as the consequences of children’s misbehavior.⁴⁹⁸

But if children did not learn how to behave, teachers were discouraged from responding with corporal punishment. In theory, corporal punishment was not

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁹⁷ Eleodoro Suárez y Petrona de Rodríguez Quiroga, *Faro. Libro de lectura* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de Guillermo Kraft, 1916), quoted in Aguiar Da Costa “Discursos y representaciones sobre la muerte”

⁴⁹⁸ Aguiar Da Costa “Discursos y representaciones sobre la muerte.”

allowed. A manual of pedagogy explained that among the disciplinary means were the system of rewards and punishments, the records, the officials, the exams, and “the way of communicating and executing the orders.”⁴⁹⁹ In theory, corporal punishment was not part of acceptable disciplinary practices since it was considered a legacy of traditional and religious education.⁵⁰⁰ Criticizing the idea that “letters with blood enter,” manuals suggested that corporal punishment not only made children cry and eventually created more chaos in the classroom, but also children tended to forget about it since its nature was disordered and undisciplined.⁵⁰¹ As teacher Gibert Bergez stated, corporal punishment could lead to more rebellion and disrespectfulness, especially among children of immigrant workers.⁵⁰²

While the disciplinary task of teachers did not allow corporal punishment, teachers still exercised other forms of violence over children’s bodies. In the tale “The Second Mother,” teacher Herminia Brumana narrates the story of a teacher who got angry because a student did not pay attention to her lesson. Herminia wrote: “she lost control of herself. She hit the student. She hit him hard, blinded by anger, and the boy’s head hit the wood of the blackboard, hurting himself.”⁵⁰³ She continues “I didn’t see the teacher’s face at that moment, but I imagine her horrified. Instead, as I passed,

⁴⁹⁹ José María Santos, *Curso Completo de Pedagogía* (Madrid: Librería de la Viuda de Hernando, 1893), 295.

⁵⁰⁰ The original in Spanish “*La letra con sangre entra*” refers to a painting by Francisco Goya. In the painting we see a child with his pants pulled down, while the teacher is inflicting physical punishment with a whip.

⁵⁰¹ Teacher Rosa del Río expressed that it was in the normal school where she learned that “the children were not to be punished for anything in the world,” in Beatriz Sarlo, *La máquina cultural. Maestras, traductores y vanguardistas*, 19.

⁵⁰² Celia Gibert Bergez, “La educación doméstica y refleja,” *Archivos de pedagogía y ciencias afines* 5, no. 13, 1909.

⁵⁰³ Herminia Brumana, “La segunda mamá,” in *Obras completas*, 103.

I saw the child's face: the little hands raised, covering his face in horror, and in the big dark eyes, the most intense shadow. Shadow of dread and shadow of disappointment.”⁵⁰⁴ While Brumana used the tale to condemn teachers for not being able to “dominate their hands” and for not being understanding with children, her narrative portrays a practice that according to other teachers’ narratives was present in the school. Samatán recalled that when she entered her first job, more experienced teachers advised her to pull children’s hair as a form of punishment so “it would hurt a lot without leaving traces.”⁵⁰⁵ Even when Samatán asserted that she never went that far, she still “handed out some sanctions ... I suppressed recess, confiscated and smashed toys, in short, I did everything possible so that my students were afraid of me.”⁵⁰⁶ This account demonstrates that even when teachers were aware that corporal punishment was not accepted, they found ways not to leave evidence on children’s bodies. Beyond physical violence, the system of punishment included violent actions such as breaking precious possessions of children.

Believing that it was within the realm of their authority, some teachers made decisions over children's bodies in order to promote a hygienic school environment. Aware of the importance of teaching hygienic habits, one of the first measures that teacher Rosa del Río took when she became principal in a poor school of Buenos Aires was to shave boys’ heads. When she realized that many of her students had lice, del Río went to see the local barber and requested that he visit the school. During the break, when all the children were on the patio, del Río scrutinized the boys’ heads

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 47.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

and selected one by one those who would be shaved. The principal made them form a line and waited for the bell to announce the start of classes. Scared and without knowing why they were not allowed to go back to the classroom as the rest of their classmates, boys waited for the principal's order who rapidly called the doorman indicating to clean the patio as the barber did his job. After the cleaning, children returned to their classroom showing by example how a hygienic head should look like. For the girls, del Río had a less drastic measure that consisted of teaching them how to use the comb to take out the lice. Del Río's attitudes toward unhygienic children was accepted and even welcomed within normalist training which taught that teachers "must be very vigilant in their inspection to prevent any disease from invading the school."⁵⁰⁷ Teachers were supposed to closely inspect children's personal hygiene including their clothes. Indeed, Del Río narrated the story with pride, convinced that her role as a teacher was to teach practical knowledge and hygienic habits to working class children. From her perspective, the story about shaving the heads of her students was a demonstration of how she cared about her students, how she taught them to take care of their bodies in order to avoid infections. In his sense Del Río was following what was expected from the CNE.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁷ José María Torres, *Curso de pedagogía. Primeros elementos de educación* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de Biedma, 1888), 44.

⁵⁰⁸ A teacher's diary parallels Del Río's story: My students ... how rough, what faces, what types, how much dirt ...! I have returned to my accommodation with my head burning despite the cold; at the age of twenty I have learned what the lack of hair hygiene consists of. Now I understand the existence, among the articles provided by the National Council, of the scissors and hair cutting machines and the mixture of oil and vinegar; Tomorrow I will give you an application to shave heads and destroy parasites. This reference to the elements provided by the CNE suggests that inspecting the heads of children for lice was an expected practice from the school authorities. "Del diario de una maestra de Territorios," *La Obra*, no. 150, June 15, 1928, 346.

Teachers intimidated children by using other forms of coercion. Brumana explained that in order to enforce punctuality, there was only five minutes of tolerance after the bell rang. Teachers could forgive the students up to two times but the third time the student was late, teachers should punish the student by asking the student to stay after class or sit in front of the principal's office where every teacher could see his fault.⁵⁰⁹ The idea was not only to shame children and to show others what could happen if they did not follow the school regulations. But, as Brumana put it, the punishment for children was to stay quiet while seeing other children running, playing, and talking. Detention, or making children stay in the classroom after school hours, was a common form of punishment.⁵¹⁰

Teachers faced contradictions when enforcing the system of punishments that *normalismo* expected to put into practice. Brumana recounted that once she punished two siblings. She told herself: "Today they will not move me with the story of the sick little brother, or the father, or the mother," and looking at the children she yelled: "Do you hear me? You stay after class, and not for a moment, you will stay until two in the afternoon!" The siblings started to cry and the teacher asked them to stop crying but continued lecturing them to make them feel guilty about being late. She asserted: "Your mom is going to be waiting for you at the front door, afraid that something happened to you... she probably made a delicious meal, beef with french fries and eggs." But the children explained that if they stayed at school they would

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ This punishment appeared in children's testimonies in a summary investigation about corporal punishment. Archivo Intermedio, Colección Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 9, Expte 1550, 1888.

miss the only meal they would have, a soup served in the *Cantina Escolar*, a place where children went after school to have a meal. As a result, the teacher canceled the punishment and visited the cantina to realize that many children from her school received their only daily meal there. The story reflects the teacher's conflicts around enforcing discipline among poor children. She was determined to "not be moved" by the children which reflects that at times the teacher could have avoided punishment when hearing their personal stories. It also demonstrates the assumptions that middle-class teachers had about their student's realities. Brumana, deeply concerned about poverty, indicated a reality for many teachers around the country. The pedagogical theory that came from the manuals of pedagogy which imposed a perfect discipline collided with the quotidian practice of teachers that saw the struggles of poor children trying to comply with school regulations.

Despite the fact that teachers relied on school regulations to punish students who misbehaved, children challenged the teacher's authority in front of their classmates. Like the two siblings who reversed the detention and went to the Cantina to eat, children were not passive subjects who quietly obeyed the punishment imposed in the school. In 1913, the book *El niño y sus fiestas* (the Child and His Parties) portrays a story of children who rebelled against their teacher. The monologue titled "En penitencia" (Under Punishment) portrays a child who explained that the teacher punished him for no reason. Although the child later admitted the mischief, he complained since he always behaved accordingly: "I study as anybody, I never have bad grades, in the classroom I am a statue, almost never I turn around, sometimes I talk, bah! But who does not talk? Sometimes I skipped school, but that is

silly.”⁵¹¹ The child then recounted how with his classmates, he threw stones toward the teacher’s hat, breaking it. Infuriated, the teacher made them form a line and inspected their pockets finding evidence in the narrator’s pocket. While fictional, the monologue portrayed children challenging the teacher’s authority.

Some teachers had to navigate the tensions between showing themselves as authoritative and understanding educators. Even when women wanted to show empathy for the students, the mandate was to perform with strictness and cause fear among the students. One story in *Tizas de colores* (Colored Chalk) related the encounter between a principal and a student. The latter was sent to the principal’s office to be reprimanded because he did not do his homework. Based on the student’s clothes and after asking a couple of questions the principal noted that the student’s father had been sent to a hospice, the student was poor, and worked as a shoe shiner. Horrified by the difficult situation of the little boy, the principal asserted: “I dare not ask anything else! But I have to justify my authority at the school, I have to even try something to tell the teacher that this student has promised to do his homework, review the reading, pay attention in class.”⁵¹² Brumana’s story reflects the contradictions that educators faced when navigating their mandate to show authority in front of their subordinates (both the teachers and the students) and at the same time show compassion for the struggles of working-class children.

In order to discipline children, teachers relied on and enforced a system of punishments that aimed to discipline children’s bodies and movements. In many

⁵¹¹ Andrés Calcagno, *El niño y sus fiestas* (La Plata: Taller de Impresiones Oficiales, 1913), 171.

⁵¹² Brumana, *Obras completas*, 91.

cases, teachers like Rosa del Río felt entitled to exercise their authority over what she considered as savage children. Interrogation, detention, and visiting the principal's office were part of the quotidian experience of children who did not follow the established rules. In other opportunities, teachers doubted the extent to which the rules they imposed on children were just when children lacked the most basic resources like food. But regardless of their personal ideas, their teaching performance was closely supervised by inspectors who scrutinized their abilities as capable educators.

Keeping Home in Order: School Inspectors and Teachers Gendered Roles in the School

As much as teachers oversaw children, they were in turn closely supervised by superiors. The CNE entrusted school inspectors with the special task of representing the national state at the local level and keeping an eye on school discipline. The position of inspector was created in 1871 by Law 1463.⁵¹³ As a hierarchical position

⁵¹³ The law of “subvenciones nacionales” stated that the national government would contribute to the provinces that wanted to found schools. The law also stipulated the creation of national inspectors who would supervise the use of the national budget. The provincial government had its autonomy in administering the resources for education but with the implementation of the 1420 law in 1884, the CNE centralized more power in the national government. In 1884, the National Commission on Education that regulated until then only Buenos Aires was transformed into the National Council of Education, the organism that would regulate normal and primary schools in the following decades. According to Roberto Marengo, the changes between the two organisms are telling in the way the administration of Roca sought to centralize power. Instead of eight voting members, the Council was reduced to four. Before 1884, the vocals were elected by the executive power and had to be approved by the Deputies. With the centralization of education, the Council's vocals were nominated by the executive without need of the Deputies approval. The other change is that the vocals who previously had the role of visiting the schools, were now dedicated mainly to an administrative task, separating in this way the inspection from the management of the schools. Roberto Marengo, “Estructuración y consolidación del poder normalizador: El Consejo Nacional de Educación” in Puiggrós Adriana, *Sociedad civil y Estado en los orígenes del sistema educativo argentino*. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1991).

within the CNE, inspectors were men. The practice of inspecting the school as well as the specific tasks they performed was under construction during the origins of the school system in Argentina.⁵¹⁴ Sarmiento dedicated a chapter of his book *La educación popular* to delineate the main requirements for school inspectors, including normal training and knowledge of the school they supervised.⁵¹⁵ But the structure of inspection became more complex at the turn of the century with a growing body of national inspectors of primary, secondary, and normal education.⁵¹⁶ Overall, inspectors supervised the school building, reported the advancement of schooling in the country, trained teachers through pedagogical conferences, and mediated between teachers' demands and the CNE.⁵¹⁷

In order to supervise the school building and oversee teachers, inspectors visited the school regularly. During their visits, the work of teachers and principals was closely monitored. Inspectors examined documents that recorded the daily life of the school such as attendance. In order to surprise teachers during their activities, the inspector could visit the school without notice. Samatán described the inspector as searching for errors committed by teachers. She wrote: "it was an unspeakable

⁵¹⁴ The role of the inspector was debated in the 1882 Congreso Pedagógico (Pedagogical Congress) and continued throughout the year. "Discusión del proyecto," *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 3, Dic. 1881; "Congreso Pedagógico," *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 12, Sept. 1882; "Congreso Pedagógico," *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 9, June 1882; "Instrucciones a los inspectores nacionales," *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 20, Dec. 1882. "Los inspectores de instrucción primaria" *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 19, Dec. 1882.

⁵¹⁵ Domingo Sarmiento, *Educación popular* (Buenos Aires: Luz del día, 1950).

⁵¹⁶ In 1890 the CNE implemented the School Inspection for the Primary Schools in the national territories in charge of Raúl Díaz. The inspectors within the provinces were directed by the Inspeccion General de Provincias, in charge of one General Inspector and one Sub-Inspector. There were fourteen traveling inspectors and seventy five visiting inspectors. Adrian Cammarota, "Relatos sobre maestras acosadas e inmorales: género, educación y disciplinamiento en el sistema escolar argentino (1919-1935)," *Historia y Memoria de la Educación*, no. 12, (2020): 395-432.

⁵¹⁷ Martín Legarralde, "Inspectores" in *Palabras claves en la historia de la educación argentina*, Flavia Fiorucci and José Bustamante Vismara ed., (Buenos Aires: Unipe, 2019).

pleasure for him to record the teacher's lack of dedication.”⁵¹⁸ Therefore, teachers experienced their visits with defensiveness as if they were ready to receive an attack or reprimand.⁵¹⁹ A patriarchal relationship established in the school between male inspectors, usually older than the teachers, and female teachers hoping not to be reprimanded by a state official. Inspectors “controlled the schedule, tricked the children, verified the change of subject every time the bell rang, walked around the lines of children to surprise them if in a wrong position.”⁵²⁰ Thus, it is possible to assume that teachers felt the pressure to keep order among children and to follow school regulations under the pressure of national inspection.

Textbooks approved by the CNE portrayed the figure of the inspector from a friendly perspective. In *El nene*, a tale entitled “The Visit of the Inspector” narrates the story of an “old man with a severe but kind face” that examined children’s notebooks with attention and asked questions of the children.⁵²¹ The relationships were harmonic and no conflict arose in the classroom. The inspector asked “very nice questions” and “for everyone he has a word of encouragement.”⁵²² Every child replied with joy, except Germán, the lazy student who, after feeling embarrassed for

⁵¹⁸ Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 62.

⁵¹⁹ It was not always the case that the inspector represented a hatred figure in the school. Although scarce, some accounts show that inspectors were well received and contributed to the teachers’ tasks. For instance, a teacher from the territories wrote in her diary that the inspector was friendly and gave her good feedback about her work in the school. “In the midst of this intellectual loneliness, your visit has done me great good.” “Del diario de una maestra de Territorios,” *La Obra*, Año 8 - Nro 150, 1928, 347.

⁵²⁰ Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 62

⁵²¹ Ferreyra and Aubin, *El nene. Libro segundo*, 87.

⁵²² *Ibid.*

not knowing the answers to the inspector's questions, learned that it would have been better to listen to the teacher and be a good and studious boy.⁵²³

But from the teachers' perspective, inspectors created more anxiety than textbooks admitted. Inspectors tested teachers' labor by examining children. As in the story of Germán, the inspector supervised the learning development of children through oral exams and the reading of their notebooks. The notebooks were understood as a reflection of both the student and the teacher's performance in the class. It was important that the notebook, as well as the children, show cleanliness and order.⁵²⁴ Samatán stated that some colleagues prepared the notebooks for the examinations.⁵²⁵ She complained that inspectors just glimpsed at what happened in the classroom, instead of focusing on the actual content of the lesson. This disconnection between what teachers might have considered pedagogically important, considering the knowledge they had about the students, and how their performance was evaluated through a short visit is one the ways in which the hierarchical disciplinary system of *normalismo* failed teachers.

⁵²³ Germán is the only student that breaks the perfect order of the classroom. The story says: "The children are sitting working on their blackboards. Only Germán remains idle. In vain the teacher admonishes him to imitate his classmates, but German ignores her. He is lazy and does not want to work. He always behaves badly, without any means of improving. He always has an excuse for doing nothing. Sometimes he forgets the book; others he loses his notebooks and almost never he has a pen, pencil, or blackboard. The teacher who sympathizes with him, because she knows that children who are lazy when they are little tend to be unhappy when they grow up, says: 'You do not want to work and that defect will cause you shame. some day'" The teacher's prediction comes true the day the inspector visited the school. Ferreyra and Aubin, *El nene. Libro segundo*, 86.

⁵²⁴ In 1921, for example, an inspector who visited the school evaluating to what extent a teacher without diploma was an effective teacher and how the principal lead the school, wrote in the "Inspection Form" that in fourth grade students needed to improve the handwriting and have "more cleanliness" in the written homework. Archivo Intermedio, Colección Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 1, Expte 9183, 1921.

⁵²⁵ She writes: "[the principal] spent her time examining the outside of things: the sweeping of the floors, the cleaning of the glass, the varnish of the furniture, the lining of the notebooks, the children's overalls, the position in class, etc., etc. An ink stain was decomposing her face, a cobweb was clouding her." Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 48.

Teacher performance was evaluated by inspectors within the gendered expectations of women's duties in society. A teacher's absence in the classroom was seen as a source of chaos. The same type of discourses circulated about women's absence from their home. In her study of home economics, Paula Aguilar explained that, far from being natural, the ideal home that promises warmth, support, and correct morals required constant activity, work, and movement. In order to perform these tasks, the expectation for women was to stay permanently in their homes. Any absence from home was translated as "abandonment."⁵²⁶ Paralleling the home with the school, teachers had to be in the classroom, making sure to work, rule, and govern children's activity.

In the same way teachers supervised children's punctuality, their attendance at school was controlled by the inspectors. Inspectors reported student *and* teacher attendance to the CNE regularly. In 1889, inspector Alfredo Ferreira visited the schools of his district and wrote brief summaries. In each school Ferreira supervised the daily attendance forms corroborating the percentage of registered students that attended regularly. In school No. 5, for instance, he noted that from a total of 299 registered students only 186 (62%) were present in the school that day. Ferreira suggested that teachers "stimulate children to attend more punctually, improving teaching work by giving daily examples (...) and using all the means available to the

⁵²⁶ In her book Amelia Palma asserted "The influence of women in the family will conquer her if she tries to provide all her loved ones with a sweet well-being, fulfilling the duties of wife and mother, since it is the woman who gives life to the home, as it is she who destroys it, when due to ignorance or abandonment neglects the fulfillment of those duties." Amelia Palma, *Veladas del hogar, Lecturas Auxiliares de Moral e Instrucción Cívica*, (Buenos Aires: Pinto, 1907).

school.”⁵²⁷ The advice given by the inspector suggests that attendance was in part the teacher’s responsibility. When the inspector visited the school he noticed that every teacher was present. Yet, his conclusion was that teachers should improve their work by giving an example even when they were already attending to their duties.⁵²⁸ At the Escuela Graduada de Niñas, Ferreira reported that one teacher was absent and another retired after the first hour. At the Escuela No. 2 Elemental de Niñas, one teacher was absent. In 1890, the inspector continued to complain about how common these “bad habits” were among teachers.⁵²⁹ The CNE put together some strategies to discourage teacher absences. For instance, appealing to the hierarchy within the school staff, the CNE requested that principals send a form with the number of times teachers were absent from the school and clarify if the nonattendance was justified or not. To avoid possible complicity with teachers, the inspector suggested that instead of making the principals responsible for deciding if the absences were justified, the CNE, via the local School Councils, would make those determinations. This initiative was rejected by the CNE and the principals continued sending the forms monthly and yearly detailing the number of absences for each teacher. Finally, the inspector urged the CNE to apply the fines established by the regulation to punish irresponsible teachers.

⁵²⁷ Punctuality in this case refers to being absent from the school. As we will see in the next section, the absence of teachers was referred to as lack of punctuality, Archivo intermedio, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 12, Exp 3071, 1889.

⁵²⁸ Another perspective in relation to the absence of children in the school put more emphasis on the parents’ responsibilities. In 1886, Inspector Guerrica, concerned with the unfulfillment of mandatory schooling suggested that the local school authorities should denounce to the police the parents that did not send their children to the school. Archivo intermedio, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 6, Exp 1987, 1886.

⁵²⁹ Archivo intermedio, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 13, Exp 2194, 1890.

As in the home, the organization of time in the school was important for an efficient administration. Inspector Ferreira scrutinized if teachers followed the time assigned for each subject. In almost every school Ferreira visited in 1889, he noted some level of failure in time management. Thus, he recommended that principals put up a sign with the daily schedule so teachers could properly follow it.⁵³⁰ As textbooks of home economics taught, the organization of time was crucial in the “good government of the home.” Nineteenth century textbooks insisted that “one of the most essential things for the order of the home, was the good distribution of time.” When time was not properly used and work was not methodically done, “waste reigned in the home.”⁵³¹ Manuals taught girls how to use their time and how to distribute all their duties throughout the day and during the week.⁵³² As we saw in textbook *Nosotros*, lessons taught children that it was the task of women to make sure everyone woke up early in the morning, to have the breakfast served on the table when children woke up and to prepare lunch for the husband who left for work. A

⁵³⁰ The concern about the lack of an orderly schedule appeared in reports from other provinces. For instance, in San Luis the inspector asserted that an urgent reform of programs and schedule was needed since “the former are exceedingly deficient and the latter do not really exist” Archivo intermedio, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 12, Exp 3018, 1889.

⁵³¹ The textbook reads: “When time is not used profitably; when work is not done with a prudent method, waste reigns in the house, some things are done and others remain to be done; in a word, there can only be derangement.” *Tratado de economía y labores para uso de niñas* (Madrid: La Educación, 1878), 19.

⁵³² For instance, the *Tratado de economía y labores para uso de niñas* suggested that Monday was for laundry, Tuesday to put the clothing with “lejía,” a chemical preparation that helped to disinfect clothes, Wednesday to dry the clothes, Thursday to amend the clothes, Friday to iron, Saturday to clean the home in depth, and Sundays to go to Church and read. *Tratado de economía y labores para uso de niñas*, 21. Another textbook indicated the distribution of tasks throughout the day in this order: 1. Wake up early, 2. Clean and ventilate the home, clothes, and people, 3. Prepare breakfast, 4. Buy groceries and inspect them. 5. Prepare lunch and rest. 6. Repair and patch clothes. 7. Domestic and social tasks. 8. Prepare dinner. 9. Rest, 10. Read and have useful and recreational conversations, 11. Set accounts and expenses made during the day, 12. Revise rooms and rest. Salzá, Emilia, *La Economía Doméstica al alcance de las niñas* (Buenos Aires: Cabaut y Cía, 1909), 21. Quoted in Aguilar, *El hogar como problema*.

home economic textbook taught girls that “The first daily care of that lady was to make the whole family get up early; Well, people who don't get up early are too lazy to work, they lack time for many things”⁵³³

The parallel between the role of teachers in the school and the role of women at home was particularly evident in the cleaning chores teachers performed in the school. Teachers were responsible for making sure their students looked clean as much as they were in charge of assuring the material conditions of the school environment.⁵³⁴ In a letter dedicated to school teachers published in *El Monitor*, an inspector suggested that as children entered the classroom, teachers pointed out to the cleanliness of the floor, the windows, and the doors showing children exemplary hygiene.⁵³⁵ Teachers also had to teach children to maintain that order and to take care of the school furniture. This way teachers would help the school council by saving money that could be allocated to benefit a major number of students. In other words, it was the teacher's responsibility, as a good housewife, to make efficient use of scarce school resources.

Since teachers lived in the school building, the connection between the school and the home was evident. Jennie Howard explained that teachers lived in the same building due to mothering obligations. She asserted that in normal schools, principals used to live in the same building since “they were comfortable leaving class at any

⁵³³ *Tratado de economía y labores para uso de niñas*, 19.

⁵³⁴ A manual suggested that teachers needed to arrive fifteen minutes before the class started to prepare the lesson. Once the teacher was ready, they would indicate with a signal to enter the school. Children entered the school by singing a song that had the purpose to teach them the acquisition of some “useful knowledge,” while the teacher inspected “the students' cleanliness as they pass in front of him.” Santos, *Curso completo de pedagogía*, 293-294.

⁵³⁵ “Gobierno de la escuela. A una joven maestra.”

time to breastfeed a child or prepare a meal.”⁵³⁶ Not all school buildings had enough rooms for teachers to live in, but when they did, the division between the home and the school blurred. An inspector publishing in *El Monitor* in 1900 recalled: “I have sometimes seen apparently soapy clothes in the school sink, which gives a very sad idea to the director of the establishment.”⁵³⁷ On another occasion, the same inspector reprimanded a principal for the presence of spider webs hanging from the roof. Ferreira recognized that the deficient hygiene was due to the lack of doormen in charge of those duties but he also attributed the responsibility to the teachers. He wrote in his report: “I recommended that the cleaning of the courtyards and classrooms be extended a lot during the teaching task.”⁵³⁸

A clean school building was a reflection of women’s honor and fulfillment of their duties. Howard mentioned a “big satisfaction” when U.S. teachers saw that “after working with their own hands” the classrooms were cleaned and ventilated.⁵³⁹ Howard recalled her labor in arranging her home in Corrientes. She wrote: “The rooms of the small adobe building, with one floor and a roof terrace, were not very spacious, but they were soon arranged with taste, and led an Englishman, who had been a traveling companion of the teachers, to express his belief that, with only a pair

⁵³⁶ Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes*, 53.

⁵³⁷ “Gobierno de la escuela. A una joven maestra.”

⁵³⁸ Archivo Intermedio, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 12, Exp 3071, 1889.

⁵³⁹ Howard, *En otros climas y años distantes*, 64. Air and light, manuals taught, had direct effects in children’s bodies and, with the appropriate set up by the teachers, they could have positive influences in strengthening the body. In order to avoid the *aire viciado* and provide a classroom with “pure air,” manuals of pedagogy urged teachers to take action: doors and windows will be opened during the breaks and in between classes. In Spanish, the concept “aire viciado” referred to a classroom with negative effects for respiration. The causes that generated this type of air were respiration, combustion, exhalation, and the gasses that were released from putrefact vegetables and animals or from the latrines. Santos, *Curso completo de pedagogía*, 54. Other manuals asserted that teachers were responsible for not exceeding the number of children allowed in a classroom that should have been no smaller than four cubic meters and one square meter of pavement. Torres, *Curso de pedagogía*.

of Japanese fans, an American girl would be able to transform a wasteland into a comfortable home.”⁵⁴⁰ In order to acquire the “good taste” of white women, girls attending normal and primary schools received training in home economics, while boys practiced military exercises.⁵⁴¹

As moral examples for the children, teachers had to maintain a morally impeccable life free from any stains, like their cleaned homes. Any disruption, including disobeying the patriarchal authority, was considered a deviation from women’s role as peacekeepers. Some home economics textbooks portrayed women as saints and angels.⁵⁴² Others taught girls to avoid disagreements with their husbands. A conversation between two sisters reads:

Our mother, dear Sofía, was an instructed and educated woman, endowed with enough dignity and self-esteem to be respected by all, and yet how many times have I seen her remain silent and submissive on the occasion of a matter in which her opinion is not the same as our father's! Believe it, she was doing his duty. Even when a mother has the firm conviction that the father is making a mistake, it is always better for her to accept his authority, instead of provoking a bitter dispute, the results of which are yelling and cursing.⁵⁴³

Any conflicts within the household could therefore be explained by women’s actions or omissions. A textbook dedicated an entire chapter to explaining the causes and consequences of the “home’s ruin” explaining that “the husband or children who find

⁵⁴⁰ Howard, *En otros climas y años distantes*, 41.

⁵⁴¹ Paula Lucia Aguilar, “Domesticidad y economía doméstica,” in *Palabras claves en la historia de la educación argentina*. In his analysis of the textbook of home economics *Consejos a mi hija* by Amelia Palma, Adrián Cammarota points out the gender norms and values taught in the school. While home economics taught girls to be self-sacrificing and altruist, in gymnastics boys cultivated strength and resistance. Adrián Cammarota, “Los Consejos de Amalia a su hija Laura. Propaganda moral y construcciones genéricas en un texto escolar a comienzos del siglo XX en Argentina,” *De prácticas y discursos*, no 1, 2012.

⁵⁴² Alejandro y Elvira Lamas, *Lecturas sobre moral, higiene y economía doméstica* (Montevideo: A. Barreiro y Ramos, Editor, 1909).

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 52.

sour scenes in their home, shouting, out of temper, unfair quarrels, untimely tears, annoying susceptibility, extreme rigors, move away from there.” In the end, the textbook asks the readers, “if the husband flees because of the quality of character of the woman, although she is still in it, will he not be responsible for its ruin?⁵⁴⁴ As Aguilar suggests, the woman that emerges from home economics discourses is one that is active, orderly, virtuous, and capable of “deactivating passions and conflicts.”⁵⁴⁵

The respectable moral behavior expected from teachers included a life with a controlled sexuality. As historian Paula Caldo has expressed, teachers could be either “single or properly married.”⁵⁴⁶ Those who were single, and especially those who moved to locations away from their families and hometown, required a vigilant attitude from the CNE and the local community. Girls incorporated these mandates that appeared in the textbooks. In *Veladas del hogar* (Evenings at Home), Amelia Palma portrayed a conversation between a teacher and her students:

Honest is the person who does not attack anyone or, who does not defame or deceive, who does not commit any vileness, who strictly fulfills all her duties and insists on procedures, her entire life be a model of virtues that conquer for her the best reputation; the honest person, in addition to the conditions expressed, is modest, moderate, observes the same in intimate life as in public, descends in modesty in actions, words, clothes.⁵⁴⁷

Because teachers had to set moral examples for their students, they had the responsibility to embody these morals in the classroom and beyond.

⁵⁴⁴ María Atocha Ossorio y Gallardo, *Las hijas bien educadas. Guía práctica para el uso de las hijas de familia* (Barcelona: Sociedad General de Publicaciones, 1910), 288.

⁵⁴⁵ Aguilar, *El hogar como problema*, 172.

⁵⁴⁶ Paula Caldo “Solteras o debidamente casadas. Aproximaciones a una arista poco explorada en la historia de las maestras argentinas, 1920-1950,” *Arenal* 26, no. 2, (July-December 2019): 521-540.

⁵⁴⁷ Palma, *Veladas del hogar*, 21.

Despite the state's expectations of perfect moral behavior, some teachers challenged the norms imposed on them. Yet, if the teacher's behavior provoked suspicions among local communities or within the school, they were subject to investigation by the CNE. In 1919, a teacher from Mendoza was investigated because of repeated leaves of absence.⁵⁴⁸ At 21 years old, Paulina was in charge of her mother, her disabled sister, her niece, and her six month old daughter. The fact that Paulina was in charge of taking care of her family members was expected but her daughter was the cause of suspicions. The visiting inspector interrogated Paulina inquiring: "What reasons are there for moving away so often from the school's location, having your mother in it?" and "Who is the father of your daughter? Where does he live?"⁵⁴⁹ Paulina refused to give information about her daughter's father but asserted that she left the town to take care of family business. The inspector, however, did not believe her and decided to suspend Paulina "because her conduct was at odds with the practices of good customs and her morality in open contradiction with the one the position demands."⁵⁵⁰ The CNE determined Paulina was not a good example for the school and in the same year decided to fire her.

Other teachers challenged expected sexual behavior by engaging in romantic relationships with their superiors. Again, the CNE turned to sanctions for those teachers who dare to transgress the norms for single or married teachers. In 1921, a school in Chubut was the scenario of conflict between a teacher and her principal. A

⁵⁴⁸ Adrian Cammarota, "Relatos sobre maestras acosadas e inmorales: género, educación y disciplinamiento en el sistema escolar argentino (1919-1935), *Historia y Memoria de la Educación* 12 (2020): 395-432.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 407

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

letter written by the principal was the evidence used by the teacher's brother to report the CNE and demand sanctions against the principal who was harassing his sister. The investigation conducted by the CNE, however, allowed the principal to deny his harassment and shame the teacher for her sexual impulses. The principal used his contacts among the CNE and the local community to portray himself as a respectable community member and father. The principal was sent to another location while the teacher resigned. As historians have shown, the workplace has been an intense arena for the expression of emotions and the establishment of frugal or long-lasting relationships.⁵⁵¹ The school was no exception. The moral surveillance exercised by the CNE via school inspectors constituted another aspect of the patriarchal relationship exercised over teacher's bodies. Keeping homes in order meant respecting their superiors, educating children, cleaning, organizing daily tasks, and behaving according to the moral standards imposed by the state. As we will see in the next section, teachers did not always succeed in keeping harmonious relationships in the school, especially when they entered into conflict with the fathers of students.

Negotiating Authority in the School Community

The previous sections have shown the mechanisms that teachers utilized to discipline "savage" children and the mechanisms that inspectors, as patriarchal figures in the school, enforced to make sure teachers were behaving as efficient teachers and moral second mothers. This section introduces local communities as

⁵⁵¹ Mirta Zaida Lobato, "Afectos y sexualidad en el mundo del trabajo entre fines del siglo XIX y la década de 1930" in *Moralidades y comportamientos sexuales. Argentina 1880-2011*, Dora Barrancos, Donna Guy, and Adriana Valobra eds., (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2014).

important actors in the process of disciplining children and teachers. Local communities were composed mostly of parents of children attending the school but also included local merchants, neighbors, political leaders, and school authorities. While the CNE assigned inspectors to oversee teachers' labor, local communities were the most present and, at times, pressing actors in observing the behavior of teachers and examining to what extent teachers were fulfilling their roles. Inspectors had access to the classroom, student notebooks, attendance records, and lesson plans, but parents were able to observe, comment, and denounce teachers' attitudes more than the inspectors.⁵⁵² This section explores the conflicts that emerged between teachers and parents that escalated to the CNE and prompted summary investigations by a visiting inspector.⁵⁵³ In the process of researching and interviewing the local community, the summary investigations constitute a valuable source to understand how ultimately *normalismo* functioned as a system that disciplined not only children but also teachers who either abused their authority or behaved in ways that did not follow state and community expectations.

Teachers were expected to collaborate with parents in the disciplining of children but parents did not always react positively to the actions taken by teachers. Manuals of pedagogy told teachers that the mutual collaboration from the home and the school was crucial to keeping children clean and making sure they attended

⁵⁵² In this section I focus mainly on the summary investigations against teachers and principals conducted by the CNE during the period 1880-1930 available at the National Archive in the collection of the National Council of Education.

⁵⁵³ Unlike the regular inspector that visited the school to supervise the daily functioning of the school, the visiting inspector was sent by the CNE to conduct research around a specific conflict that emerged from a formal complaint of educators or parents.

classes regularly.⁵⁵⁴ Ángel Bassi asserted that the home was like a small state but in many cases it was in the school where children first learned notions of government and norms. Therefore, it was the teachers' task to teach norms and impose punishments when those norms were not followed. Yet, parents do not always quietly accept teachers' discipline of their children. Ultimately, these disputes show children's bodies as a site of conflict between the state and the family. Because the teachers representing the state were mostly female and the parents in charge of the *patria potestad* of children were male, the struggles reveal gender conflicts regarding who had the authority to better educate children.⁵⁵⁵

When conflicts between teachers and local communities escalated, parents reported them to the CNE. The process of a summary investigation began. The CNE sent visiting inspectors to do research, interrogate the parents and the teachers, and collect evidence. Based on the information collected, the visiting inspectors suggested disciplinary measures that could go from a suspension of a portion of the salary, to the relocation of the teacher to another school, or their expulsion from the educational system, especially if the teacher had prior disciplinary issues. Disciplinary measures tended to be harder on women, but when teachers considered the sanctions unfair,

⁵⁵⁴ Parents were the most important allies in educating children since they made sure to “establish and maintain regularity in daily attendance, punctuality, children’s submission of homework; and neatness and personal cleanliness” Ángel Bassi, *Curso de pedagogía para el primer año de las escuelas normales de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Kapelusz, 1931), 567.

⁵⁵⁵ *Patria Potestad* refers to the power and authority that fathers exercised over their children. Fathers were the primary legal guardians of minors. For a definition and historical evolution of the *patria potestad* in colonial Latin America, see: Bianca Premo, *Children’s of the Father King. Youth, Authority, and Legal Minority in Colonial Lima* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina). In Argentina, during the period under analysis the *patria potestad* belonged to the father. If the father died the mother had *patria potestad* over their children. See: Marcela Nari, *Políticas de maternidad y maternalismo político. Buenos Aires 1890-1940* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2004). In 1949, the *patria potestad* started being shared between both parents although it was abolished during the 1955 dictatorship to be reestablished in 1983.

they complained and appealed the process, requesting the CNE to reconsider the case. The entire process, from when a local actor reported a teacher until the final resolution of bureaucrats in Buenos Aires, could take months or extend over a year. Meanwhile, teachers continued attending the school and teaching the lesson to dozens of children, including those of parents who testified against the teachers.

Parents pushed back from the disciplining children received in the school. In June 1888, Juan R., father of student Carmela R., reported a teaching assistant for “ear tugging.”⁵⁵⁶ In the letter sent to the CNE, Juan explained that in the past three days Carmela had been sick in bed as a result of the abusive behavior of the teacher. As proof, the father attached a certificate signed by a doctor who diagnosed an “inflammation of the exterior organs in the left inner ear.”⁵⁵⁷ But the medical certificate did not prove that it was the teacher who caused her sickness. Juan requested the CNE take the appropriate measures to avoid these types of practices in the school. The inspector took care of the investigation the following day by spending Saturday investigating the case, interviewing the people involved including the teaching assistant María C., her colleagues, the principal, Carmela, her sister, and some classmates. The inspector went to the school to talk with the local community and to determine if the teacher was guilty of breaking school rules that strictly prohibited corporal punishments.

⁵⁵⁶ Since the documents are part of a summary investigation, the names of the participants are protected. I use pseudonyms in each case to maintain their anonymity. Archivo Intermedio, Consejo Naional de Educación, Box 9, Exte 1550 “Denuncia castigo corporal,” 1888.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

The principal and the teachers denied the accusations. Aware of the regulations that forbade corporal punishment, the principal denied those practices but recognized that when she arrived at the directorship teachers had the habit of beating children. Yet, the principal claimed those practices were eradicated. María's colleagues argued that it was hard to believe that María could strike children since she had a "soft character." In this case, teachers used women's delicate attributes to defend their colleague. María told the visiting inspector that she was "painfully impressed" when she learned about the father's accusation. Finally, she revealed that the father had extorted her when she was visiting his daughter to check on her health. According to the teacher, Juan wanted her to pay for the cradle of her daughter to remain silent.

Except for Carmela and her sister, the rest of the children interviewed testified in favor of the teacher. Carmela testified against the teacher, asserting that she had been punished for not paying attention in class.⁵⁵⁸ As the inspector noted in his report, she "did not cry, neither did she complain, but she felt some pain."⁵⁵⁹ Carmela's sister confirmed the corporal punishment. The inspector wrote in his notes: "the ear is somewhat red at its root and there is some inflammation around it."⁵⁶⁰ The doctor did

⁵⁵⁸ The inspector visited the parents. No declaration of Carmela's mother is present in the inspector's report. As was common in most of the reports, mothers were not called to testify. Instead, the children's fathers who were legally responsible for the children were interrogated by the inspector. The document is damaged and the inspector's handwriting is not clear but it seems that Carmela asserted that she was punished for not looking towards the front of the classroom and instead she was turned around, potentially talking with a classmate. As we saw in the previous section, children were not supposed to turn around and talk in class.

⁵⁵⁹ Archivo Intermedio, Consejo Naional de Educación, Box 9, Exte 1550 "Denuncia castigo corporal," 1888.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

not help María's defense, but neither did he hinder it.⁵⁶¹ Continuing his research, the inspector visited other children. Following the suggestion by Carmela's family, he visited Ester F. who lived next to their home. Ester, however, did not confirm Carmela's story and instead she affirmed that "the teachers are very good and she loved them."⁵⁶² Children contended that the teacher was good and that the only punishment she applied to them was "detention" after class.⁵⁶³

Convinced that most children testified under pressure, the inspector suspected that the teacher was guilty. It was not credible for him that two girls of good behavior accused a teacher of something she did not do. The visiting inspector asserted that the children were manipulated and therefore less reliable. But he did not ponder the possibility that Carmela or her sister could be influenced by her father. He did not mention the father's extortion. Instead, he distrusted children who supported the teacher. He wrote: "the children's answers were so uniform that they made me harbor suspicion of a preparation or of a strange influence in their behavior."⁵⁶⁴ Yet, statements that children should love their teachers as much as they love their parents, was part of the morals that they learned from textbooks. His writing reflects the homogeneity he wanted to convey since he grouped students' testimonies in the same section without differentiating them by name. Finally, the inspector distrusted María's intentions when visiting Carmela. He wrote: "Is it not strange that a person

⁵⁶¹ The doctor expressed that the inflammation in Carmela's ear could have been caused by corporal punishment as much it could not have. In other words, the doctor could not testify against the teacher.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Some children mentioned detention lasted until five in the afternoon. Others recalled it was until six. This discrepancy was not enough to convince the inspector that children's declarations were the product of an external influence. Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

approaches the house of the people to whom he attributes a slander in that way?”⁵⁶⁵

On Monday, the inspector wrote in his report: “it is not, in my opinion, sufficiently proven, although I have the presumption that in reality, that lady has applied the punishment that she is being blamed for, perhaps without the slightest intention of harming the girl and being the first time that she ventures into a lightness of this class.”⁵⁶⁶ María was not punished for her actions. Even though we cannot fully know any of the accusations made by either side, the case nonetheless demonstrates that conflicts between parents and teachers arose over children's bodies and ultimately inspectors made their decisions based on contested evidence provided by fathers and teachers.

Parents also complained and organized against teachers considered as pretentious or authoritarian. In 1919, in a town seventy miles away from the city of Buenos Aires, rumors that teacher Teodora C. was not performing responsibly circulated among the parents and reached the head of the School Council and landowner, Gabriel T.⁵⁶⁷ He telegraphed the CNE, reporting to them that the local community was dissatisfied with the teacher's performance. At the same time, Teodora also reached out to the CNE to express her concern regarding her situation.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ According to the documents collected in the investigation, Teresa Crespo was a school teacher of first grade and received her teaching diploma in Uruguay where she was born. She later validated her diploma to teach in Argentina. Her first job in the country began in 1900 as a teacher of 3rd category in La Pampa. In 1909 ascended to teacher of 2nd category in a school in Buenos Aires but in March 1910 she resigned. From March until July 1911 she worked in another school where she was being disciplined for not attending the school on February 15 as expected according to the CNE regulation. This disciplinary measure did not stop her from becoming a principal. In 1918 Crespo started her job as principal in the school of San Antonio de Areco where another summary investigation was started. Ibid.

In a letter to the national inspector, Teodora accused Gabriel of spreading “propaganda against the school” and urging his tenants and other parents to not send their children to the school.⁵⁶⁸ In an attempt to undermine her legitimacy among the local community, Gabriel had already introduced a new teacher during a horse race, telling parents that she would be the new teacher. In March, Teodora reiterated the complaint, hoping that the CNE acted towards the defense of her authority as the legitimate teacher in the community. On April 5, the CNE approved the beginning of a summary investigation that would leave Teodora without a job, despite being the one who called the national inspector to protect her from the hostilities of the local community.

Parents brought many charges against the teacher, including mistreating children and making them perform domestic chores. They claimed that during school hours, the teacher sent their children to buy groceries, move her horse, or bring her firewood. The storekeeper confirmed that the children bought groceries during school hours. One of the fathers even mentioned that in a conversation with the teacher she protested that the community “had the obligation to serve the teacher in everything she needed.”⁵⁶⁹ In representation of the parents, Gabriel assured that many of them were “convinced that free education was more expensive than if they had to pay for it” since the teacher requested children to bring her milk and firewood. Finally, Gabriel complained that Teodora was absent on February 15, the first registration and

⁵⁶⁸ Archivo Intermedio de la Nación, Colección Consejo Nacional de Educación, Expte 8338, 1919.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

ceremonial day of the new school year.⁵⁷⁰ Teodora claimed not to remember asking children to bring milk or firewood. Although she said: “if I did, I must have told them to bring something, if they had excess in their houses.”⁵⁷¹ Parents felt the teacher was utilizing her position to request special favors from their children, or to put them to work for free.

Teodora defended herself from the accusations made by the parents. She was interviewed multiple times to respond to the accusations made by the parents. She mentioned being completely satisfied with her labor as an educator who did not give bad examples to the community and showed comprehension with children. She mentioned not being aware that she was causing distress in the community and that if she had known the discomfort that she created, she would not have asked children for any favor. She asserted that she was present in the school on February 18; she did not employ children in domestic tasks during the time of classes (all the references she made were during the weekend or during vacations), and she did not mistreat students if they did not bring what she requested from home. In many towns, especially those away from urban centers like in the case of Teodora, teachers relied on communal favors and resources in everyday life. Teodora reminded the CNE: "Keep in mind, Mr. Inspector, that neither butcher nor milkman comes here. And more than once, I have gone without eating and without sleeping. And it was precisely thanks to the

⁵⁷⁰ The CNE expected that teachers were in charge of registering the students, opening the school, and managing the employees such as doormen or domestic service on February 15. In 1900, a school inspector published indications of what teachers should expect on the first day of classes. On the anniversary of Sarmiento’s birthday, February 15, at 10:30am teachers should have opened the doors of the school, registered the children, and told their parents when the classes started. “Gobierno de la escuela. A una joven maestra.”

⁵⁷¹ Archivo Intermedio de la Nación, Colección Consejo Nacional de Educación, Expte 8338, 1919.

good neighbors who helped me get ahead.”⁵⁷² Teodora denied using children for her own benefit. Yet, she believed her students owed her respect and deference.

One day, during recess, a student was going to the grocery store and Teodora asked him to buy coffee and matches. According to her narrative, the boy looked at her and said that his mom told him not to buy anything for her. The child’s response implies that the teacher’s requests were known among parents and that parents had advised not to obey her. But Teodora received the rejection with displeasure and decided to write a note to the mother. The teacher confessed that she did it believing “it is my duty to teach my students to be attentive and courteous with the teacher, because they later will do the same with the mother.”⁵⁷³ Whether Teodora was performing as a responsible teacher in front of the inspector or if she actually believed that she was educating her students, she insisted that informing the parents when a child was “not a good student” and disobeyed a command was part of her role. Through pedagogical manuals teachers had learned, for example, that working class, rural, and poor families were negligent in caring for their children. Teachers “should make an effort to accustom the cleanliness of the children who belong to those classes, thus helping to mitigate the harshness of customs and rudeness of manners.”⁵⁷⁴ These were the manners that Teodora tried to correct in the child who refused to buy her coffee. The parents, however, did not agree with Teodora's supposedly pedagogical intentions and the letter only increased their beliefs that the teacher was pretentious and authoritarian.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Santos, *Curso completo de pedagogía*, 62.

In her defense in front of the inspector, Teodora showed a dismissive view on parents and the local community. Embracing the principles of *normalismo* and believing in the hierarchies established between literate and illiterate people, teachers differentiated themselves from the rural communities due to their education. Teodora referred to the parents as “these uncultured people” who misunderstood her note. She claimed to be a victim of a plan led by Gabriel and parents who were manipulated and threatened since “these people naturally do what the boss orders them to do.”⁵⁷⁵ None of the members of the community admitted Gabriel’s involvement in the boycott against the teacher and many of the parents interrogated were illiterate. But despite not knowing how to write and read, they had a clear idea of the education their children should receive. Or at least they claimed that the teacher had no authority to send children to work. That was their prerogative as fathers.

The CNE decided to punish Teodora for being absent from the school and for not keeping a friendly relationship with the community. The two accusations were closely related with two unavoidable tasks for women, that of abandoning the home and failing to keep peace with the patriarchal authority. Ultimately the CNE preferred that the local community collaborate with the school and wanted to avoid any conflict that would cost them resources.⁵⁷⁶ In August 1919, six months after Teodora sent the first note to the CNE, the visiting inspector suggested two disciplinary measures. The first one was to withhold one week's salary for not being present on time to open the

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Despite the negative conception of the families that appeared in manuals of pedagogy, its authors encouraged teachers to collaborate with the family. Creating disciplined children required common action between school and home. Regarding children’s hygiene for instance, a manual explained that parent’s cooperation was indispensable since they were responsible for sending children with clean clothes. Santos, *Curso Completo de Pedagogía*.

school on February 15, as expected.⁵⁷⁷ The second measure was to relocate Teodora to another school considering that the relationship with the community was not harmonious. Disregarding the inspector's advice to relocate Teodora to another school, the CNE decided to fire the teacher. The office of "Hacienda y Asuntos Legales" had been investigating the teacher and they found in their "Service Record" that in 1911 while working in a school in La Pampa, Teodora received a warning for not being in the school on February 15. These antecedents were unforgivable from the perspective of the CNE. Teachers' reputations needed to be impeccable.

Teodora did not passively accept the disciplinary measure and appealed to the CNE. It was not easy for teachers in towns outside Buenos Aires to appeal their case. They had to travel to the city and stay in hotels at their own expense. In November 1919 at her room of Hotel Bayona, Teodora wrote the last letter that was archived in her case. While she recognized the existence of a previous summary that she did not consider important at the moment, Teodora denounced the injustice of her treatment when the CNE decided to listen to and please the head of the School Council instead of responding to her arguments. Teodora appealed to a last resource that could prove her authority in the community. She had thirty-one students attending classes, and therefore she demonstrated that the conflicts with some members of the local community did not prevent all parents from sending their children to the school.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁷ Teodora asserted that she was present in the school on February 18. The person in charge of keeping the keys of the school could not remember exactly if Teodora opened the school on the 18th or the 19th. Disbelieving in the one interview who claimed to see her either the 18th or the 19th in the school, the inspector asked for withholding a week's salary..

⁵⁷⁸ The number of students attending the school not only proved that parents were sending children to the school, but that she was performing well at her job. CNE authorities and teachers believed that the number of students registered in the school was evidence of the success of the school in the local community. A principal under summary investigation from Mendoza declared that "The moral

Therefore, she requested the CNE reconsider their decision because “it is not fair that my salary is taken away from me.” However, the CNE believed there was no reason to reevaluate the decision.

As in María’s case, parents' vigilant attitude toward teacher performance aimed to prevent mistreatment and abuse of power from educators but the CNE took these opportunities to monitor women’s fulfillment of their roles and to punish them. Teodora’s case proves that conflicts between teachers and the community usually involve complex relationships, rumors, and competing visions on children’s education and the role of the teacher in the community. Teachers built their authority in the community based on principles that distanced them from the illiterate families, local vendors, and workers. Probably looking to the state for protection, Teodora thought that the CNE would support her but the male authority of the School Council along with the fathers’ accusations was easier to believe than the teacher. When she contacted the CNE arguing the parents and Gabriel were damaging the image of the school, her authority was already undermined in the community. Children did not respond to her demands since parents had taught children not to do so. The investigation does not make any reference to Teodora’s husband or children. Assuming she was single and with no kids, she probably relied on the favors of the community to provide for food or certain goods. But fathers started believing the favors exceeded what they were able to do for a person who saw them as ignorant. In

ascendancy that the directors have in the neighborhoods is revealed in the number of students who attend the establishments they direct” Archivo intermedio, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 1, Exp 9183, 1921.

the end, her disdain toward the poor parents became an obstacle to finding alliances and keeping her job.

Summary investigations opened a series of accusations and investigations that revealed the conflictive relationships between the state and common people on the ground. Parents complained about the teachers because of multiple intricate misunderstandings, disagreements, and rumors that circulated in the town and that were uncovered in front of the inspector once the summary investigation started. Summary investigations also revealed that parents organized against teachers and principals, investing energy and time advocating for the teachers' removal from the community. The stakes for the teachers were high since their labor stability could be at risk. But equally important was for parents to assert their authority vis-a-vis teachers that they saw as foreign to the community. The missionary image of the teacher who arrived to save the population from illiteracy and barbarism was far from being universally welcomed.

In 1920, a group of parents met in a town in Mendoza and sent a letter to the CNE complaining about the principal Ernesto and his teacher wife, Mónica.⁵⁷⁹ The accusations made by parents illuminate how gender expectations and behaviors shaped how parents framed their complaints. Ernesto was accused of being violent while Mónica was accused of abandoning her duties.⁵⁸⁰ Aware of the state's expectations of teachers, parents used the same vocabulary to pursue their own goals.

⁵⁷⁹ Archivo intermedio, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 1, Exp 9183, 1921.

⁵⁸⁰ Ernesto Cordero was an Argentine teacher with no teaching diploma. His first job as a teacher started in July 1912. His title in the school he was directing was Interim Principal which put him in a more precarious situation. Martha L. de Cordero was also a Argentine teacher without a diploma whose title in the school was interim teaching assistant.

They asserted that the teachers, supposed “models for the People,” were actually the opposite. The performance of the educators was considered inappropriate by the parents who asked the CNE to remove them from their jobs.⁵⁸¹

Complaints against the couple speak to gendered expectations and stereotypes. Parents complained that Ernesto was violent, authoritarian, and abused his power. A conflict between the principal and one of the community members reached physical violence. One day, while having an argument in the street, Ubaldo L. hit Ernesto with a pot, injuring his head. The event, witnessed by the neighbors, ended with a police report. One father characterized Ernesto as impulsive and insolent, another was upset because the principal did not give permission to their children to skip school, another accused both the principal and the teacher of making his daughter work for free. Complaints about Mónica were of a different nature than the ones against her husband. Beyond the complaint about not attending school, she was judged for not being knowledgeable to teach. In fact both educators lacked a teaching diploma but only the woman was under suspicion for not being prepared for the labor of educating children.⁵⁸² Not all the interviewed parents agreed that Mónica and Ernesto were

⁵⁸¹ The letter reads “parents raise these complaints to this inspection, in the assurance that we will be attended and that when processing the case these teachers will be transferred to another location.” Archivo intermedio, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 1, Exp 9183, 1921.

⁵⁸² As seen in chapter 1, the dissemination of normal schools increased the number of teachers with a teaching diploma. Yet, in the 1920s there were still teachers in charge of schools that lacked a teaching diploma. Lacking a teaching diploma was, ultimately, an important factor with the CNE making decisions around disciplinary measures, gradually displacing educators without diplomas from the educational system. Flavia Fiorucchi, “Maestros para el sistema de educación pública: La fundación de escuelas normales en Argentina (1890-1930),” *Revista mexicana de historia de la educación* 2, no. 3 (2014): 25-45.

immoral. Some testified that they had “a good concept” of them recognizing that the educators were “respectful and urban.”⁵⁸³

Teachers from the school joined the parents in denouncing both educators. Stressing the argument that the principal was violent and his wife was irresponsible, Rosa Álvarez asserted that Ernesto treated her with rudeness and made differences between her and his wife allowing Mónica to leave the classroom and skip classes. Yet, Álvarez declared that these accusations were made in a family reunion and it was not her intention to harm her colleague Mónica seeing that she was now involved in a summary investigation. But the rumors against Mónica and Ernesto spread among neighbors who used that information as part of their testimony in front of the inspector. Even those who did not have a negative opinion of the educators seemed to know that many parents were upset with them, increasing the bad reputation of the school from the inspector’s perspective.

Teachers rebutted charges brought against them by characterizing the community as ignorant and uncultivated. Ernesto was hostile towards each person who testified against him, asserting their immorality by claiming they were drunk. Another strategy developed by Ernesto was to accuse the community of having no authority over school matters since they did not have children in the school. The principal asked the CNE to consider the characteristics of the town where “civilization has just begun to offer its first rudiments; and where barbarism has turned each of its inhabitants into wise men according to their loyal knowledge and

⁵⁸³ Archivo intermedio, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 1, Exp 9183, 1921.

understanding.”⁵⁸⁴ Ernesto, who considered himself a “representative of civilization,” compared the community with the tribes that populated those lands in the past, suggesting they were primitive like indigenous populations. In other words, the principal delegitimized the community’s testimonies and the knowledge they had regarding educational issues.

But the root of the disagreement between the principal and with the neighbors had to do with Ernesto's political engagement in local government and media. Ernesto took care to not frame his involvement as political; rather he stressed that he was only rendering a service as a cultured neighbor.⁵⁸⁵ He mentioned a former participation in the *Junta Vecinal* (Neighborhood Board) in which Ubaldo L. was secretary. Ernesto also brought up a collaboration in the local newspaper *El Comercio*. As he put it, he learned from this experience not to publish his ideas in the media in order not to harm the relationship with the community. Ernesto also recognized that he acquired debts among some neighbors. Yet, he also explained that when transitioning from a provincial to a national school, he did not receive a salary for months.⁵⁸⁶ Regarding the differential treatment among the teaching staff, the principal affirmed that Mónica skipped classes a couple of times due to having to take care of sick family members

⁵⁸⁴ Archivo intermedio, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 1, Exp 9183, 1921.

⁵⁸⁵ In a letter he narrated that it was his participation in local newspapers and later differences with those neighbors who created a party that prompted the disagreement with Ubaldo and others close to him.

⁵⁸⁶ Cordero referred to the teachers’ strike organized in Mendoza in 1918. On teachers unionism in Mendoza see Rodolfo Richard-Jorba, “Somos el pueblo y la Patria. El populismo leninista en Mendoza frente al conflicto social y la prensa: discursos, representaciones y acciones, 1917-1919,” *Revista de Historia Americana y Argentina* 48, no. 1 (2013); Graciela Crespi, “La huelga docente de 1919 en Mendoza,” in *Mujeres en la educación. Género y docencia en Argentina (1870-1930)*, Morgade, Graciela ed. Buenos Aires, Miño y Dávila, 1997, 151-174.

and that he registered the absences in the school forms as expected.⁵⁸⁷ Interestingly, far from asserting Mónica’s capabilities to teach, he pointed to her “little professional experience and lack of knowledge of pedagogical norms” as a reason for the special treatment she received. In this way, he positioned himself not as a husband who was covering for his wife but as a responsible principal concerned with the pedagogical quality of his teacher’s lessons.⁵⁸⁸

Mónica’s defense centered around her suitability for the teaching position. Unlike her husband who was being judged mainly for his public appearances — arguing with neighbors in the streets or debating about politics in the media— Mónica needed to demonstrate her aptitudes to teach and to keep her responsibilities as a second mother without abandoning her students. Mónica denied all the accusations of corporal punishment and mistreatment —so did her colleagues— and asserted that the students who testified against her were being bribed by their family members.⁵⁸⁹ Regarding her training, Mónica took a submissive attitude. Probably aware of the vulnerable position of not having a teaching diploma, she asserted that it was not her role but her superior’s role to judge her ability to teach.

⁵⁸⁷ The principal recognized: “What I did not do and of which I plead guilty if the current regulations so provide is that I did not account for the superiority in due time.” Archivo intermedio, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 1, Exp 9183, 1921.

⁵⁸⁸ Regarding his pedagogical responsibilities as a principal, Ernesto claimed that since he took the leadership of this institution, he created a book titled “Actas de Conferencias” (Conference Minutes) where there were registered the indications regarding teaching and school government that he gave to his teachers.

⁵⁸⁹ For example, some of the students whose testimonies were collected, were cousins or sisters of Rosa Alvarez. Another girl was the niece of Estanislao’s “enemy.” She also mentioned some community members had a conflict with her mother in the past and this was one of the reasons the community members were trying to take revenge against her.

Mónica skipped classes because she was a mother. Regarding her lack of regular attendance at the school, Mónica explained that her daughter was seriously ill. Since there were not enough medical resources in a small town, she had to commute to the closest city, San Rafael, to take her daughter to the doctor and to buy her medicine. Proving her responsibility, she affirmed that the times she had to leave the classroom early, she asked the director and left him in charge of the classroom. It is possible that Ernesto believed that he was not only contributing to taking care of children in his school but he was also supporting his wife in taking care of his own daughter. It is also possible to believe that teachers like Rosa Álvarez saw these attitudes with distrust. From Mónica's testimony, the inspector could not prove that every time she skipped classes it was due to her daughter's illness. Mónica could have been using her role as a mother to generate empathy and even pity. But her story evidenced that the expectations of teachers' labor as symbolic mothers of children in the community was not always compatible with the demands of biological mothering.

The role of teachers was harder for mothers in part due to the community's expectations. Beyond attending the school every day and teaching their children how to read and write, teachers needed to be welcomed as central actors in their neighborhoods.⁵⁹⁰ This endeavor was not always successful as we see with Ernesto who disagreed with community members not despite but precisely because he was committed to political activities in the municipal council and local media. Due to the domestic expectations of women regarding motherhood, Mónica did not have an

⁵⁹⁰ The role of the school as a cultural center of socialization can be seen for example in this summary investigation when Ernesto confessed that younger teachers were upset with him because he did not organize monthly dances in the school.

active presence in the community. She confessed to locking herself up at her home and not visiting any mothers. According to Mónica, this attitude was not welcomed by the community who saw her as an outsider. For her, the balance between being a good teacher who attended the school regularly, talked with the children's mothers, and visited their homes was incompatible with being a good mother for her ill daughter.

The inspector presented the charges to the CNE accusing the principal of seven charges including the conflict with Ubaldo, debts with the community, favoritism with Mónica, and a lack of justice in administering the school. Due to his behavior, the inspector asserted that the principal lost "concept and influence" in the community, which constituted another charge against him. Mónica was charged with not regularly attending the school, mistreating children (including corporal punishment), and losing influence among the parents.⁵⁹¹ After the inspector presented the charges against the educators, they had ten days to write their defense. After three months of investigation, the CNE refused to arrive at any conclusion based on the information provided by the inspector. Among other arguments, they considered Ernesto could not be charged with the violence exercised against his person by Ubaldo L., nor could he be judged for his debts when the government was not paying salaries and Mónica could not be judged without presenting previous evaluations by the inspector that confirms she was not an effective teacher. As a result and after the couple requested a new investigation, the CNE sent a different inspector who

⁵⁹¹ Although it appeared as part of the final accusations made by the inspector, there were no specific declarations from the parents or more information regarding corporal punishment.

collected novel information regarding the teaching performance of both educators including the teaching experience from her Service Record, past inspectors' evaluations, and information regarding the current situation in the school.⁵⁹²

In the end, both teachers were fired. Dismissing the knowledge of local people, Ernesto decried: "The ignorance of the signatories has reached the extreme of believing that as soon as the request was received in the national inspection, it would order my immediate withdrawal from the school that I direct." But, according to the principal, the community did not expect the "strict procedure followed by the authority." In his arrogance, the principal believed that under no circumstance the CNE would hear the complaint of a group of ignorant, violent, and drunk parents. He was right about the lack of an immediate order to leave the school, but the expulsion ultimately arrived and a new director with a teaching diploma took charge of the school. Regardless if the accusations against teachers were truthful and to what extent the inspectors were able to prove their culpability, when the relationship between teachers and the community reached those levels of violence and disagreement, it was clear for the CNE that teachers could not fulfill their role. That teachers needed to be loved and welcomed as moral examples in the community was a *sine qua non* for teachers' labor.

⁵⁹² The form indicated the province, the school, the location, and the month when the inspector visited the school. A total of fifteen questions were answered by the inspector including the link between the school and the local community, the opinion that the community had in the school, the most urgent needs of the school, the general concept that the inspector had of the school, the social and educational function of the school, the general state of the school, the progress or relapse of the school in comparison with the previous visit, the schedule, the application of the programs, the state of the book of topics that teachers filled out every day, the written work of students, the knowledge of students in relationship with their grade, the details regarding student's knowledge, and other observations the inspector wanted to make.

Conclusions

This chapter showed that the practice of teaching was, for teachers, and especially for women, a disciplinary one in a double sense. Because of the hegemonic scientific discourse that saw children as primitive and potentially criminal, teachers applied in the classroom a set of procedures that distanced themselves from the realities of children forcing them to behave according to school regulations. Based on the violent nature of children, textbooks taught them to be obedient with the adult world inside and outside the school, to remain silent while the teacher was imparting the lesson, to work and be punctual in order to incorporate important values for their future work. Yet, the system was not perfect and children navigated the disciplinary school life bending the norms and pushing the limits. When children disrupted the order, teachers put into practice punishments including detention. But the quotidian practice of the school asked for teachers to perform in a way that interrogated children and made them distrustful of their narratives. The principles of *normalismo* learned in the normal school imposed violent pedagogical practices on children's bodies even when teachers believed they were doing children a favor, civilizing them, teaching proper hygienic and moral habits, as Rosa del Río's story shows. Applying the norms disciplined teacher's bodies, as the second and third section demonstrate. The school system relied on a hierarchical observation that surveilled teacher's performance inside the classroom as much as it controlled women's bodies. The figure of the inspector is a crucial one to understand how the state operated on teachers' quotidian lives, from regulating the forms they fill out to supervising their

hygiene and sexuality. Analyzed from a gender perspective, the relationship between teachers and inspectors, shows how patriarchal authority was built in the school.

The last section introduces the local community as a crucial actor to understand the dual disciplinary practices applied to children and teachers alike. Parents reacted and organized against teachers considered as authoritarian or immoral. They utilized state expectations on teachers to delineate who belonged to their community. They also pushed back against corporal punishment and other forms of violence exercised by teachers. But the community expectations on teachers were also gendered. There was no tolerance for women abandoning the school which posed a serious challenge for women taking care of their own children or sick family members. The CNE used conflictive relationships to punish teachers who did not comply with the moral standard and the regulations imposed by the national state. The investigation conducted by visiting inspectors, showed the bias that male state officials had in believing the evidence provided by women and tended to benefit the community of fathers that doubted women's morals. Teachers had to demonstrate they were punctual, they were caring with their students, and they were prepared to educate children. The last resource in their defense in front of the CNE relied on a series of discourses that were at the core of *normalismo*. They tried to portray themselves as carriers of civilization attacked by a group of ignorant and illiterate fathers. Ultimately, teachers who had “antecedents” as criminals suffered more punitive measures, including expulsion from the school. While this chapter investigated how discipline operated against teachers and children’s autonomy, the next chapter will show that *normalismo* was not infallible and that teachers raised

their voices and organized against what they considered an authoritarian form of schooling.

Chapter 4: Challenging *Normalismo*: School Experiments in the Search for the Modern School

Introduction

Last chapter highlighted the tensions experienced by teachers when applying the disciplinary system that predominated in the school. *Normalismo* did not only discipline children but also aimed to surveil women's practices within the patriarchal school family. Competing authorities performed by the school inspector and the children's fathers along with the classist and racial perspectives that prevented them from being part of the local community were some of the obstacles that teachers found in developing their roles as educators. This chapter examines how teachers reacted to the perceived injustices of *normalismo*. Indeed, not all teachers passively accepted the teaching practices imposed by the national state. Many used their normalist training and their experience in the school to challenge state-sponsored education. Since 1899, alternative pedagogies have circulated in magazines, cultural centers, and union halls. In alliance with anarchist and socialist activists, teachers contributed to the foundation of private schools for working-class adults and children. These schools were crucial in channeling ideas about children's education that challenged the Consejo Nacional de Educación (National Council of Education, CNE). While many teachers failed in individually confronting the patriarchal authority of the CNE and the fathers in the local community, others found a path to advocate for structural transformations in the school via collective organizing.

This chapter investigates the influence of scientific ideas in the alternative pedagogies that teachers imagined in opposition to *normalismo*. I show that school reformers proposed an alternative pedagogy by founding magazines, participating in congresses and building transnational alliances. They transform the classroom into a laboratory of pedagogical experimentation where children could discover, investigate, and observe the natural world beyond just listening to the lessons of teachers and reading textbooks. Across ideologies, school reformers asserted that state-sponsored education did not properly educate children according to the principles of a modern education. This education, as they conceived it, was rational, scientific and integral, based on the principles of natural laws. Alternative pedagogies proposed by anarchists, socialist, and feminist teachers challenged the vision that children were naturally criminal and proposed instead a view of children that highlighted positive aspects such as spontaneity, curiosity, and solidarity. They disputed notions about children's nature that were prevalent among normal school teachers and manuals written in the previous decades and that would continue to be written by positivists like Víctor Mercante and Angel Bassi.⁵⁹³ Yet, the alliance with eugenic doctors translated into school routines that still subjected children's bodies to the medical examination in order to regenerate children's bodies for the betterment of the race.

Conceiving alternative schools as laboratories for pedagogical experimentation, I put in conversation a network of educators and publications that aimed to modernize the school. Scholars tend to identify rigid distinctions between

⁵⁹³ Víctor Mercante, *Psicología de la aptitud matemática del niño* (Buenos Aires: Librería del Colegio, 1904); Mercante, *Cultivo y desarrollo de la aptitud matemática del niño*, (Buenos Aires: Cabaut y Cia Editores, 1916); Ángel Bassi, *Curso de pedagogía para el primer año de las escuelas normales de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Kapelusz, 1931).

state-sponsored education and alternative pedagogies that often obscure teachers' effort to build collaborations across ideologies and borders.⁵⁹⁴ By the 1910s, a pedagogical movement that criticized public schools and disseminated scientific knowledge in magazines and conferences emerged from the collaboration between school inspectors, professors, teachers, and activists from anarchist, socialist, and feminist backgrounds. Science proved a powerful means to bridge connections between these actors advocating for a modern education. The school reformers analyzed in this chapter drew on eugenics ideas to regenerate children's bodies. While school reformers conceived the modern schools as utopian societies, they continued imagining teaching as learning practices within a disciplinary framework. By looking at the emphasis on the networks built by school reformers, I move beyond the question of how successful school reformers were in achieving the society they envisioned to underscore teachers' efforts in voicing a critique to state-sponsored education by collective organizing and publishing.

The first section explores the alternative schools developed by anarchist workers and teachers in Buenos Aires from 1889 until the creation of the *Liga de*

⁵⁹⁴ For the case of Argentina, this distinction responds to Adriana Puiggrós's classification between normalist teachers and "democratic radicalized" teachers. Sandra Carli differentiates the conceptions of children between positivist and naturalist views and social anarchist and socialist discourses of childhood. Sandra Carli, *Niñez, pedagogía y política: transformaciones de los discursos acerca de la infancia en la historia de la educación argentina entre 1880 y 1955* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2002). Studies on anarchist education depicts alternative schools in radical opposition with state sponsored education. Dora Barrancos, *Anarquismo, educación y costumbres en la Argentina de principios de siglo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Contrapunto, 1990); Juan. Suriano, *Paradoxes of Utopia: Anarchist Culture and Politics in Buenos Aires, 1890-1910* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2010); Mariana Di Stefano, *El lector libertario: prácticas e ideologías lectoras del anarquismo argentino: 1898-1915* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2013); Martín Alberto Acri and María del Carmen Cáceres, *La educación libertaria en la Argentina y en México, 1861-1945* (Buenos Aires: Libros de Anarres, 2011); Paul, Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); *Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflections on Education* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012).

Educacion Racionalista in 1913. The political persecution of anarchists and socialist activists in 1902 and the execution of Francisco Ferrer in 1909 shaped a new movement under the umbrella of rationalist education. School reformers utilized scientific discourses to distance themselves from previous anarchist experiences in a context of political persecution. Anarchist schools served as laboratories that gave educators the experience to criticize state-sponsored education and to reimagine the school.

The second section delves into the definitions of rationalist circulation to show that magazines served as a platform for teachers to criticize state-sponsored education. They condemned the school for being authoritarian, for not allowing children to move and express themselves freely; for not implementing a scientific and integral education, and for not complying with the principles of co-education.

The third section examines the influence of eugenic thought in school reformers, focusing on how teachers praised pedagogical experiments focused on the teaching of hygiene and labor in a natural environment. It shows that, along with a discourse that promoted children's freedom, school reformers imagined a daily disciplinary routine to regenerate children's bodies. The fourth section demonstrates the influence of eugenics in school reformers through Raquel Camaña's advocacy of sex education to improve the race. Opposing "religious prejudices" present in the public school at the turn of the century, Camaña proposed the introduction of co-education of the sexes and sex education based on the teaching of reproductive functions and puericulture to educate future mothers. As with other failed eugenic projects, Camaña's pedagogical reforms were never realized, but her writings

influenced teachers' debates in the following decades. Within the school, the CNE reacted against school reformers, showing that despite women's activism and socialist demands to reform the school, children's education, specially when it came to sex education, was closely surveilled by national authorities. Together these cases demonstrate the limitations and possibilities that school reformers faced in implementing transformations but it also shows the effects that experimentation had in envisioning new pedagogies and challenging *normalismo*.

Alternative Experiments: From the First Anarchist Schools to the Liga Racionalista

Education of children was not exclusively under state control. Parallel to the foundation of normal and primary schools, anarchists and socialists founded their own schools as alternative pedagogical options for poor children and adults. Like the elites, workers and intellectuals of these movements believed that education was the most powerful medium to transform society. These initiatives abounded and served as laboratories to practice the alternative pedagogies they were imagining and reading about in pamphlets written outside the country.⁵⁹⁵

Anarchists were the most active organizers of alternative schools.⁵⁹⁶ Within the working class, anarchists gained hegemony in 1902 at the Federación Obrera Argentina (FOA, Argentine Workers Federation), the federation that organized strikes

⁵⁹⁵ The Biblioteca de la Escuela Moderna from Spain contributed to disseminate these ideas through a series of titles that included Francisco Ferrer's *La escuela moderna* and included fictional stories and textbooks to teach history, natural history, and Spanish language. See: Di Stefano, *El lector libertario*, especially chapter 2.

⁵⁹⁶ Suriano, *Anarquistas, cultura y política libertaria*; Barrancos, *Anarquismo, educación y costumbres*.

and boycotts among the bakers and longshoremen unions.⁵⁹⁷ The schools were operated by workers in alliances with teachers. Schools usually functioned in local cultural centers and unions and were attended by children and adults from the working class. Self-management was a characteristic of these types of initiatives. While they allowed communal participation and the collaboration between magazines, local societies and unions, and the community, they also introduced activists and teachers to the financial challenges of the daily functioning of the school.⁵⁹⁸ Schools were supported by the unions or cultural centers who contributed with the building and organized events to fund the school. Thus, schools relied on and contributed to a network of solidarity with active involvement of the local community. Newspapers systematically advertised the schools and offered raffles for the readers to collaborate with the cause of education. As Dora Barracos has shown, schools became important counterhegemonic spaces not only in terms of pedagogy but also in terms of the organizational practices of their leaders, including communal forms of funding.⁵⁹⁹

The first alternative school to the state, led by anarchist group *Los Corrales* and the societies of construction workers, opened its doors in 1899. *Los Corrales* marked the beginning of many educational experiences located predominantly in

⁵⁹⁷ Oved explains the anarchist hegemony due to the acceptance of the general strike, usually rejected by socialists, and the majority of anarchist activists among the elected members of the administrative commission. Iacov Oved, *El anarquismo y el movimiento obrero en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2013).

⁵⁹⁸ When the Secular School of Lanus was announced, *La Protesta* published an invitation to donate money or even chairs and tables to put together the classrooms. "Inauguración de una escuela popular," *La Protesta*, no. 672, March 1st, 1906.

⁵⁹⁹ Barracos, *Anarquismo, educación y costumbres*.

Buenos Aires and Rosario.⁶⁰⁰ According to Juan Suriano, the goal was to neutralize the religious and patriotic education disseminated in the primary schools. Like many of the anarchist schools, their existence did not last long and the school stopped functioning in 1901. One of the longest lasting alternative schools was the *Escuela Laica de Lanus* (Secular School of Lanus). The school was originally founded in March of 1906, by the *Sociedad de Educación Laica* (Secular Society of Education) and welcomed by socialist activists such as teacher Pascuala Cueto in the Society “*Fomento de la Educación Laica*” (Promotion of Secular School).⁶⁰¹ As in many other schools founded by this year, this experience demonstrates that many schools were sustained by both socialist and anarchist activists who shared an advocacy for scientific and secular education.

But collaborations between anarchists and socialists were not always easy to put into practice. In the *Escuela Laica de Lanús*, conflicts between anarchist and socialist educators arose only a couple of days after the school was inaugurated when Principal Ramona Ferreira had a disagreement with one of the teachers, Blanca Corona López. Apparently López had arrived five minutes late to the classroom and the principal wanted to sanction her. The commission that ran the school did not accept the sanction, choosing instead to discourage a disciplinary regime that replicated the sanctions of state-sponsored schools. Furious, Ferreira resigned from

⁶⁰⁰ Barrancos identified twenty-seven schools for children and adults organized between 1899 and the 1920s. The author creates a periodization divided in three moments. The first moment goes from 1900-1910, the second from 1910-1919 and the third one in the 1920s. From this perspective the conflict between the anarchist movement and the national state conditions the foundation of schools since schools closed in moments of major conflicts and state persecution. Barrancos, *Anarquismo, educación y costumbres*.

⁶⁰¹ “Inauguración de una escuela popular.”

her position and wrote a letter in the newspapers *El Infierno* and *La Protesta*. According to her narrative, she joined the school because she believed it was an institution of “order, morality, and progress” to teach children scientific notions and morals.⁶⁰² The school, she believed, should teach children to respect institutions and their superiors in order to mold citizens for the future. Yet, Ferrerira found it impossible to cooperate with anarchist teachers since they were sectarian, broke the disciplinary regime that every school required, and fomented the insubordination of teachers. *La Protesta* published her letter along with a response that accused Ferreira of being despotic and violent and for believing that the school’s mission was to create respectful citizens of the law and superiority.⁶⁰³ The conflict reflected that, while anarchists and socialist shared the concern for worker’s education, the actual practice of administering the schools exacerbated the conflicts between both groups. Although founding and sustaining the school was a difficult endeavor that required collaboration among activists, conflicts distanced anarchists and socialists in their attempt to build coalitions around education. Anarchists seemed to hegemonize the school after anarchist Julio Barcos took the leadership in 1907.⁶⁰⁴

Anarchist educators in Argentina looked to the Modern School of Barcelona as a beacon of pedagogical inspiration. The school, founded in 1901, was defined by

⁶⁰² “La Escuela Laica de Lanús,” *La Protesta*, no. 848, Oct. 4, 1906.

⁶⁰³ Hermann Gallach responded to Ferreira’s accusation of sectarianism, asserting that an article in the school program stated that children of both sexes will be taught “according to the more modern teaching methods and under the principles of progressive education devoid of any religious or political concern.” “Escuela Laica de Lanús.”

⁶⁰⁴ Julio Barcos (1883-1960) was born in Coronda, Province of Santa Fe. During his youth Barcos participated in numerous libertarian publications such as the most important newspaper *La Protesta* and *Ideas y Figuras* directed by anarchist Alberto Guiraldo. Horacio Tarcus, *Diccionario biográfico de la izquierda argentina* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2007).

Francisco Ferrer as a “pedagogical experiment.”⁶⁰⁵ The school was directed towards children, characterized by the teaching of study of natural sciences and hygiene, and the co-education of sexes. In Ferrer’s words the purpose of the Modern School was to create a “truly fraternal humanity, without distinction of sex or class.”⁶⁰⁶ In 1906, five years after the opening of the school and the publishing house of the same name, a close collaborator of Ferrer, Mateo Morral bombed the wedding of King Alonso XIII, killing twenty-six people. Immediately, Ferrer was arrested as an accomplice and the Modern School of Barcelona was closed, never to be reopened. A year later, Ferrer was released and moved to Paris where he restarted the publication *Escuela Moderna* and founded its francophone version *L’Ecole Rénovée*. During his time in Paris, Ferrer founded the syndicalist labor federation, *Solidaridad Obrera*, co-founded a Masonic lodge in Barcelona, and founded, along with other educators, the League for the Rational Education of Children. Ferrer contributed to the expansion of pedagogical ideas and practices that sought to transform society through a new way of schooling. From 1904, his influence could be seen in the new denomination — “modern school”— of the schools founded in Argentina.⁶⁰⁷

As in Spain, activists in Argentina suffered from systematic persecution by the national state. At the international and national level, anarchists had gained a reputation as violent political agitators. In 1901, anarchist Leon Czolgosz assassinated

⁶⁰⁵ *Anarchist Education and the Modern School: A Francisco Ferrer Reader*, ed. Mark Bray and Robert H. Haworth (Oakland: PM Press, 2019), 54.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

⁶⁰⁷ Among them were Escuela Moderna de Luján (1907), Escuela Moderna de Ingeniero White (1908), Escuela Moderna de La Plata (1909), Escuela Moderna de Villa Crespo (1909), Escuela Moderna de Villa Domínico (1911-1913), Escuela Moderna de La Plata (1914), Escuela Moderna de Punta Alta (1917). Barrancos, *Anarquismo, educación y costumbres*.

United States President McKinley, provoking an anti-anarchist response that culminated in the Alien Immigration Act of 1903. A year prior, the New York state legislature had passed the Criminal Anarchy Act which made it a felony to “advocate, advise, teach, print, publish, edit, circulate, or publicly display” anarchist ideas.⁶⁰⁸ In Argentina, anarchists had become a threat due to the wave of strikes that agitated the working class since 1900.⁶⁰⁹ Elites responded rapidly to workers’ mobilization and in November 1902 debated and approved Law 4.144, also known as the Residency Law. According to the representatives in the Congress, it responded to a national emergency to preserve social tranquility. The problem, they argued, was not workers but the “external agitators,” the “entrepreneur of strikes.” Senator Miguel Cané, who presented the project in 1899, explained its urgency to defend the country of “undesirable foreigners.”⁶¹⁰ An anarchist activist stated years later: “the residency law has been created exclusively for us.”⁶¹¹ Despite the unsolved debate regarding what to do with the anarchist agitators who were native Argentines, the Residency Law gave the executive power the license to expel from the national territory everyone who was prosecuted in international courts, as well as every foreigner whose “conduct compromises the national security or disturbs public order.”⁶¹²

The conflict between the elites and workers continued throughout the decade and escalated in 1909, affecting the regular running of the schools. That year, during

⁶⁰⁸ Julia Rose Kraut, “Global Anti-Anarchism: The Origins of Ideological Deportation and the Suppression of Expression,” *Indiana Journal of Legal Studies* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2012), 172.

⁶⁰⁹ Iaacov Oved, “El trasfondo histórico de la ley 4.144, de Residencia,” *Desarrollo Económico* 16, no. 61 (April- June 1976): 123-150.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁶¹¹ F. Giribaldi “Los anarquistas y la organización,” *La Protesta*, no. 2203, April 4, 1914.

⁶¹² “Ley N° 4.144, de Residencia” sanctioned on November 22, 1902.

the popular protests of May 1, workers were brutally repressed by Police Chief Ramon Falcón.⁶¹³ Only a couple of months later, anarchist Simón Radowsky assassinated Falcón.⁶¹⁴ Radowsky's imprisonment for life revamped anarchist campaigns. Thousands of pamphlets and newspapers vindicated the "avenger" and "retaliator."⁶¹⁵ Following those events, in 1910 the government passed Law 7029, also known as the *Ley de defensa social* (Social Defense Law) to persecute political dissidents. Despite the insistence in portraying anarchists as violent, the overwhelming majority of anarchists in Argentina rejected violent tactics.⁶¹⁶ Beyond their labor in organizing the emerging working class, anarchists were incredibly active in creating a counterculture. The printing of newspapers, the organization of

⁶¹³ May 1st was the most significant anniversary for anarchists in Argentina where they commemorated the martyrdom of Chicago workers. Suriano, *Anarquistas. Cultura y política libertaria en Buenos Aires 1890-1910*. On that day Alberto Belloni narrates: "On May 1, 1909, this working class of ours, which was dragging its pain of hunger and sacrifice, will once again take to the streets. They are going to step firmly, to erect their body, to be filled with energy in the crowd. The column of the F.O.R.A. arrives at Plaza Lorea. Suddenly a real hell breaks loose on them: saber, revolver, and mauser go into action, unloading on the defenseless workers. It is a "brave" way of waging war: everything on one side, nothing on the other." Alberto Belloni, *Del anarquismo al peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Punto de encuentro, 2011), 43.

⁶¹⁴ The general strikes that emerged in 1902 and the assassination of Falcón are representative of the different strategies taken by anarchists in Argentina and abroad. At moments, these differences created severe obstacles to plan a common strategy. The differences between anarchists and socialists also limited collective action in factories and local communities. In Argentina, Oved distinguishes between the groups "pro-organization" aligned with the most important anarchist newspaper *La Protesta* and advocates of unions, and groups who sympathized with "propaganda by the deed." Suriano identified the "pure doctrinaires" as those who believed it was impossible to reconcile among the different ideological positions within the labor movement (socialism, syndicalism, Catholicism, and anarchism). They were represented by *La Protesta* and also led the FORA between 1905 and 1915 when the federation was divided into anarchist and socialist unions. The second tendency were the "heterodox intellectuals," who advocated for an anarchist intervention beyond the limits of labor movement, including the schools and cultural centers. The internal divisions among anarchists and between them and socialist activists, along with the constant political persecution that censored the newspapers, had a terrible impact in the development of a political project that could represent the working class. Suriano, *Anarquistas, cultura y política libertaria en Buenos Aires*.

⁶¹⁵ José Moya, "The Positive Side of Stereotypes: Jewish Anarchists in Early Twentieth-Century Buenos Aires," *Jewish History* 18, no. 1 (2004): 19-48.

⁶¹⁶ Luciana Anapios, "Prensa y estrategias editoriales del movimiento anarquista en la Argentina de entreguerras." *Anuario del Instituto de Historia Argentina* 16 (2), e25 (2016): 1-20. Available at https://www.memoria.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/art_revistas/pr.7688/pr.7688.pdf

talks and festivals, and the circulation of pamphlets were among the most important actions that anarchists developed in everyday life to challenge the status quo.⁶¹⁷ Still, the normal functioning of the schools negatively impacted the attempts to sustain alternative schools. Some schools lost their leaders as in *Los Corrales*, whose Principal Juan C. Cazabat was expelled due to the Residency Law. Even the *Escuela Laica de Lanús*, with a vast support from the local community, only lasted until 1909 when the repression against anarchists escalated. That same year, three other schools were also closed due to their links with the anarchist movement.⁶¹⁸

Combined with the police brutality that activists suffered at the local level, in October 1909 anarchists and socialist educators received the news of the execution of Francisco Ferrer. On October 14, the contributor to the most important anarchist newspaper, journalist Teodoro Antilli declared: “Ferrer has been shot! Faced with this statement so simple and at the same time so big -all a pain enclosed in a scream!”⁶¹⁹ The news was shocking, according to González Pacheco, who presumably had believed that the international efforts to liberate Ferrer in the previous weeks would triumph.⁶²⁰ Ferrer was known for his participation in freemason, socialist, and anarchist circles. Ferrer returned to Barcelona from his Parisian exile in the midst of a general strike and protests against military conscription for the war in Morocco. After

⁶¹⁷ Suriano, *Anarquistas. Cultura y política libertaria*.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Teodoro Antilli “Ferrer,” *La Protesta*, no. 1771, Oct. 14, 1909.

⁶²⁰ Right after his imprisonment on September 1st, Ferrer’s friends and co-founders of the Rationalist League, Charles Albert and Charles-Agne Laisant, along with Aldred Naquet created the *Comite de Defensa de las Víctimas de la Represión Española* in Paris (Defense Committee of the Victims of Spanish Repression). Throughout September and until Ferrer’s sentence to death on October 9th, the Committee collected petitions and letters, and organized conferences advocating for Ferrer’s liberation. Vincent Robert and Eduard J. Verger, “La protesta universal contra la ejecución de Ferrer: las manifestaciones de octubre de 1909,” *Historia Social*, no. 14 (Autumn, 1992): 61-82.

an irregular trial, Ferrer was sentenced to death as the main leader of the rebellion, later known as the Tragic Week.⁶²¹ It is unclear the level of participation that Ferrer had in the events that started on July 26, but *Solidaridad Obrera* was one of the main forces behind the strike. 1,725 people were charged with crimes related to the strike but only five, Ferrer among them, ended with death sentences.⁶²²

After decades of pedagogical experiments, the execution of Ferrer sparked the light for rationalist education. His death represented a threat of political persecution against activists who dared to challenge the national state but also opened an opportunity for activists across ideologies to reunite efforts under the banner of education. With his execution Ferrer became a symbol and martyr for many activists who gathered under the banner of rationalist education.⁶²³ After his imprisonment socialist lawyer Enrique Del Valle Iberlucea asserted: “We write these lines with an intense anguish that overwhelmed all liberal spirits. There is complete uncertainty about the fate of Francisco Ferrer, apostle of rationalist ideas in Spain, martyr of the human cause of the redemption of modern outcasts.”⁶²⁴ Days after the news of his

⁶²¹ During the “Tragic Week” protesters burned dozens of churches and convents. Civilians and police officers were killed. Along with the execution of activists, the Spanish administration closed 130 rationalist schools. Suriano, *Anarquistas, cultura y política libertaria*.

⁶²² The other activists sentenced to death were José Miquel Baró, charged with leading a local revolt in San Andrés, Antonio Malet Pujol charged with burning church property and shooting the police, Eugenio del Hoyo, charged with shooting an armed patrol, and Ramon Clemente Garcia, charged with helping to build a barricade and dancing with the disinterred corpse of a nun. *Anarchist Education and the Modern School*, see chapter 2 “Francisco Ferrer: The Man.”

⁶²³ Mark Bray, “Francisco Ferrer: The Martyr,” in *Anarchist Education and the Modern School*.

⁶²⁴ Enrique Del Valle Iberlucea, “Ferrer,” *Revista Socialista Internacional*, no. 9, Aug. 15, 1909. Del Valle Iberlucea was a member of the Socialist Party, professor at Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires and assistant of Joaquín V. González at Universidad Nacional de La Plata. Before dedicating his time to advocate for the Modern School of Buenos Aires, he had been a candidate for deputy of the Socialist Party and a vociferous public speaker for worker and immigrant causes such as with his denouncement of the Residence Law. Horacio Tarcus, *Diccionario biográfico de la izquierda argentina*.

death arrived in Argentina, socialist magazine *Revista Socialista Internacional* published an entire issue on Ferrer inviting activists to pronounce themselves against the injustice. Among them was Víctor Mercante who asserted that “the blood of Ferrer will invigorate New Spain.”⁶²⁵ Socialist and feminist Alicia Moreau (1885-1986) recognized that after Ferrer’s death: “the Modern School, its methods, its spirit will be now disseminated, attacked, or debated, but they will be known.”⁶²⁶ Spanish anarchist Anselmo Lorenzo declared that, alive, Ferrer would have had a limited sphere of action, but “Ferrer’s glorious death continued inspiring and defeating his enemies.”⁶²⁷ The importance of education for political transformations became evident in the streets but also in the pages of the press. With many of their organizations dismantled and their main newspaper closed, anarchists saw in Ferrer’s cause a great opportunity to unite efforts with teachers, physicians, writers, and the working class to revive the Modern School in Buenos Aires.

From the perspective of Ferrer’s supporters, the school was called to play a revolutionary mission. Ferrer’s death more clearly situated the tensions between a pedagogical project associated with clericalism and authoritarianism and one

⁶²⁵ Víctor Mercante, “Ejecutar un ideal es preparar una victoria,” *Revista Socialista Internacional*, no. 6, Nov. 15, 1909, 329.

⁶²⁶ Alicia Moreau, “Progreso moral y solidaridad humana by Alicia Moreau,” *Revista Socialista Internacional*, no. 6, Nov. 15, 1909, 332. Alicia Moreau was born in England and moved to Buenos Aires when she was five years old. She was a normalist teacher and later physician who led multiple socialist and feminist magazines and organizations. In 1907 she participated in the First Feminist Congress Pro Universal Suffrage along with other feminist leaders such as Sara Justo, Julieta Lanteri, and Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane. In 1910, along with Del Valle Iberlucea, another member of the Liga Racionalista, she founded the Ateneo Popular. In the same year she co-organized the First Feminine International Congress in Buenos Aires. When she joined the Liga Racionalista, she was among the group of socialist and feminist activist leading many projects centered on education. Horacio Tarcus, *Diccionario biográfico de la izquierda argentina*.

⁶²⁷ Anselmo Lorenzo, “La protesta revolucionaria. La semana trágica de julio 1909 en Barcelona,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 7, Aug 1st, 1911, 6.

conceived as modern, secular, and liberatory. Socialist leader Enrique Del Valle Iberlucea portrayed Ferrer as someone who yearned for the “revolution of culture,” building a free civilization, a progressive justice, social equality, and individual and collective improvement.⁶²⁸ Using a war metaphor, Del Valle Iberlucea explained the role of education in transforming society. He wrote that the Modern School was “a central nucleus of educational revolution; the library, its arsenal; the children, its army; the teachers, its bosses; pedagogy, its tactics; the working world, its camp.”⁶²⁹ In her article “The School and the Revolution,” Alicia Moreau asserted that the school of the future was one characterized by solidarity and not violence. The religious school of the past, was “tough, rigid, severe, it rained whips and punishment; fear must seize those young spirits”⁶³⁰ For Moreau, the principles of divine authority that governed the school was “the sore of medieval education, which, unfortunately, has not yet completely disappeared.”⁶³¹

Feminists like Moreau adhered to rationalist education. One of the leaders of the First Feminine International Congress organized in Buenos Aires in 1910, she explained that only through a rational and integral education could women perform their role in society. She asserted: if women continued without receiving a rational education, society could not reproach their “sentimentality, superstition and fanaticism, [and] disorderly sensibility.”⁶³² Women found in rationalism an arena to

⁶²⁸ Enrique Del Valle Iberlucea, “Ferrer,” *Revista Socialista Internacional*, no. 9, Aug 15, 1909.

⁶²⁹ Enrique Del Valle Iberlucea, “Política y educación,” *Revista Socialista Internacional*, no. 6, Nov. 15, 1909, 324.

⁶³⁰ Alicia Moreau, “La escuela y la revolución,” *Revista Socialista Internacional*, no. 1, Sept 15, 1908, 15.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*

⁶³² Ernestina López, “Sesión Inaugural,” in *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la República Argentina. Historia, actas y trabajos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ceppi, 1911).

fight over the common belief that women were not capable of rational activity. Alicia Moreau, one of the more vocal feminists in Argentina, continue advocating for a rational education in socialist magazines. As we will see in the next chapter, the feminist movement that starting to emerge at the turn of the twentieth century was not homogenous, but many feminists found in education a crucial tool to emancipate women from the domestic sphere.

1910 marked an important year in the history of modern Argentina. The centenary of the Independence gave the elites an opportunity to show modern Argentina to the world. A series of congresses and events were organized in the city of Buenos Aires and international representatives joined the celebrations.⁶³³ The sentiment of hope invaded many intellectuals like Jose Ingenieros who, in 1910, wrote: “There is no sociological reason to believe that the European continent will forever retain the first place in human civilization.”⁶³⁴ In the following years, World War I would confirm Latin American perceptions that Europe was not a model to follow.

After 1910, the mobilization around a rationalist education came not from the unions but from a group of intellectuals and teachers who led two magazines and a league. On May 1st 1911, a group of rationalist teachers launched the first issue of *Francisco Ferrer*, edited by Samuel Torner, during an important anniversary for the workers around the world.⁶³⁵ The goal was to “create an environment” that spread

⁶³³ Fernando Devoto, *El país del centenario. Cuando todo parecía posible* (Buenos Aires: Capital intelectual, 2010).

⁶³⁴ Quoted in Devoto *El país del centenario*, 15.

⁶³⁵ Samuel Torner had previous experience as principal in the Modern School of Valencia under Ferrer’s model. The magazine *Francisco Ferrer* was published from May 1911 to September 1912, with a print run of 15,000 copies.

enthusiasm for the cause of rationalist education and “inspire courage” to rationalist professors.⁶³⁶ According to the editors, Argentina had a level of cosmopolitanism comparable to Spain and Italy. This characteristic —they assumed— would benefit the foundation of the school. Yet, the editors acknowledged the limitations of such enterprise. As they understood it, they needed first to disseminate the ideas of rationalist education in order to gain support among professors and workers alike.⁶³⁷ In 1912, Samuel Torner believed that the role of *Francisco Ferrer* in creating an environment for the Modern School was accomplished and along with a group of thirteen teachers, professors, and activists founded the *Liga de Educacion Racionalista* (Rationalist Education League), the Argentine chapter of the International Rationalist League for the Education of Children.⁶³⁸ The main goals were to propagandize the principles of rationalist education, to reform the school, and take the lead in a plan that “realizes the scientific and humanitarian concept of modern Pedagogy.”⁶³⁹ Finally, they sought to found rationalist schools considered as “fields of experimentation of that plan and system.”⁶⁴⁰ In order to achieve these goals, they created an Administrative Commission with multiple responsibilities. Among them were the organization of talks and the direction of the magazine, *La escuela*

⁶³⁶ “Saludo,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 1., May 1st, 1911.

⁶³⁷ While the editorial project included women and even when women were the majority in the teaching profession, when editors talked about rationalist educators, they referred to them as professors (in the masculine form in Spanish) and did not address school teachers.

⁶³⁸ Samuel Torner “La escuela moderna en Buenos Aires. Necesidad de una entidad protectora. La Liga de la enseñanza racional,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 16, January 1st, 1912.

⁶³⁹ “Liga Racionalista de Educación Racionalista. Bases y fines,” *La escuela popular*, no. 1, Oct. 1, 1912, 9.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

popular.⁶⁴¹ Together they aimed to propagandize rationalist education and to collect money for the foundation of the Modern School.⁶⁴²

Despite the connections with previous anarchist pedagogies and the goal to build a Modern School, activists affirmed that rationalist education was distinct from anarchist pedagogies.⁶⁴³ Teaching children from a scientific perspective that privileged freedom meant to avoid any “doctrinary” or “dogmatic” ideas. In this sense, by the turn of the century, teachers participating or sympathetic with the rationalist movement, distanced themselves from any political ideology, including those that teachers had supported or actively participated in socialist and anarchist circles.⁶⁴⁴ In August 1911, Torner published “Razonamiento” where he stated that while the Modern School had been labeled with multiple denominations such as secular, neutral, and anarchist, “teaching cannot be the patrimony of parties or sects, the school must be only scientific” and has to teach the proven truths of scientific investigations.⁶⁴⁵ He wrote: “truth cannot be labeled, science is neither black nor

⁶⁴¹ *La escuela popular*, published once a month, was among the most important tools that activists of the Modern School used to disseminate the principles of rationalist education. The magazine was not directed only towards teachers. Instead, it aimed to reach a broader audience through the popularization of scientific knowledge. In a way, they conceived their role as pedagogic, almost like a teacher who would illuminate the people. The cost of the issue was \$0.20. Three-month subscriptions cost 0.50 and biannual submissions, one peso. As an official magazine of the *Liga Racionalista*, the publication included internal information regarding financial information, meeting minutes, changes in the Administrative Commission.

⁶⁴² Members of the Administrative Commission were in charge of an office opened Monday to Friday from five to six and eight and nine in the afternoon. The office was located just a couple of blocks away from the Plaza de Mayo, in the city of Buenos Aires.

⁶⁴³ According to Suriano, rationalist education had “stopped being part of the liberatory tactics of anarchism or any political ideology, to pretend to become an independent system of ideas with a similar status to political ideologies” Suriano, *Anarquistas, cultura y política libertaria*, 245.

⁶⁴⁴ Some members of the Liga de Educacion Racionalista were activists and intellectuals with extensive experience in local pedagogical and editorial projects that confronted state sponsored education, among them Julio Barcos, Alicia Moreau, and socialist lawyer Enrique Del Valle Iberlucea.

⁶⁴⁵ Samuel Torner, “Razonamiento,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no 7, Aug. 1, 1911.

white, nor red.”⁶⁴⁶ Thus, a scientific education required a disidentification with anarchist or socialist ideas.

Not everyone agreed that rationalism and anarchism were separate ideologies. In November 1911, activist from Santa Fe, Miguel Expósito, replied to Torner insisting that rationalist and anarchist education were synonyms. Expósito quoted Anselmo Lorenzo and anarchist Paraf-Javal.⁶⁴⁷ Based on the definitions of anarchism and rationalism from both authors, Expósito asserted that if rationalism was the synthesis of positive science and anarchism was forged through the positivism of rationalist science, he did not see any difference between them. Both rationalism and anarchism, tended to the moral elevation of humanity and aimed to free humanity from religious ideas. Rejecting Torner’s comparison of anarchism with socialism and republicanism, Expósito affirmed that anarchism was “the purest alienated Truth, the most polished Reason; it is in short, the only ideal of human redemption.”⁶⁴⁸ On the opposite end, socialism and republicanism were mere reformist ideologies, perpetrators of contemporary prejudices. Torner replied to the reader welcoming the controversy and inviting the rest of the readers to use the magazine as a forum to

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid. Turner's definitions had reverberations among activists (referred to by him as “comrades”) in the province of Santa Fe. They asked him to clarify what the magazine understood by rationalist education. In response, Torner reaffirmed that “the teaching we advocate cannot be anarchist, as it is neither republican nor socialist.” In Torner’s words, rationalist education was neutral since it could not belong to “any party, religion, or determined idea.” Samuel Torner, “La enseñanza racionalista,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 9, Sept. 15 1911.

⁶⁴⁷ Paraf-Javal started his political activity in the Dreyfus affair and continued his participation among anarchist groups publishing articles. Professor of natural sciences, he advocated for a society of rational beings governed by natural laws. In November 1911, *Francisco Ferrer* published an article originally published in the Boletín of “Group d’ Etudes Scientifiques de Paris,” an organization founded by the author. This is the article quoted by Miguel Expósito to associate anarchism with rationalism. Paraf-Javal “La interpretación científica,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 13, November 15, 1911.

⁶⁴⁸ Miguel Expósito “La enseñanza racionalista,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 12, Nov. 1st, 1911.

debate ideas.⁶⁴⁹ Yet, Torner reaffirmed his position, giving examples from Spanish and French secular schools. In those schools, teachers educated children to be partisans of their ideas and to reject with animosity people with different ideologies. According to Torner, this imposition was a mistake that led the teacher and the school not to comply with their role, which was to teach children to examine, deliberate, observe, and find methods to explain reality.

The attempt to deny any association between rationalist education and anarchism was shaped by the political persecution that anarchists faced in Argentina and Europe. After the closing of schools in Spain and in the local context, admitting any proximity between rationalist ideas and anarchism presented a risk for those who advocated for the creation of the Modern School.⁶⁵⁰ The fact that Torner referred to their “enemies” when they made these statements proves the defensive strategy that rationalists took after the execution of Ferrer. For instance, in his assertions, Torner responded to accusations by Antonio Maura who characterized the Modern School of Barcelona as a “school of hate and resentment, promoter of disorder” and responsible for the hate against religion.⁶⁵¹ These types of assertions justified the consequential

⁶⁴⁹ Samuel Torner “Contestando,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 12, Nov. 1st, 1911.

⁶⁵⁰ The police clearly identified the members of the *Liga* as political dissidents, intimidating them in their daily educational activities. In January 1913, the magazine’s editors denounced a police attack against Vicente Fonda and Heriberto D. Staffa. “Censurable atentado policial,” *La escuela popular*, no 4, January 13, 1913, 22-23. The newspaper *Giornale d’Italia* covered the unjust police action under the title “To educate is a crime!” The editors denounced the detentions as an act against freedom and democracy and responding instead to a tyrannical government influenced by clerical pressure. The persecution of members of the *Liga Racionalista* reached other members such as doctor Emiliano Carulla, detained by the police when leaving the office. “Nosotros y la policía,” *La escuela popular*, no 12, October 13, 1913, 20-21 This persecution did not stop activists from continuing their pedagogical project and gave them more arguments to present themselves as cultural workers, intellectuals, or educators who were persecuted for freely promoting their ideas.

⁶⁵¹ In another article Torner expressed that the rationalist school was not sectarian “as its enemies pretend to portray it.” Samuel Torner, “Laicismo inutil,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 6, June 15, 1911.

violence that the state perpetrated against activists of the Modern School. Moreover, Torner was concerned with the reception of anarchist ideas among common people. Torner started his article “Razonamiento” by asserting that it was a common prejudice to adjudicate adjectives to the rationalist education that created “suspicion and distrust” among “wary people.”⁶⁵²

The ultimate goal of building the Modern School was never accomplished but the efforts around the propaganda of rationalist education made an important contribution in rejecting state-sponsored education, challenging adult authority over children, and uniting a group of intellectuals, teachers, and physicians under a common goal. Yet, the heterogeneity of a movement that aimed to transform education generated disagreements. The next section delves into the debates defining what a rational education meant and the main critiques made by teachers advocating for a modern school.

Defining Rationalism: A Scientific Education for Children's Liberation

Rationalism was not an homogenous movement or set of ideas. Rather, it was composed of anarchist and socialist leaders, teachers, and doctors who published in magazines, presented in congresses, and gave conferences to spread the need for a school reform among working class parents. The *Liga Racionalista*, along with its magazine, was the main actor in this pedagogical endeavor although I identify other teachers who contributed to the dissemination of discourses with the clear goal of criticizing state-sponsored education and providing teachers with alternative teaching

⁶⁵² Samuel Torner, “Razonamiento.”

practices to educate children. The discourses analyzed in this section were part of the broad educational laboratory network that was composed of teachers who contributed to the magazine *La escuela popular*, anarchist leader and writer Julio Barcos, socialist doctors and educators such as Alicia Moreau and Raquel Camaña, and participants of the First Feminine International Congress in Buenos Aires. The goal was to transform the ways children were educated in the school and the home.

Socialist, anarchist, and feminist teachers allied against state-sponsored education through a variety of tactics. They created leagues, such as the Rationalist League, that served as collective spaces where teachers imagined alternative pedagogies. Teachers also published magazines specialized in education, such as *Francisco Ferrer*, and *La escuela popular*, and wrote articles on education in socialist, anarchist, and feminist magazines.⁶⁵³ Teachers were central actors in the multiple congresses that occurred in the second decade of the twentieth century to debate about education and childhood. The normal school trained teachers in practices of public speaking and writing, and teachers who were not convinced that state-sponsored education was following the correct path used their knowledge to condemn *normalismo*. Writing became a tool for emancipation from a system of schooling considered as traditional, authoritarian, and associated with a religious past. Thus, magazines served as a platform that teachers used to build networks of solidarity between working-class children and parents and the emerging middle class that they represented. They made daily efforts to spread their views in magazines, to

⁶⁵³ For an overview of the magazines specialized in education in Argentina see Silvia Finocchio *La escuela en la historia argentina* (Buenos Aires; Edhasa, 2009).

build transnational connections through congresses, and to deliver talks in community centers where teachers gathered with the local community to discuss the future of the society.

Local magazines disseminated scientific and pedagogical theories that informed local teachers' perspectives on education. While Ferrer became the proponent of the rationalist education that circulated in Argentina and other Latin American countries, Argentine school reformers found in European educators multiple sources of inspiration for their projects. The richness of concepts that circulated transnationally explain that at times, rationalist, scientific, modern, and integral education were used as synonyms by teachers. The concept of "integral education" was not new for Argentine teachers whose first year of normal training included the three components —physical, intellectual, and moral education— that defined the term. Yet, the term acquired a different meaning when Paul Robin, director of the Orphanage Campus in France, added to the components of integral education, the "continual relationship" among them.⁶⁵⁴ Robin aimed to blur the distinctions between intellectual and manual labor. He claimed that "a truly integral education possesses the brain that directs and the hand that executes; is at the same time the wise and the worker."⁶⁵⁵ According to Robin, the educational process was founded on the individual desire to learn. Respect for children's needs was a main principle of Robin's pedagogical theory. He encouraged teachers to: "Respect the child's inclination for observation and initiative; beware of imprudently exciting

⁶⁵⁴ Paul Robin, "La educación integral," quoted in Dora Barrancos, *Anarquismo educación y costumbres en la Argentina*, 41.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

him/her, let her make his/her own discoveries; await his/her questions and answer them soberly and with extreme reserve so that he can continue his/her own efforts.”⁶⁵⁶

Historians have recognized in Robin and Ferrer the two main influences of the alternative pedagogies circulating in Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century, but the origins of the critique of state-sponsored education can be found in nineteenth-century formulations of William Godwin.⁶⁵⁷ Beyond Ferrer and Robin, rationalist education drew on the contributions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Herbert Spencer, and Sebastian Faure.⁶⁵⁸

However, beyond the theoretical influences, in local magazines teachers defined rationalist education from their own perspective, in first person.⁶⁵⁹ Multiple definitions of rationalism appeared in magazines *Francisco Ferrer* and *La escuela popular* as well in other magazines. Members of the Rationalist League advocated for rationalist education in socialist magazines reaching working-class and middle-class audiences. Socialist leader and feminist Alicia Moreau wrote extensively on education in *Revista Socialista Internacional* and *Humanidad Nueva*. She defined the rationalist or modern schools as ones that tended to “train strong and emancipated individualities.”⁶⁶⁰ Another contributor defined rationalism as a philosophical

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 49-50.

⁶⁵⁷ Martín Alberto Acri and María del Carmen Cáceres, *La educación libertaria en la Argentina y en México (1861-1945)* (Buenos Aires: Libros de anarres, 2011).

⁶⁵⁸ Sandra Carli, *Niñez, pedagogía y política. Transformaciones de los discursos acerca de la infancia en la historia de la educación argentina entre 1880 y 1955* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Avila editores, 2002).

⁶⁵⁹ I draw on Laura Fernández Cordero’s analysis on women’s participation in anarchist magazines. Drawing on Bakhtin’s theory of enunciation, she asserts the importance for women to write in first person the anarchist doctrine. The same can be said about Argentine teachers defining and debating in the rationalist magazines. Laura Fernández Cordero, *Amor y anarquismo. Experiencias pioneras que pensaron y ejercieron la libertad sexual* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI editores, 2018).

⁶⁶⁰ Alicia Moreau, “La educación racionalista,” *Revista Socialista Internacional*, no. 1, June 15, 1909.

doctrine and system that establishes the use of reason as the basis of every political and religious belief.⁶⁶¹ Under this perspective, the teacher's task was one of "reason, peace, and spiritual serenity entirely external to the human passions and the ambitions of a sect or a party."⁶⁶² Under the principles of science, rationalism promised to function as a "great factor of a peaceful and harmonic future."⁶⁶³ Other definitions put more emphasis on the class struggle, a clear legacy of the anarchist tendency of the Modern School. Close collaborator of Francisco Ferrer, anarchist Anselmo Lorenzo differentiated in the first issue of the magazine between rationalist schools and state-sponsored schools that, like the catholic schools, taught children "capitalist privileges."⁶⁶⁴ Unlike those schools, the rationalist school had the mission to teach children the origin of social injustices so children in the future were able to combat and oppose them.

Teachers defined rationalist education as "modern," in opposition to the traditional education of the past and the contemporary secular education taught in the schools. In a conference given at Casa Suiza in July 1913, anarchist teacher Julio Barcos, director of *La escuela popular*, historicized schools from the Middle Age to the twentieth century. Traditional education was associated with an ancient building, a rigid discipline, and a claustal severity impermeable to the light of modern theories.⁶⁶⁵ Traditional schools of the Middle Age prepared "automatons for the

⁶⁶¹ "En lucha," *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 2, July 15, 1911.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶⁶³ Dr. Medeiros defined rationalist education in a talk for a Brazilian audience. "Enseñanza racionalista," *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 6, June 15, 1911.

⁶⁶⁴ Anselmo Lorenzo, "Sindicalismo y racionalismo," *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 1, May 1, 1911.

⁶⁶⁵ Barcos, "Plan de una escuela integral," *La escuela popular*, no. 10, Aug. 15, 1913.

fatherland” and not independent spirits able to think and act by themselves. The contemporary secular school was born as a result of a concession of the old school to scientific positivism, but in practice teachers, books, and a dogmatic state continued intoxicating the new generations. As Leopoldo Lugones asserted in the 1913 Congress of the Child, secular schools “fulfilled their historical mission” although it was time to perfect its mission and to build a modern school free of any dogmatism.⁶⁶⁶

Due to the heterogeneity of the movement, there were disagreements in defining rationalist education. Nicolás Arata defines eight principles of the rationalist school: education as a political problem, the rejection of political, military or dogmatic prejudices in favor of an education inspired by science, co-education of the sexes, co-education among poor and rich children, anti-state sponsored education, play and work as vital methodologies, program centered around children’s needs, and abolition of rewards and punishment.⁶⁶⁷ However, as we saw in the exchange between Toner and Expósito, rationalists debated how to name their doctrine and what characteristics rationalist education had. During the conference held at the *Cámara Sindical de Cocineros y Pasteleros* (Union of Cooks and Bakers) Santiago Locascio attacked the “prejudices of nationality” in children’s education.⁶⁶⁸ Locascio’s intervention provoked disagreement with school inspectors Carlos

⁶⁶⁶ Leonilda Barrancos, “El Congreso del niño,” *La escuela popular*, no. 13, Nov. 15, 1913.

⁶⁶⁷ Nicolás Arata, “Julio Barcos: Derivas de un pedagogo intempestivo” in Julio Barcos *Cómo educa el Estado a tu hijo y otros escritos* (Buenos Aires: Unipe, 2013).

⁶⁶⁸ Santiago Locascio was an anarchist journalist who participated in the organization of unions at the end of the nineteenth century. He edited the newspaper *Nueva Era*, and collaborated with *Avvenire* and *La Protesta Humana*. In 1902 he was expelled due to the Residency Law but he managed to return to the country clandestinely via Montevideo. Tarcus, *Diccionario biográfico de la izquierda argentina*.

Vergara and Jose Berruti.⁶⁶⁹ Barcos intervened to conclude the discussion summarizing the main arguments and “unfurling the flag of the internationalist humanism vis-a-vis the patriotic religion”⁶⁷⁰ Heriberto D. Staffa, the Treasurer of the League Administrative Commission, replied to Vergara’s talk with an article titled “Rationalist Education Cannot Be Patriotic.” In the article, more aligned with anarchist ideas, Staffa argued that in opposition to the “patriotic ideal,” rationalist education proposed the ideal of natural laws that rejected nationalism and embraced the concept of humanity.⁶⁷¹ The discussion reflected the tension between radicalized workers and anarchists like Locascio and allies of the rationalist education trained as normal teachers.

Yet, other teachers joined the critique against patriotic education. Sava Tevama wrote an article complaining that the festivities organized around the national heroes such as José de San Martín occupied too important a part of everyday life in the school and forced teachers to focus on the organization of performances and songs to celebrate the Fatherland. The problem with this approach to national history, according to Tevama, was that it praised selfishness and promoted racial superiority instead of teaching the virtues of all races that would link “the great human family.”⁶⁷² To illustrate how terribly developed the programs provided by the National Council of Education were, Tevama asserted that a colleague of hers started

⁶⁶⁹ The magazine referred to this participant as a “a young worker with simple words but with great effectiveness for assembly speeches.” “La conferencia del día 4. Los debates libres,” *La escuela popular*, no.9, July 15, 1913.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁷¹ Heriberto D. Staffa, “La enseñanza racional no puede ser patriótica,” *La escuela popular*, no. 10, Aug. 15, 1913, 13-15.

⁶⁷² Sava Tevama, “Enseñanza de la historia,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 1, May 1st, 1911.

crying when she received the detailed program. Patriotic education was, for Moreau, another expression of the dogmatic character of the school. She wrote: “The new dogma is not religious but patriotic.”⁶⁷³ She complained about the “constant action, repeated in every opportunity during the festivities.”⁶⁷⁴

Rationalists defined their approaches as anti-dogmatic and in opposition to religious education. A crucial principle against religious education was teachers’ defense of co-education, that is the possibility of boys and girls sharing classroom instruction. In theory, Law 1420, promulgated in 1884, allowed co-educational institutions. In practice, however, the educational system was heterogeneous, composed of mixed institutions and schools exclusively dedicated for boys and girls.⁶⁷⁵ Women were particularly vociferous in complaining about an incomplete process of secularization.⁶⁷⁶ In 1909, Julia Caillat published an article defending mixed educational institutions in *Archivos de Pedagogía*. Caillat, who recognized co-education as a “conquest of feminism,” asserted that it was “the most natural and equitable of all regimes: it announces the equality of the sexes and the right to be educated.”⁶⁷⁷ In 1912, Francisca Jacques published her defense on co-education in the socialist magazine *Humanidad Nueva*.⁶⁷⁸ One by one, Jacques rejected the arguments

⁶⁷³ Alicia Moreau, “La escuela nueva,” *Revista socialista internacional* 1, no. 1, Dec. 15, 1908, 173.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ In order to fulfill the requirement of co-education Camaño suggested that schools register fifty percent of girls and boys.

⁶⁷⁶ Bertilda Ayarragaray, “Coeducación de los sexos,” *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines* 6, no. 16, 1909.

⁶⁷⁷ Julia Caillat, “Las escuelas mixtas en los Estados Unidos” *Archivos de Pedagogía y Ciencias Afines* 4, no. 12, 1908, 423.

⁶⁷⁸ Francisca Jacques, “Co-educación de los sexos,” *Humanidad nueva*, no. 1, January 1912.

against co-education.⁶⁷⁹ In a talk given at the 1913 Congress of the Child organized by socialist teachers Raquel Camaña and Julieta Lanteri, Barcos warned about the dangers of the secular school that was independent of the religious dogmas but still perpetrated political dogmas and routine. Camaña complained that while the school sought to prepare children for life, it condemned the relationship between boys and girls.⁶⁸⁰ Camaña saw schools exclusively for men and women as unnatural and illogical.

While definitions of rationalist education varied and the heterogeneity of the moment provoked internal debates, it was evident that there was discontent about how the school educated children. In her critique of *normalismo*, Marta Samatán reflected: “it could well be said that when listening to this teaching profession made up of so many men and women, young and healthy, an enormous collective disappointment was palpable.”⁶⁸¹ Denouncing this discontent in the magazines opened, for teachers like Tavama, the possibility to criticize what they considered the irrational and archaic curricula and teaching methods. Barcos, voiced the most radical critiques of the school conceiving the state as an organ of the dominant class that monopolized children’s education. State-sponsored education, “does not educate—

⁶⁷⁹ The first argument was that co-education was against good manners and morals. Jaques responded that on the contrary, mixed schools could give a better basis for the interaction and potentially marriage between men and women than other spaces more dangerous although less attacked than the school such as the dance saloon. The second argument was that co-education was contrary to personality of each sex, feminizing boys and masculinizing girls. Drawing on her experience observing students in the school, Jacques asserted that despite these common beliefs, mixed institutions made boys more honorable manners and gave women more seriousness. A third argument Jacques rejected was the supposedly women’s inferior learning abilities. Jacques assured that women were far from being “the weak sex” since they were stronger than men as past and contemporary women had demonstrated by working outside the home while still being mothers.

⁶⁸⁰ Camaña, “Educación integral,” 143.

⁶⁸¹ Marta Samatán, *Campana y horario* (Rosario: Editorial Ruiz, 1939), 55.

Barcos denounced— does not forge the personality for the future men apt for freedom (...) [the school] tricks the child's intelligence, depresses, brutalizes, fragments and diminishes the soul of the youth who attends the classrooms.”⁶⁸² The school, far from being an institution that educated children for freedom, prepared them to obey and follow orders. These values, teachers argued, were against a modern and democratic society.

By 1910, the critique of state-sponsored education as authoritarian spread in congresses and magazines alike. During the First Femenine International Congress in 1910 organized by *Universitarias Argentinas*, teachers condemned the authoritarian character of *normalismo*.⁶⁸³ According to Maria Mercedes de la Vega, the teacher was an “official of unlimited authority, whose orders or provisions must be followed by his subordinates as if they were precepts of an absolute authority.”⁶⁸⁴ The teacher’s authority, she claimed, was “infallible.” The teacher was “the one who knows, the one who approves, denies, exercises, chooses, in everything related to knowledge.”⁶⁸⁵ Barcos critiqued the dangers of authoritarianism and the unconditional obedience to norms that oppressed children. Discipline was “regimented by violence and fear”

⁶⁸² Julio Barcos “El monopolio del Estado en la enseñanza.” *La escuela popular*, no. 1, Oct. 1st, 1912; Julio Barcos, *Cómo educa el estado a tu hijo*.

⁶⁸³ *Universitarias Argentinas* was the first organization led by university alumni and students. They organized the First Femenine International Congress in 1910 with the goal of “establishing ties of union between all the women in the world.” The participants debated on sociology, law, arts, sciences, and education. The congress will be analyzed in more depth in the following chapter. López, “Sesión Inaugural,” 29.

⁶⁸⁴ María Mercedes de la Vega, “Nuevos Rumbos,” in *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la República Argentina. Historia, actas y trabajos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ceppi, 1911). Maria Mercedes de la Vega was the Secretariat of the Education section, and member of the commission in charge of parties and reception. As Vice-principal of the School No. 6 in Buenos Aires, De la Vega published her visions of the “free school” in *El monitor de la educación común* where she called teachers to innovate and not to stop in their path towards progress.

⁶⁸⁵ De la Vega, “Nuevos Rumbos.”

within a hierarchical system that domesticated everyone.⁶⁸⁶ Considering the school a smaller scale of the broader national political system, Carlos Vergara compared the tyranny of the politicians with that of the teacher.⁶⁸⁷ Another member of the Rationalist League, Rosalia Granowsky, asserted that teaching obedience in the school was the basis for the economic and social inequality among the people. State-sponsored schools were “based on inequality among men, first with classifications, then with medals and certificates of superiority and finally with diplomas and other titles, not developing in the child the feeling of observation, discovery and love of knowledge, but they accustom him to study in order to receive a privilege in reward of his studies.”⁶⁸⁸

Teachers characterized the school using adjectives like immobile, routinary, and inert. Barcos labeled the school as a “temple of routine.”⁶⁸⁹ The lack of movement and the boredom that these words implied were not just a metaphor. Under the normalist classroom, children had few possibilities to speak and move. Gozalbo asserted that while children were quietly learning in the classroom, “the garden, the street, the countryside called them to play, to exercise outside, free from the

⁶⁸⁶ Julio Barcos, “Pestes intelectuales dentro del magisterio,” *La escuela popular*, no. 4, Jan. 1, 1913.

⁶⁸⁷ Vergara contributed on different occasions to *La escuela popular* voicing critiques to state sponsored education and the National Council of Education administered the schools. Carlos Vergara, “Los únicos criminales,” *La escuela popular*, no. 1, Oct. 1st, 1912, Carlos Vergara, “La sorpresa de los teóricos,” *La escuela popular*, no. 4, Jan. 1st, 1913; “Proyecciones pedagógicas,” *La escuela popular*, no. 6, April 4, 1913; “La gloria de los imbéciles,” *La escuela popular*, no. 9, July 15, 1913.

⁶⁸⁸ Rosalia Granowsky “Hacia la educación racionalista,” *La escuela popular*, no. 11, September 15, 1913.

⁶⁸⁹ Barcos, “Pestes intelectuales del magisterio.” Julio Barcos, “Dos pestes del progreso. Resignación y rutina,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 6, June 15, 1911. “In another conference Vergara agreed that the school was dominated by routine. “La conferencia del día 4. Los debates libres,” *La escuela popular*, no. 9, July 15, 1913.

inquisitorial gaze of the professor.”⁶⁹⁰ Inspector Carlos Vergara, trained in the Normal School of Parana with Pedro Scalabrini, complained that the teaching of sciences was based on textbooks instead of the outdoors and with texts written by people with little knowledge.⁶⁹¹ *Francisco Ferrer* published articles by teachers from the Modern School of Barcelona such as Principal Clemencia Jacquinet, who denounced the quietness of children in the dark rooms of the traditional schools.⁶⁹² Routine was expressed in the practices of memorization and repetition of concepts. Gozalbo rejected the archaic method in the teaching of sciences, that required students to memorize from the books instead of learning from the actual experiments.⁶⁹³ According to him, memorization, instead of developing children’s brains, atrophied them. For De la Vega, the clearest consequence of the teacher’s “despotic character” was that children repeated, and executed actions without developing their own thinking.

In the school, children’s lack of movement was evident in the teaching of physical education and in children’s instructions vis-a-vis moral and intellectual instruction. Critiques of physical education were in dialogue with the reforms proposed by Enrique Romero Brest who advocated for a rational physical education. In 1900, Romero Brest wrote his medical degree dissertation, “*El ejercicio físico en la escuela*” (“Physical Exercise in the School”), where he argued the need for

⁶⁹⁰ Augusto Gozalbo, “Críticas a la educación actual. La educación física,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 9, Sept. 15, 1911.

⁶⁹¹ Carlos Vergara “La sorpresa de los teóricos,” *La escuela popular*, no. 4, Jan. 1st, 1913.

⁶⁹² Clemencia Jacquinet, “Primaveras nuevas,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 4, June 15, 1911.

⁶⁹³ Augusto Gozalbo, “Críticas a la educación actual. La enseñanza científica,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 10, Oct. 1, 1911.

children to exercise outdoors. He advocated for an education centered on movement, especially during childhood when muscles were still developing and when children's bodies could be easily molded. Physical exercise was defined as a natural and physiological need for children.⁶⁹⁴ Brest argued that a scientific and rational physical education aimed to improve the qualities and physical aptitudes.

While doctors like Brest aimed to provide scientific arguments for transformations in the curricula, teachers grounded those statements with concrete examples they observed in the school. Gozalbo mentioned that in the school children only dedicated thirty minutes per week to exercise when the rest of the time they remained quiet in an uncomfortable classroom.⁶⁹⁵ In the First Feminine International Congress, teacher Ana Montalvo introduced a gender perspective on the issue. She claimed that while boys received physical education in the schools and clubs and were allowed to freely play, run, and climb, the girl:

an orphan of physical education, only receives in our official schools, the manual teaching of some patient needle work, which will retain her for hours making her young and weak back acquire vices, and fatigue her eyesight, which is gradually weakened by the excess visual attention that has to be done to count those very fine and delicate threads, or so that the most absolute and correct symmetry predominates in the small stitches.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹⁴ Romero Brest, "Organización general de la enseñanza física," *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 389, June 30, 1905. For more on the history of physical education in Argentina see: Eduardo Galak, "Educación del cuerpo y política: Concepciones de raza, higienismo y eugenesia en la educación física argentina," *Movimiento* 20, no. 4 (2014): 1543-1562; Eduardo Galak, *Educación física argentina* (Avellaneda: UNDAV Ediciones, 2016); and Pablo Ariel Scharagrodsky, "Los arquitectos corporales en la Educación Física y los Deportes. Entre fichas, saberes y oficios (Argentina primera mitad del siglo XX)" *Trabajos y Comunicaciones*, no. 42 (September 2015).

⁶⁹⁵ Augusto Gozalbo, "Críticas a la educación actual. La educación física," *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 9, Sept. 15, 1911.

⁶⁹⁶ Montalvo, "Educación física femenina" in *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la República Argentina. Historia, actas y trabajos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ceppi, 1911).

She condemned that girls were constrained in their movements and actions. Thus, she was “no longer independent, and she loses all of her energy, because she fears that her initiatives will be reproached, or that they may seem bad.”⁶⁹⁷ According to Montalvo, teachers and parents were responsible for this situation, but women especially had to carry the task of advocating for the improvement of girls’ education. She stated “it will be the woman who will raise her voice for these evils to disappear.”⁶⁹⁸ The demand around physical education for women was not new in Argentina, but the actualization of the debate in the Congress and magazines in the 1910s demonstrate that an integral education was far from being a reality for children as teachers continued to constraint their movements.⁶⁹⁹

The habits promoted in the school, including the lack of movement, could harm children’s bodies. Because the environment could affect children’s bodies, reformers condemned that the school building itself was harmful for children’s health. As Barcos suggested, the problem with state-sponsored education was not only the quality of education but the hygienic conditions of the school buildings.⁷⁰⁰ Where children received education became as important as the context itself. In the normal school, teachers learned the importance of hygienic buildings. Even after graduating,

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Jennie Howard for instance recalled the implementation of physical education in the Normal School of Cordoba. Jennie Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Raigal, 1951). Her colleague Edith Lowe implemented physical education at the Normal School of Corrientes, *Anales de la Escuela Normal de Maestras de Corrientes* (Corrientes: Imprenta del Estado, 1928). Student of Mary O. Graham., Raquel Camaña recalled the physical exercises at the Normal School of La Plata. Raquel Camaña, “Verdades,” *Revista de Derecho, Historia y Letras*, vol. 48, August, 1914.

⁷⁰⁰ Barcos, “El monopolio del Estado en la enseñanza.”

teachers read texts written by hygienists that targeted educators and parents.⁷⁰¹ In his analysis of the school hygienic conditions, Dr. Francisco Súnico warned teachers that the school could be the cause of children's sickness such as myopia, scoliosis, and surmenage. Defective furniture, insufficient light, fatigue, and sedentary habits could directly affect children's health.⁷⁰² School reformers did not oppose the centrality of hygiene in teaching new habits. Rather, they draw on medical knowledge to make visible that the ideal hygienic school taught in manuals of pedagogy was not a reality in contemporary schools.

School reformers went further and linked children's oppression in the school with the working conditions of teachers. They claimed that routine was alienating not only for children but also for the teachers.⁷⁰³ Tevama asserted that teachers were condemned to pure repetition and lack of interest and variety. As a dead organism, the Argentine school could not adapt to modern times. In the talk at Casa Suiza, Barcos asked his audience: "The evolution? It had left the routine and retrograde soul of the school intact!"⁷⁰⁴ The school created an "automatic uniformity of consciences where the light of modern theories did not penetrate"⁷⁰⁵ Decades later, Marta Samatán would use the same type of assertion in her critique of *normalismo*. Samatán wrote:

⁷⁰¹ In 1900, the Ministry of Justice and Instruction requested Dr. Francisco Súnico to write a document based on his observations in school buildings. Francisco Súnico, *Nociones de higiene escolar* (Buenos Aires: Taller tipográfico de la penitenciaría, 1902).

⁷⁰² Súnico, *Nociones de higiene escolar*.

⁷⁰³ Barcos and other teachers condemned the school for being routinary. Barcos, "Plan de una escuela integral;" Barcos, "Pestes intelectuales del magisterio," Leonilda Barrancos, "El Congreso del niño;" Raquel Camaña, "La mujer muñeca," *La escuela popular*, no. 13, Nov. 15, 1913.

⁷⁰⁴ Barcos, "Plan de una escuela integral."

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

“progress was advancing, but our spiritual life remained routine and small-minded.”⁷⁰⁶ With sadness, she recognized:

Many times I stumbled upon values obscured by routine. They [teachers] had only one aspiration: to flee from the classroom, to escape to other spheres, to give their soul to another task. They did not love their work. They spoke of it with boredom and only gave it their external part: their presence, their gestures, their voice. Thus, they fulfilled the precept that had been inculcated in them: form first and form later.⁷⁰⁷

Samatán believed that teachers lacked material and moral motivations. Thus, it was not their fault to be consumed by the claws of *normalismo*. She claimed: “They had not taught them to improve themselves, or to cultivate themselves, or to have faith. They paid them little and poorly and the hopes of improving were almost non-existent.”⁷⁰⁸

For many, the liberation of children from the claws of *normalismo* was intertwined with teacher’s liberation. Vergara recognized that school regulations “surround teachers with a thousand of demands that restrict their freedom, extinguish their enthusiasm, and sterilize all their labor.”⁷⁰⁹ A teacher, motivated after attending a conference organized by the *Liga*, exposed that teachers were forced to follow the schedules and programs “to the letter” and they could not even suggest to the principal how to organize the daily schedule considering, for example, the “mental work” required by each subject.⁷¹⁰ Teachers like Mercante had proved that the scientific study of children could improve teaching practices, but in practice, teachers

⁷⁰⁶ Samatán, *Campana y horario*, 55-55.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷⁰⁹ Vergara “La sorpresa de los teóricos.”

⁷¹⁰ “Eco simpático de nuestras conferencias. Nota de una maestra,” *La escuela popular*, no. 10, Aug. 15, 1913.

were not allowed to make changes in the school based on scientific evidence. Probably fearing the consequences of her critique, the teacher preferred to not disclose her name which demonstrates to what extent common teachers —and not established professors and inspectors like Vergara and Barcos— exposed themselves when making public their criticism. Indeed, the teacher complained about the “reactionary” and bossy principals that did not like innovative teachers. Moreover, the article revealed that teachers were under the gaze of principals responsible for writing the reports to be read by the inspector. Despite the authoritarian schools system described by rationalist, the anonymous teacher, encouraged the readers to challenge the ways teachers “inculcated children with unnecessary and absurd things” and to unite under the cause of rationalist education to “regenerate this muddy society starting with children, “who are pure creatures, as long as they have not been altered, corrupted, disfigured by the effect of a so-called civilization, which is nothing but a long decadence.”⁷¹¹

In this context, teachers were called to be active, to organize, to join a movement of rationalist teachers who could critique and transform the classroom. Teachers who joined the *Liga Racionalista* found, in writing and public speaking, a media to channel their frustrations and voice a collective critique to the state. In 1912, Barcos led teachers’ unionizing efforts by founding the *Liga Nacional de Maestros* (The National League of Teachers). The *Liga Racionalista* supported this initiative.⁷¹²

⁷¹¹ Ibid.

⁷¹² For instance they sent Julio Barcos and other teachers such as Juan Franchi, Francisco Segovia y Jorge Guash Leguizamón, as delegates to the meeting organized by the Confederation of Teachers. Alexandra Pita González, “De la Liga Racionalista a Cómo educa el Estado a tu hijo: El itinerario de Julio Barcos,” *Revista De Historia*, no. 65-66 (January 2012): 123-41.

Its agenda was composed of issues related to retirement and delay in the payment of the salary. They advocated for teachers who were suspended by the CNE. Out of the *Liga Nacional de Maestros*, in 1912 teachers organized the *Confederación Nacional del Magisterio* (National Confederation of Teachers).⁷¹³ Rationalist teachers such as Barcos and Barrancos continued leading the organization along with Florencia Fossati, who would become a union leader in the province of Mendoza during the strikes of 1918.⁷¹⁴ Moreau contextualized the *Liga de Maestros* as an organization within the union movement, where teachers were actors of social change through workers' solidarity. As a model, the rationalist teacher, a member of the Teachers' League, was a teacher who questioned the extent to which the school prepared children for life, a worker who did not mechanically accept the CNE regulations, and instead "resisted and critiqued" the national government within the school. In Moreau's words, teachers needed to be "someone with capacity for thinking and organizing."⁷¹⁵ According to Moreau, along with the teachers' economic demands, the Teachers' League would make room for the intellectual and moral needs of the

⁷¹³ Among the goals of the confederation were to "strengthen the bonds of solidarity between the conferred associations and all the educators of the country" and to "offer mutual support and solidarity to the confederated teachers." "Confederación nacional del magisterio," *La escuela popular*, no. 1, Oct. 1, 1912. For more on the links between rationalists and teacher's confederation see: "Nuestra adhesión a la Confederación del Magisterio," *La escuela popular*, no. 16, March 15, 1914.

⁷¹⁴ Originally from the province of Mendoza, Florencia Fossati graduated as a professor of pedagogy in La Plata. She returned to her hometown in 1912 to work as a director and later Sub-Inspector. Fossati participated in the 1913 Congress of the Child and continued advocating for teacher's rights. In 1917, she joined the Union Mendocina de Maestros (Mendoza Teachers Union, UMM) to advocate the payment of teacher's salary. In the following year, Fossati was fired but continued participating in the 1919 teachers' strikes against the provincial government. Martin Acri "Mujer, maestra y sindicalista. Florencia Fossati y su lucha por una educación popular, laica y democrática," in *Maestra. Fundadoras de la educación pública argentina*, Flavia Vitale ed. (Buenos Aires: Esildica, 2021).

⁷¹⁵ Alicia Moreau, "Liga Nacional de Maestros," *Revista Humanidad Nueva*, no. 8, Aug. 29, 1910, 392.

teaching profession. Barcos saw the movement with hope asserting that members and supporters of the *Liga Racionalista* constituted “a new type of the future teacher.”⁷¹⁶

Rationalists continued to impose upon teachers a high standard of commitment and energy to the cause of education, now from the perspective of revolutionary morals. In a conference, Barcos suggested that they should question:

Does the teacher have an investigative and idealistic spirit?
Does he/she love the group of children entrusted to them?
Does he/she respect and cultivate the idiosyncrasy of children as much as possible?
Does he/she have intellectual and artistic passions?
Does he/she monitor the march of contemporary thought?
Is he/she interested in the social events that shake and move our civilization?
In short, is he/she a studious, reasoning, and understanding spirit, full of lyrical resonance and open to all the horizons of the intellect?
Because, how can an innocuous being, without passions, without ideals, without kindness and without character, inoculate something other than stupidity in his/her disciples?⁷¹⁷

For rationalists, the expectation was that teachers investigate, read, care about contemporary politics, and develop intellectual and artistic interests. A cultivated teacher would understand children and promote a respectful environment of multiple ideas in the classroom. Barcos’s expectations aligned with intellectuals like Alicia Moreau who praised the *Liga* as an intellectual movement more than as a union to advocate for a better salary. These discourses reflected in part the privileged position of middle-class activists from Buenos Aires. Yet, even acknowledging that Barcos and Moreau were not representative of the majority of the teachers, their claims called for teachers to fulfill a historical role, one that was able to liberate the school from

⁷¹⁶ Julio Barcos, “Virtudes negativas,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no. 7, Aug. 1, 1911.

⁷¹⁷ Barcos, “Pestes intelectuales dentro del magisterio.”

ignorance and that opened the opportunity for teachers to become leaders of a social movement.

With the rationalist teacher taking the lead, the rationalists called for an urgent transformation of the school based on modern principles of education. In a context of political conflict and increasing debates around the meaning of democracy, rationalists fought over the meaning of a modern school able to prepare children with the knowledge required for a changing society. The changes proposed affected everything and everyone. A radical reform was needed, rationalists repeated in their conferences and articles. Children had to learn by doing, playing, and observing nature. Teachers needed to study children. The school curricula had to be modified. The schedule could be revised respecting children's needs. Even the space for instruction needed to be reimagined. Instead of learning inside the classroom, a modern education should be developed outside, in the countryside, in the factories, and in the gardens where children enjoy the contact with nature. Quoting Ellen Key's *The Century of the Child* published in 1909, Barcos addressed the importance and depth of the reform that teachers need to lead: "Detailed reforms are useless if they are not intended to prepare the revolution that leaves no stone of the current systems behind."⁷¹⁸ While the Modern School of Buenos Aires was never accomplished, rationalists in Buenos Aires imagined their own school from where children and a new society based on the natural harmony promised by science would arise.⁷¹⁹ Yet,

⁷¹⁸ Barcos, "Plan de una escuela integral."

⁷¹⁹ A visual analysis of imagery of Francisco Ferrer suggests a luminous and harmonious future. Issue number 4 shows two children happily reading a book outside in the base of a tree. In Issue number 10 the cover page has a family looking at a luminous horizon. Both parents hold their two naked children while the youngest child points out to a point in the horizon/future.

rationalist eugenic inspirations and the daily routines they envisioned for the school continued reproducing a strict disciplinary system for working-class children. The next section analyzes the connections between school reformers and their pedagogical utopias with the eugenic discourses that aimed to regenerate the race.

Imagining the Modern School: Hygiene, Nature, and Work

Through the pages of rationalist magazines, teachers found a source to imagine the Modern School in Buenos Aires. Articles and the correspondence showcased European modern schools, and U.S. Open Air Schools founded by the Antituberculosis League as “home-schools” for children with different afflictions.⁷²⁰ With the Modern School of Barcelona closed, *La Colmena* served as an horizon for rationalists in Argentina. The school was founded by anarchist Sebastian Faure in Rambouillet, France.⁷²¹ In July 1913, Barcos introduced the school to the Argentine in a conference at Casa Suiza. Julio Barcos describes *La Colmena*:

In the quiet surroundings of the city, in the most panoramic and healthy place, the land had been chosen for the location of the large school building. On a hill of the land, in a high and dry place, between a beautiful garden and a leafy grove, stood out in the distance, the smiling children's house similar to a lonely Eden, simple but beautiful, cheerful, picturesque, laughing, at times boisterous, sonorous of voices and childish joys, now palpitating with secret activity like a laborious hive of souls in the sublime gestation of the redemptive ideals of life.⁷²²

⁷²⁰ “La escuela moderna de Clivio,” *Francisco Ferrer*, no 1., May 1st, 1911.

⁷²¹ Originally from France, Sebastian Faure was one of the intellectual referents of anarchism, conferencists and writer of the *Encyclopedie Anarchiste*, translated in various languages. In 1904 Faure founded *La Ruche (La Colmena)*, in Rambouillet, France. Barcos, “Plan de una escuela integral.”

⁷²² Barcos, “Plan de una escuela integral.”

In the Modern School, the environment acquired a central aspect in providing a healthy and harmonious life for children; the “large” building facilitated space for movement; children enjoyed the school as they laughed and worked. The hygienic ideal and the close contact to nature was a common denominator in the schools which rationalist teachers covered in the magazines. This section analyzes the links between school reformers and a eugenic vision of the school that aimed to regenerate working class children. While opposing state-sponsored education, anarchist, socialist, and feminist leaders continued depositing in the school the hopes that education could transform children’s bodies. Rosalia Granowsky proclaimed: “the only radical remedy to cure us of this chronic disease that destroys our individual and social organism worse than tuberculosis, is the implantation of rationalist schools.”⁷²³ The goal was to build a harmonic, almost utopian society, with no hierarchies, where science regulated social relations and children would collectively work in solidarity as bees in the hive.

School reformers believed that children could be transformed with proper education and a healthy environment. These ideas were informed by a Neo-Lamarckian understanding of the social environment as able to affect children’s nature. Teachers also believed that children were at a crucial state in their life to absorb the impressions they received from the external stimuli and therefore the school was able not only to cure children’s illness but also to mold their bodies and influence future behavior. Because children were considered particularly “impressionable,” the school could have positive effects that counteract the pervasive

⁷²³ Granowsky “Hacia la educación racionalista.”

influence of the family, the factory, and other spaces considered as dangers.⁷²⁴ The concept of impression appeared repeatedly to characterize children's bodies and minds. For instance, in a correspondence from Madrid with the editors of *La escuela popular*, a doctor defined children's brains as a "soft wax" in which the impressions left an irreversible mark.⁷²⁵ Ferrer conceptualized children as tender and soft. He wrote: "When the child has evolved into an adult, it will be an obstacle to progress. The consciousness of man in childhood is of the same texture as his physiological nature; it is tender, soft. Receives very easily what comes from outside."⁷²⁶ Therefore, childhood was a strategic moment to imprint in their minds the values and knowledge that would shape human character.⁷²⁷

The teaching of hygiene was central to molding working-class children into healthy adults. Following the advice of doctors, the Modern School of Barcelona implemented the teaching of hygiene through weekly or bi-weekly presentations where they were "habituated to hygienic practices such as washing their hands, mouths, bathroom, swimming, cleaning their nails, etc."⁷²⁸ This education was deemed positive not only for the children in the present but also for the future when they "take care of their offspring with a better understanding."⁷²⁹ Not only the future

⁷²⁴ Kyla Schuller defines impressibility as the "capacity of a substance to receive impressions from external objects that thereby change its characteristics." It also refers to the "capacity of matter to be alive to movements made on it, to retain and incorporate changes rendered in its material over time." Kyla Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling. Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 7.

⁷²⁵ "El miedo y los niños," *La escuela popular*, no. 1, October 1st, 1912.

⁷²⁶ Francisco Ferrer y Guardia "Necesidad de la enseñanza mixta," *La escuela popular*, no. 12, Oct. 15, 1912.

⁷²⁷ M. Costa Iscar, "Por la propaganda," *La escuela popular*, no. 14, Dec. 20, 1913

⁷²⁸ *Anarchist Education and the Modern School: A Francisco Ferrer Reader*, 71.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

generations were at stake, teachers of the modern school hoped that children would later disseminate the hygienic knowledge acquired in the school to their families. For this reason, on Sundays parents attended the school for instructive talks.⁷³⁰ Other hygienic measures taken in the Modern School of Barcelona included the daily monitoring of the “health of the building,” the “prophylaxis of transmittable diseases,” and “the normal function of the organs and growth.” The goal was as much to prevent the spread of diseases as it was to evaluate child development through measurement and regular weighing. This way, teachers could know if children were “developing vicious postures that became permanent, including myopia, scoliosis, and others.”⁷³¹ In order to register children’s development, the doctor recommended keeping a “biological logbook” that documented the illness that the students suffered.

The hygienic program of the modern schools translated into daily routines. For instance, the first ten minutes were dedicated to a “hygiene examination” performed by the teachers who scrutinized children’s bodily hygiene and clothing. This routine coincided with expectations that state-sponsored education had of teachers as supervisors of children’s bodies. Yet, school reformers seemed to emphasize the methods by which children incorporated hygienic concepts. According to Ferrer, teachers explained the benefits of hygiene without reprimanding or questioning the student. Instead, the teacher talked with the children’s family. Practices of examination by teachers and doctors were common in modern schools

⁷³⁰ In Ferrer’s words “the influence of these lessons spread to their families, as the new demands of the children altered the household routine. One child urgently asked for their feet to be washed, another asked to be bathed, another wanted a brush and powder for their teeth, another was embarrassed by a stain, another asked for new clothes and boots, and so on. *Anarchist Education and the Modern School: A Francisco Ferrer Reader*, 68.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.* 71.

beyond Spain. At the beginning of the year, in the Ferrer School of Lausanne, in Switzerland, doctors diagnosed children and classified them according to their abilities and diseases.⁷³²

According to school reformers, the medical examination was useful not only for medical but also for pedagogical reasons. With the doctors' assistance, teachers were able to discover the illnesses that impeded children's activities and to prevent issues for those children who were healthy. Similar to Mercante's ideas, reformers believed that the teacher's task was easier when knowing children's bodies. The doctor's advice for the treatment of "weak" children promoted the abolition of homework and punishment. Even freedom, a crucial principle for school reformers, had its benefits in medical terms. Dr. J.W. asserted that with freedom children digest and breathe better. Based on the examination of children, doctors recommended to teachers, and indirectly to parents, the actions to be taken including a specific diet for those with digestive problems or periodic showers with salty water for those who were nervous. Still, teachers could take some action in the school such as promoting frequent walks outside and guiding "rational gymnastics" (without violent exercises).

At Modern Schools, doctors examined children's physical and psychological health. Doctors classified children's character, providing the basis for teachers' knowledge regarding children. For instance, a doctor noticed that one student was "too nervous," which he considered a problem since they disturbed other children, and three girls were classified as "lymphatic" and "apathetic."⁷³³ Other children were

⁷³² "De la escuela 'Ferrer' de Lausanne," *La escuela popular*, no. 5, March 3, 1913, 13-14.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*

“inactive” because they had some hearing issues. Others did not have normal vision. The list continued from nutrition to what was considered body abnormalities such as a “double chin.” The classification presented the same categories that Mercante used in his classrooms based on psychological tests, with the difference that in Modern Schools the exam was conducted by a doctor as opposed to teachers. Similarly to the laboratory of psychopedagogy developed in La Plata, reformers expected that the psychological exam could identify normal and “abnormal children.”

Other schools that drew on medical alliances and proved successful in curing students were the Open Air schools in the United States. Similar to the European Modern Schools, teachers received assistance from a doctor so that children were “under constant observation.”⁷³⁴ Doctors measured children’s weight in order to “select those that physically are inferior to the normal children.”⁷³⁵ The 1908 report showed that every child, excepting one, had a notable improvement after only one year of school. The improvement in children’s physical conditions was measured by weight gain. After this period, children were able to return to the regular schools without being delayed in their school development as they would if they would have to stay in their homes. The article demonstrated the importance of the school environment in making possible children’s healing. The building was very luminous with entire walls made out of windows that remained open for children to receive fresh air. The daily routine paid special attention to nutrition. Children were fed regularly with soup, bread, hot chocolate, rice, potatoes, and meat. Like Modern

⁷³⁴ “Lo que se hace en otras partes. Escuelas al aire libre en Estados Unidos,” *La escuela popular*, no. 9, July 15, 1913, 9.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Schools in Europe, Open Air Schools taught hygienic practices: before eating, children washed their hands and faces and after lunch they brushed their teeth. The education of the body was completed with gymnastic exercises where children were taught how to breathe.

The physical and psychological exam became a major concern for school reformers on both sides of the Atlantic in order to identify “abnormal children.” Alicia Moreau and Julio Barcos wrote about how educators abroad attempted to educate abnormal children. In 1911, Moreau applauded a methodology utilized in U.S. schools to “correct children who were incorrigible.”⁷³⁶ The procedure was characterized by Moreau as original, quick, and audacious. The audacity of the new pedagogical method relied on the use of electricity. The socialist leader explained that the child was conducted to a room specially prepared for him/her where the child interacted with his/her classmates. All but “the incorrigible” student wore a pair of shoes that protected them from the electric impulses. In a room next to them, the teacher observed the student and “at the slightest sign of bad humor, at the first impropriety, it sends a current that produces an unpleasant impression on the child but without major damage. Little by little, he/she associates that painful sensation with the wrong action he/she has committed and understands that in order not to receive it, it is necessary to abstain”⁷³⁷ The coercive methods welcomed by Moreau, active follower of Ferrer in Argentina, illuminate how, in the name of a scientific education,

⁷³⁶ Alicia Moreau, “Ciencia y educación. Nuevos procedimientos educativos. *Humanidad Nueva*, no. 2 1911, 99.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*

school reformers sought to intervene in children's bodies through violent disciplinary methods.

Although having the same concern regarding how to educate “abnormal” children in the Modern School, Barcos had a different approach. He asked the principal of *La Colmena* what happened with the “unadaptable or abnormal” students who presented “stubbornness, rebellion, or bad behavior.”⁷³⁸ The principal replied that in the school, children were taught with love, and affection, through suggestion and not punishment. Comparing children with the birds that lived in the school, the principal rhetorically asked if children were more unadaptable than animals in the jungle. The visitor did not seem fully convinced since he replied: “Ok, that’s fine. But, in the case of the abnormal children?” The principal gave a vague answer. On one hand, he said that children were “cured by the environment, while they are susceptible to improvement.” On the other hand, the principal admitted that when this improvement was not possible, children were definitely separated from the school. The association between children who could not adapt with categories such as “rebellion” demonstrates that, while reformers advocated for children’s freedom, they sought to educate only children who did not rebel against the teacher’s authority. No matter how inclusive *La Colmena* was for children of all ages and socio-economic classes, the limits of inclusion were found in the “abnormal.” Although school reformers wrote about ideas of children’s liberation that radically distanced them from the “authoritarian” school, the practice of teaching that appeared in their magazines presented less stark distinctions between pedagogies. Both were motivated

⁷³⁸ Barcos, “Plan de una escuela integral.”

by the premise that working-class, abnormal, and stubborn children needed to be regenerated by the school.

For medical and pedagogical reasons, nature was considered the ideal environment for children. As the Open Air Schools demonstrated, educating children outdoors could regenerate children's weak bodies. *La Colmena* was introduced by Barcos as situated in the suburbs of the city, within a panoramic scenario, in a high and dry place with a beautiful garden where children played and worked. Barcos asserted:

in contact with mother earth, there is no doubt that the body is invigorated, health is toned; and the spirit is ennobled; that aesthetic enjoyment turned into intellectual and physical enjoyment, a term for making work a pleasure, and the set of simple pleasures in the countryside, make hearts simple, courageous and generous, capable of good for the good itself.⁷³⁹

Barcos's statement reflects how reformers imagined a school that aimed to liberate children from the classroom while drawing on eugenic paradigms that saw the school as a source of regeneration. Nature could counteract the harm produced by the dangers of industrialization and urbanization, which anarchist and socialist activists widely criticized.

The exterior of the building represented a perfect environment for the regeneration of children, the interior of the school was characterized by Barcos as incredibly clean and ordered with multiple study rooms and a laboratory of physics and chemistry under construction. Everyday lessons took place in the garden, in the workshops, in the reading saloon (*sala de lectura*) without using rigid programs or

⁷³⁹ Barcos, "Plan de una escuela integral," 6.

tables. Due to the open air, children enjoyed freedom. They could move, exercise, and work in the school.

The descriptions of the Modern Schools can be read as in opposition to the dark rooms that reformers criticized in state-sponsored schools. The Modern School was full of light and air. Barcos wrote:

Open wide the doors and windows so that the regenerating light of the day enters in torrents, so that the lungs are soaked with oxygen and the brain with light, and sing their songs of health and optimism, of youth and strength, within the soul of this lush and strong race (...) and let's throw away from the environment all the drugs released into circulation by certain esthetes, who are not just flesh of the hospital or flesh of the asylum.⁷⁴⁰

As imagined by Barcos, the strong race built from childhood in the Modern School would prevent adults to end up in a hospital, or the asylum. The light of the modern school was physical but also symbolic since Barcos belonged to a generation who saw in modern science the source for enlightening the youth of the Americas.

For those teachers with anarchist and socialist backgrounds, nature provided the possibility of emulating the values of solidarity and communal relationships that existed in the natural world. A contemporary of Ferrer's work in the Modern School of Barcelona and Barcos's leadership in rationalist schools in Buenos Aires, anarchist geographer Peter Kropotkin was publishing in England a series of articles that challenged social Darwinists who saw competition as the primary factor in evolution. Based on his studies in Siberia, Kropotkin proposed a different understanding of evolution centered on the solidarity of species. In 1902, his articles were published in

⁷⁴⁰ Julio Barcos, "Arte y juventud," *La escuela popular*, no. 11, Sept. 5, 1913.

the book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*.⁷⁴¹ As in the natural world studied by Kropotkin, teachers at Modern Schools promoted a spirit of solidarity among children. According to Barcos, in *La Colmena*, children sacrificed selfishness to prioritize friendship. Predisposition to act in solidarity with their peers was even evaluated by the teachers at the Modern School of Barcelona. One observation by a teacher to a group whose work was intellectually satisfactory read: “duties were not fully fulfilled by looking at one just by itself. We must comply with the law of solidarity. Since nature has been endowed with ease of intelligence and sufficient willpower to combat laziness, they are obliged to look out for their classmates.”⁷⁴² According to these teachers, it was necessary that the school provided a space where children learn the “supreme law of solidarity, the only basis of the moral and social order.” Another form of enacting solidarity was through the communal property of class material including pencils and books.⁷⁴³

As a commune of harmony and solidarity among peers, *La Colmena* was introduced as an utopian society. Barcos noticed that children called the school principal by his first name, “as if he were a comrade.”⁷⁴⁴ This more horizontal relationship between teacher and student was reinforced by the idea that love and not fear should characterize the relationship between adults and children. No punishments and rewards hierarchized students.⁷⁴⁵ Teachers favored the spontaneous development

⁷⁴¹ Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London: Heinemann, 1908).

⁷⁴² “Clasificación de los discípulos,” *Boletín de la Escuela Moderna*, no 7, May 31, 1902.

⁷⁴³ *Anarchist Education and the Modern School: A Francisco Ferrer Reader*. See chapter “The Modern School Buletin.”

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁵ In *Escuela Moderna*, rationalists encouraged teachers not to excessively congratulate a student for their achievements. Ferrer explained that the corporal punishment was an irrational and atavistic

of children with the idea that the school must produce a pleasant experience for children.⁷⁴⁶

The narratives that portray the Modern Schools as healthy spaces for children’s freedom contrast with a schedule that imposed strictly regulated time for study, working, resting, and eating. For instance, in *La Colmena*, the distribution of time was the following:

| Time | Activity |
|--|--|
| 7am-8am (during winter time) 6am-7am (during summer time) | Everyone wakes up, washes themselves, brushes their hair, and gets ready |
| 8:00-8:20am | Sing or exercise |
| 8:20-9:00am | Breakfast |
| 9:00am-10:00am | Reading or Arithmetic class |
| 10:00am-11:00am | Class |
| 11:00am-11:30am | Lunch |
| 11:30am-2:00pm | Children are in complete freedom |
| 2:00pm-3:00pm | Class |
| 3:00pm | Snack |
| 6:30pm | Dinner |
| 6:30-9:00pm | Students listen to music or read newspapers and magazines |

The schedule reflects that while children had time assigned for “freedom,” they also had to comply with a regime of hours to eat, exercise, and study.

practice of the past that should disappear in modern education. Clemencia Jacquinet explained Spencer’s educational principles that justified their pedagogical approach against adult punishments.⁷⁴⁶ Clemencia Jacquinet “Herbert Spencer.” The complete list of principles are I. Go from the simple to the compound. II. Go from the concrete to the abstract. III. The child’s education must be consistent with the education of the historically considered humanity. IV. One must proceed from the empirical to the rational. V. The spontaneous development of the child will be favored. VI. A good educational plan must produce a pleasant excitement. VII. The intellectual instincts of the child deserve more confidence than our reasoning.

The Modern School of Barcelona presented a similar picture. An elementary class schedule published in the *Boletín de la Escuela Moderna*, provides an approximation of the daily activities in the school.

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| 9:00am-9:15am | Hygiene Examination - Order in the class |
| 9:15am-9:45am | Question about the work of the previous day |
| 9:45am-10:00am | Recess |
| 10:00am-10:30am | Hands-on Exercises |
| 10:30am-11:00am | Lessons of objects |
| 11:00am-11:15am | Recess |
| 11:15am-11:35am | Hands-on Exercises |
| 2:00pm-2:15pm | Hygiene Examination |
| 2:15pm-2:45pm | Story Time |
| 3:15pm-4:00pm | Review Questions - Recitation from Memory |
| 4:15pm-4:45 | Gymnasium |

The schedule reflects the importance assigned to learning from doing, called “hands on exercises.” Yet, it seems that the recitation of words, and the learning from memory, a method that rationalists in Argentina rejected, was part of a common practice. Both schools started the schedule with hygienic practices and examination, which shows that despite the differences among the schools, hygiene continued to be a core principle in modern schools. The schedules indicate that school reformers carefully organized children’s activities. Thus, pedagogical experiments proposed different types of activities than state-sponsored education but still reproduced the organization of bodies and time.

In theory, no punishments or rewards were accepted in the school. Yet teachers at the Modern School of Barcelona evaluated and graded the students. The

grades were followed by a short comment by the teacher on the student's conduct and abilities to learn and behave. Some of the grades were even published in the school journal with the student's full names. Negative comments include: "[he] wastes time, and the result is that he generally responds poorly to questions;"⁷⁴⁷ "[he] doesn't apply himself with anything nor does he make even the most minimal observation"⁷⁴⁸ "[he is] very distracted; not very conscious of his work."⁷⁴⁹ These students were graded below the average with 4 or 5 points. Teachers also characterized some students as being "lazy" and negatively evaluated students who were "talkers." The comments also included comparison with previous months, and observations regarding how certain students could improve their grades such as not being absent from classes, or not getting distracted by their classmates. Students with good grades did not receive observations except perfunctory comments such as "good work" or "good student."

Wasting time and being distracted was not welcomed by rationalist teachers because, as bees in the hive, children at Modern Schools were supposed to be in constant activity. Facing the moral corruption of their families, the streets, and the factories, working-class children needed to be instructed in the values of work.⁷⁵⁰ Creating habits of working children was considered a major mission of the school.

⁷⁴⁷ *Anarchist Education and the Modern School: A Francisco Ferrer Reader*, 167.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 168.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 169.

⁷⁵⁰ An report published in *La escuela popular* reflects rationalists view on working-class children: "the painting of the child badly asleep in the pernicious promiscuity of the *conventillo*, poorly fed, with his attention fatigued by a purely mechanical work that openly conspires against the progressive development of his intelligence, prematurely sad and thoughtful, poorly developed physically, would allow masterpieces of humanism." Alejandro Unsain, "De la escuela a la fábrica. Condiciones de vida de un niño obrero en la ciudad de Buenos Aires," *La escuela popular*, no. 6, April, 4, 1913, 17.

Work structured the daily life of the school. Children participated in all the daily tasks that concerned the school such as cleaning the common spaces or serving the table. In addition children attended workshops of engraving, carpentry, bookbinding, wickerwork, and mechanics for boys; and ironing, sewing, dyeing and floristry for girls. Manual labor training was completed through the work children developed in the vegetable garden. Describing *La Colmena*, Barcos narrated: “We are in the focus of the active and industrious life of the small children's world; we are in the workplace; in the workshops where the spirit and the hands of the young person preparing for life are given a noble, healthy and pleasant occupation.”⁷⁵¹ When describing the closing of the day in *La Colmena*, Barcos asserted: “The bees repair their energies in the rest of sleep, to wake up buzzing in the morning to the pleasure of work and the joy of living.”⁷⁵²

The Modern School of Buenos Aires that Barcos envisioned was never built in Argentina. In comparison with the rationalists from Europe, the challenge of limited resources for a new school in Buenos Aires translated into conflicts between rationalists, labor organizations, and workers publishing in anarchist newspaper *La Protesta*.⁷⁵³ A worker asserted that if rationalist teachers wanted to found a school, they could, as previous anarchists did in the past, use any room at a union hall. However, the school environment that rationalists imagined required more than one

⁷⁵¹ Barcos, “Plan de una escuela integral.”

⁷⁵² Ibid., 11.

⁷⁵³ Ferrer relied on an important fortune inherited by Ferrer’s former student. Other schools in Italy offered a more communal effort where workers contributed with money and their labor in building the school. “La escuela moderna de Clivio.”

room to regenerate children's bodies.⁷⁵⁴ Another worker affirmed that rationalists needed to “abandon dreams of greatness” with exorbitant amounts of money and urged them to found modest schools. Yet, the obstacles to creating the school were not merely economic, but also political.

As a group composed of intellectuals and middle-class professionals, the *Liga* struggled in collaborating with unions and working-class families. A member of the *Liga*, asserted that “some members of the Commission say that the people do not understand pedagogical problems and that therefore they cannot give us the help.”⁷⁵⁵ Staffa explained that they were promoting a new social organization. Rationalist education was not just another pedagogical system but a “vast humanitarian plan” for the integral improvement of life. Put in this way, Staffa could not conceive how workers were not willing to donate money for what he conceived as a radical transformation of society.⁷⁵⁶ In response, a worker explained that the problem was that even when workers supported the Modern School, they would not contribute with money “because if we ever have it, it turns out that it is not ours, that we owe it to the landlord, the baker, the butcher, etc. Or that we need it to eat and dress as we can.”⁷⁵⁷

Even though the Modern School of Buenos Aires was never established, the efforts made by the *Liga Racionalista* greatly contributed to criticisms of state-

⁷⁵⁴ Taking as example the scarce resources of *La Protesta*, which continued functioning despite the economic obstacles, a worker named Florentino Giribaldi addressed: “The essence of the newspaper lies in those who write; and at the school, in the teacher, in the pedagogue.” Convinced of the importance of the pedagogic task, Giribaldi anticipated that the problem with the rationalist school was the risk of remaining in an eternal planning stage without ever actually building the school. Florentino Giribaldi “La escuela nueva,” *La Protesta*, no. 2200, April 1, 1914.

⁷⁵⁵ Heriberto D. Staffa “Dogmatismo rojo,” *La escuela popular*, no. 18, May 15, 1914.

⁷⁵⁶ Heriberto D. Staffa “Principiemos la obra,” *La escuela popular*, no. 15, Jan. 15, 1914.

⁷⁵⁷ “Instrucción popular,” *La Protesta*, no. 2214, April 17, 1914.

sponsored education and to imagining a different school. This imagination served as a generative force for teachers and working-class parents that other types of schooling were possible. The next section delves into another imagined school for the regeneration of the race proposed by socialist teacher Raquel Camaña.

A School-Home for the Betterment of the Race

At the same time members of the *Liga Racionalista* were imagining a Modern School in Buenos Aires, Raquel Camaña advocated for changes in the school system structured around the *escuela-hogar* (school-home). Camaña and Julieta Lanteri organized the American Congress of the Child in Buenos Aires in 1913. Camaña explained: “The modern soul feels the unease of the unknown and it yearns for a solution. Only science can give it. Only the school can make it possible by practicing the gospel of humanity.”⁷⁵⁸ Camaña affirmed that society could only be transformed by reforming the school; social problems were educational problems. Science was the key towards modernity and an important tool to combat what teachers considered as religious prejudices, a legacy from the past. Being modern meant to be an avid reader and defender of the evolutionary theories that explained how society has evolved and changed, how inheritance and environment affected human life.

The science that Camaña had in mind was eugenics. Camaña firmly believed that eugenics could lead humanity to a new direction, a society in which children and women receiving a proper sex education could be healthy and reproduce consciously. In her view, eugenics’ goal was to “study the causes submitted to the social contract

⁷⁵⁸ Raquel Camaña, “Cátedra práctica de humanidad,” *Tribuna Libre*, April 9, 1919, 29.

that can improve or weaken the qualities of the race in future generations from the physical point of view.”⁷⁵⁹ In other words, it was “puericulture before procreation.”⁷⁶⁰ Although the regulation of marriages was mentioned in her speeches, the more important eugenic action was “to teach the popular masses the individual conditions, well known in the present, for a good and healthy procreation.”⁷⁶¹ The school-home would introduce sex education in the school curricula, an advocacy that made her a pioneer in the topic.⁷⁶²

Aware of the contemporary scientific theories, and participating in international congresses, Camaña started advocating for sex education nationally and internationally in the Congress of School Hygiene in Paris in 1910.⁷⁶³ Due to her success in her presentation, she was invited to another congress of Pedagogy and Hygiene in Belgium and to give conferences in Madrid. In 1913 she organized the First Congress of the Child in Buenos Aires that continued to raise her profile among other Latin American feminists. Camaña died in 1915, too young to see the development of a pedagogical debate among teachers and doctors that would continue in the following decades, but her voice continued resonating after her death through her writing.⁷⁶⁴ In 1916, the publisher "La cultura argentina" (the Argentine Culture),

⁷⁵⁹ Camaña, “Eugenismo y profilaxis social,” 28.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁶² Myriam Southwell, “Raquel Camaña: pedagogía social, moral y sensibilidad en el comienzo del siglo XX”.

⁷⁶³ Raquel Camaña, “El prejuicio sexual y el profesorado en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras,” *Revista de Derecho, Letras e Historia*, vol. 37, Dec. 1910.

⁷⁶⁴ The debates about sex education continued in the 1920s in the magazines of the new school. *La Obra* published articles supporting the teaching of sex education. Fernando Lahille asserted it was of “extraordinary importance, and the problems that are linked to it must be, on the part of parents, educators and governments, the object of the deepest meditations and the wisest resolutions.” Fernando Lahille, *La obra*, no. 32, June 20, 1922, 7. It was not appropriate to take a censorship attitude by

directed by José Ingenieros, compiled Camaña's conference talks and other writings under the title *Pedagogía Social*. In 1918, her *El dilettantismo sentimental* was published with a prologue by Alicia Moreau.⁷⁶⁵

The school that Camaña envisioned for working class women and children was the “escuela-hogar” (school-home), where children would live communally “protecting and loving each other.”⁷⁶⁶ Camaña drew on eugenic thought to promote an instruction that prepared children for life. She repeated her pedagogical proposals in many opportunities, in front of different audiences, changing or adding some concepts to her pedagogical utopia.⁷⁶⁷ She envisioned the “escuela única” (single school): public, popular, and secular. In her words, “the single school, that of the State, that of the people and for the people as a whole, without distinction of castes or fortunes, is in charge of instructing, tying in solidarity the bond between social

“seizing pornographic images and books and prohibiting immoral shows and customs.” Domingo Gradizio went further in defending the teacher's role in educating children on scientific topics since they had the scientific authority and knowledge that parents lacked. This scientific education meant to move away children from vice, masturbation, and prostitution and instead teach them about sex from a reproductive perspective. Domingo Gradizio “La educación sexual,” *La obra*, no. 59, Aug. 20, 1923. In the 1930s feminist magazine *Vida Femenina* served as an arena where teachers, doctors, and parents expressed their ideas about sex education. Pedro Franco, “Perfiles educativos del problema sexual. Coloquio para padres inocentes” *Vida femenina*, no. 18, Jan. 15, 1935; “En las jornadas pedagógicas. La Dra. Telma Reca habla de la educación sexual,” *Vida femenina*, no. 31, Dec. 15, 1936; Martha J. Licyh, “Educación Sexual,” *Vida femenina*, no. 20, March 15, 1935. On the history of sex education in Argentina in the second half of the twenty century see: Santiago Zemaitis, “Historia de las pedagogías de la sexualidad en la Argentina contemporánea. (1960-1997). Discursos, agentes y experiencias en torno a la educación sexual,” Doctoral Dissertation, Universidad Nacional de la Plata, 2020.

⁷⁶⁵ Myriam Southwell, “Raquel Camaña: pedagogía social, moral y sensibilidad en el comienzo del siglo XX,” *Anuario SAHE* 16, no. 2 (2015): 109-124; and Myriam Southwell, “Ciencia y moral : Raquel Camaña y los desafíos abiertos para la nueva educación,” in C. Suasnábar de Campos, ed. *Educação no Brasil e na Argentina: Escritos de história intelectual* (Ponta Grossa: UEPG, 2013): 39-57.

⁷⁶⁶ Raquel Camaña “Bases prácticas para la educación sexual,” *Revista de Derecho, Historia y Letras*, vol 55, August 1918.

⁷⁶⁷ I found definitions of the *escuela hogar* in her articles published in *Revista de Derecho, Historia y Letras*, as well as in “Educación Integral,” “Profilaxis social” and “Servicio femenino obligatorio,” *La escuela popular*, no. 6, April 4, 1913.

classes, unifying the educational orientation.”⁷⁶⁸ Thus, the “escuela-hogar” had similarities with the Modern Schools promoted by the *Liga Racionalista*.⁷⁶⁹ But Camaña’s utopian vision of the school-home integrated kindergarten to the university, encompassing a network of institutions composed of university students, doctors, teachers, and parents collaborating towards children’s health and education. Medicine students would teach puericulture for teachers and parents, law students would teach about the history of family, paternal responsibility, divorce, and the legal rights of women, and engineering students would plan hygienic school buildings.

Along with other school reformers, Camaña fought against what she called “religious prejudice.” The school-home had a secular and humanistic pedagogy that opposed what Camaña called a “pseudo-religious” education of the school. Camaña asserted that religion deformed reality, told people there was a life beyond life, and blinded people with illusions.⁷⁷⁰ In opposition to religious education, Camaña repeated that the school needed to teach a “human religiosity,” centered on life and had to avoid teaching “the fossilization of social, sexual, and religious prejudices.”⁷⁷¹ At the center of religious prejudice was the concept of sin, defined by Camaña as an “absurd denomination of shameful organs and functions; that Christian reaction (...) that led to harmful exaggerations, and nurtured the fatal error of believing that

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁹ Historians of anarchism have identified the concept of “integral education” with French anarchist Paul Robin, in charge of the orphanage Cempius. See: Suriano, *Anarquistas, cultura y política libertaria* and Barrancos, *Anarquismo, educación y costumbres*. Camaña refers to Robin in “Educación integral,” in *Pedagogía Social*.

⁷⁷⁰ Raquel Camaña, “La guerra,” *Revista de derecho, historia y letras*, Año XVII - Tomo XLIX - October 1914.

⁷⁷¹ Camaña “Eugenismo y profilaxis social,” 33.

modesty consists in ignorance.”⁷⁷² For Camaña, in order to teach children with the scientific truth, without lying, secular education had to avoid the shame that religious culture promoted.⁷⁷³

As for rationalist teachers in Argentina and abroad, doctors were crucial allies in implementing the new school. In a context when medicine promised to be the answer to social problems, Camaña defended the scientific knowledge that she encountered in international congresses. Doctors had legitimate knowledge about the human body while working-class children attending public schools were conceived as the recipients of an education that would allow a “conscious” and “erudite” procreation. From her positionality as a white, professional, and middle-class woman, Camaña’s views on popular actors put them in a disadvantaged position vis-a-vis the literate educators and doctors. Yet, her advocacy of sex education was motivated by concerns about the economic conditions and health of poor women.

An example of the alliance between teachers and doctors prompted by eugenic thought was Uruguayan doctor Paulina Luisi. Originally trained as a teacher, Luisi was the first woman to graduate from the school of Medicine in Uruguay in 1908. She led the foundation of the Consejo Nacional de Mujeres in 1916 and co-founded the Socialist Party in her country. Her advocacy for women’s rights, including suffrage, made Luisi a prominent representative in the transnational networks of the feminist

⁷⁷² Raquel Camaña “Educación sexual de nuestros hijos” in *Pedagogía Social*. Camaña understood that in the regions where Catholicism was more prominent, the religious prejudices against co-education of the sexes were harder to overcome, while in the U.S. the principle of co-education had obtained the better benefits, Raquel Camaña, “Co-educacion” in *Pedagogía Social*.

⁷⁷³ Paulina Luisi also blamed Catholicism for disseminating the idea that it was shameful to talk about organs and human functions. Luisi, *Enseñanza sexual*.

movement in the Americas.⁷⁷⁴ Like other women who studied medicine at her time, she specialized in gynecology and wrote about women's and children's health.⁷⁷⁵ As a doctor, Luisi observed women attending the hospital. She wrote:

“tainted forever, bearing in her womb a fruit conceived in deception and that will be gestated between despair and pain; or dragging with it the disorganizing germ of the species. Condemned, by those same philosophers and sociologists, who gave her no other weapon of defense than ignorance and instinct, to lead a life of shame and lies, she alone will suffer the penal sanction that society cruelly applies to the unhappy creature, whose crime has only been to obey that same instinct ...”⁷⁷⁶

Luisi's perspective combined a concern for women who were left alone by their male companions with the responsibility of raising a child and unfairly judged by society, with a medical and eugenic concern for the social aspect of reproduction. This reproduction based on ignorance and instinct and not knowledge and rationality carried a dangerous “disorganizing germ.”

In this context, sex education could instruct the importance of women's reproductive and social role in society as a mother and as a partner of men. A knowledge that would humanize women and position them in a central place in the view of women and men alike. Therefore, sex education aimed to improve the experience of motherhood since it would bring more respect to the future mother. Luisi asserted that sex education had the goal to “strengthen the education of the sexual feeling and the discipline of the will on the generative instinct, by demanding

⁷⁷⁴ Katherine Marino, *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

⁷⁷⁵ Fernanda Sosa and Santiago Zemaitis, “Educación sexual, eugenesia y moral en el pensamiento de Paulina Luisi: La experiencia de la cátedra de Higiene Social (Uruguay, 1926-1930),” *Mora*, no. 27 (2021): 7-25.

⁷⁷⁶ Luisi, *Enseñanza sexual*, 12.

responsibility towards the race.”⁷⁷⁷ In an article published in *Archivos de Criminología*, Camaña asserted that once the state defined as mandatory sex education “motherhood would stop being an accident, a surprise, a risk for women’s life.”⁷⁷⁸ Crucial to the success of the sex education was co-education. In her conceptualization, sex education would be “public and collective” in order to be effective. The difference among sexes would bring harmony and balance in the students’ character. From the “mutual and familiar behavior” of a shared classroom, “comradeship, esteem, and friendship” would arise. Camaña’s vision of a school as an utopian harmonic society was one where women were respected for their role in society, and where in companionship and mutual cooperation both men and women collaborated in learning and healing from the social diseases.

It was during her presentation at the First Congress of the Child that Camaña outlined the practical foundations for educational reforms she envisioned. Her program for an integral education included, first, physical education based on the education of the body through gymnastics, and the teaching of physiology, home economics, chemistry, and economy. Second, she advocated an intellectual education that included sex education in the study of natural sciences and the teaching of history from a humanistic perspective where children learned about the genesis and evolution of the arts, industry, and the family. Within this education, artistic education would be the basis of a patriotic and moral education. Regarding moral education, Camaña

⁷⁷⁷ After Camaña’s death, Paulina Luisi recognized in Camaña a pioneer in the promotion of sex education and her leadership as Secretary in the First Congress of the Child. Paulina Luisi, *Enseñanza Sexual* (Montevideo: El siglo ilustrado, 1916).

⁷⁷⁸ Raquel Camaña, “La educación sexual de nuestros hijos,” *Revista de criminología y ciencias afines*, 1910, 399.

expected that children would “assimilate the notions of balance, effort, development, justice, reciprocity, law, and evolution.”

While the advocacy for co-education was widely supported among school reformers, the incorporation of sex education in the schools was a controversial topic. Although backed by the eugenic discourses gaining traction in international congresses, sex education generated mixed reactions among school reformers.⁷⁷⁹ It was one thing to propose that students observe the environment and learn about the reproduction of plants; it was another to make children learn about human reproduction and to teach young women how to take care of their own bodies against, for example, venereal diseases. A debate in *La escuela popular* reflected some of the negative reactions around sex education. Mercedes Gauna reacted negatively to Camaña’s presentation at the congress.⁷⁸⁰ She affirmed that co-education was truly noxious because it was anti-hygienic and anti-pedagogical. It was anti-hygienic because it “stimulated in the children's premature appetites, that in another way, would remain dormant for many years, becoming a source of vice.”⁷⁸¹ It was anti-pedagogical because it could awaken in children “unhealthy practices.” Gauna believed it was not the role of teachers but of parents to educate their children in these

⁷⁷⁹ In her defense of sex education Paulina Luisi pointed to the multiple congresses in which sex education was debated and defended as a legitimate scientific knowledge. Among them were the First International Congress of Education and Preservation of Family held in Leija in 1905, the Third Congress of the German Society against sexual diseases organized in Manheim in 1907, the Second International Congress of Primary Education; the First Congress of Eugenic in Lindas (1912), the Feminist Congress of Paris in 1912, the Fourth Congreso of School Higiene held in Buffalo, and the multiple congresses of abolitionist organizations. Paulina Luisi *Enseñanza sexual* (Montevideo: El siglo ilustrado, 1916).

⁷⁸⁰ *La escuela popular* was receptive to Camaña’s ideas. They recommended her pamphlet *Educacion Sexual* (Sex Education) and published an article authored by her. Raquel Camaña, “Servicio femenino obligatorio.”

⁷⁸¹ Mercedes Gauna, “Moral y educación sexual,” *La escuela popular*, no. 13, Nov. 15, 1913.

matters. However, Gauna was not completely opposed to the teaching of sex education but pondered when best to teach this knowledge to the students. She considered that sex education was to be taught only for students during puberty.⁷⁸² Gauna's response to the teaching of sex education in schools reflect critical points of debate that would continue in the following decades among educators and doctors; when and who would teach sex education to the students.

In other Latin American countries, the teaching of sex education was causing debates in congresses and magazines. *La educacion popular* echoed conversations happening in Mexico by publishing an article by Mexican doctor Lavallo Carabajal, member of the Society of Medical School Inspectors.⁷⁸³ According to Carabajal, while in the III Congress of School Higiene celebrated in Paris in 1910 reformers debated sex education, they did not specify when to teach this subject. It was important, in his view, to differentiate periods within childhood; from children who did not think of the sex to those who had an active sexual life. Lavallo Carabajal agreed with other eugenicists like Camaña that it was important to teach young people the biological importance of sex but he warned not to awaken in children an impulse that was not appropriate for their age. The doctor warned educators "any allusion to sexual physiology is easy for it to go beyond the limits of pure science or that the child's fantasy, already with germs of perversion, make it arrive home

⁷⁸² The article generated controversy and confusion since she equated co-education of the sexes with the co-education of sex education. In order to clarify their position, the magazine asserted in the following issue: "We are in favor of the co-education of the sexes, as we have publicly stated on occasion, but not of sexual co-education, that is, providing knowledge related to sexuality to boys and girls jointly, up to the age of ten." "Aclaración de una nota," *La escuela popular*, no. 14, Dec. 20, 1914.

⁷⁸³ Lavallo Carabajal, "La educación sexual [sic] precoz," *La escuela popular*, no. 14, Dec. 20, 1914.

disfigured, simplified, excessively ‘naturalized.’”⁷⁸⁴ One suggestion that might solve the problem of how to talk with children about sex was to teach them about reproduction among plants for children to see that “the male fertilizing powder transforms the female ovary into fruit, and that the ovule thus fertilized will be the multiplying seed.”⁷⁸⁵ Avoiding the literal language on human sexuality would therefore provide an answer to the fear of putting children in contact with premature ideas that did not correspond with their natural development. The debates around sex education demonstrates that children’s nature was not a given category but a contested one. While reformers asserted the need to respect and favor children’s natural development, not all agreed on what would be the most appropriate education for children.

More than any other subject in the school, sex education put into question the relationship between the school and the local community. Another topic of the debate around sex education was who would be in charge of teaching it, the parents or the teachers. Lavallo Carabajal doubted that doctors were prepared to teach sex education. Instead Camaña considered teachers and students of medicine could teach sex education to children and parents. Paulina Luisi saw the lack of preparation of teachers as a minor obstacle, but not something that delegitimized the need for sex education in the school. Once the school incorporated sex education in the curricula,

⁷⁸⁴ Lavallo Carabajal, “La educación sexual precoz. Breves comentarios,” *La escuela popular*, no. 15, Jan. 15, 1914.

⁷⁸⁵ Carabajal, “La educación sexual precoz.”

she was convinced, teachers would learn how to teach it as they did with other subjects.⁷⁸⁶

Camaña and many others' desires to introduce sex education in the school remained impossible to realize. Not only did the topic lack consensus among teachers, doctors, and parents, any mention of reproduction produced strong reactions by the national authorities. In 1909, reproduction was excluded from the programs of anatomy, physiology, and hygiene by the Ministry of Public Instruction, Romulo Naón.⁷⁸⁷ In 1912, the teaching of human reproduction gained national attention in the media and generated the expulsion of the inspector Samuel de Madrid. Apparently, the inspector had suggested incorporating the theme of reproduction in the class of Natural History when visiting the Escuela Normal de Lenguas Vivas in the City of Buenos Aires. The professor and interim principal of the school asserted that he insisted on covering human reproduction through the teaching of plant reproduction. But other testimonies asserted that the inspector evaluated students' knowledge by asking questions about "internal secretion glands." De Madrid was interviewed in *La Razon* and published a series of essays based on the unfair decision of the CNE to expel him from his position. Different newspapers included *La Nacion*, and *La Libertad* complained about the ignorance promoted among women regarding their own bodies and their "mission on the earth." Mocking the Minister of Instruction, Manuel Garro, who approved the expulsion of de Madrid, *La Libertad* asserted that for the religious authorities "all Nature was a huge brothel and natural science was an

⁷⁸⁶ Luisi, *Enseñanza sexual*.

⁷⁸⁷ Zemaitis, "Educación sexual, eugenesia y moral."

extensive course of pornography.” This episode illuminated to what extent the school-home that Camaña envisioned was far from being a reality in a country where the mere mention of bodily parts in a normal school for women caused a national controversy.

In 1924, school inspector Julio Barcos suffered similar persecution from the CNE for his advocacy of sex education and more broadly, women’s freedom in his book *La libertad sexual de las mujeres* (The Sexual Freedom of Women). In the book, Barcos denounced women’s oppression and criticized anarchists and other activists who daily talked about workers’ unfair situations but refused to resign to their privileges as men. He wrote: “There is a heavier cross than the economic slavery of wage earners, and it is the slavery of women, an outcast among the outcasts, a worker without salary and without relief, who day and night is at the service of her master, whether they are called husband, father, brother, guardian, or lover.”⁷⁸⁸ *La libertad sexual de las mujeres* covered topics including women’s rights, prudishness, the representation of women in literature, and of course, the importance of sex education. Like his eugenicist colleagues, Barcos was concerned with the venereal diseases that besieged adolescents in the city of Buenos Aires and believed that sex education could provide a solution.⁷⁸⁹ Similar to Camaña, Barcos framed sex education as a “practical course for life.” According to him, parents were responsible

⁷⁸⁸ Julio Barcos, *Libertad sexual de las mujeres* (n.p: n.d) 13.

⁷⁸⁹ Barcos asserted that 200,000 adolescents visited the brothel per week and quoted a study that assured that only 5% of young people escaped venereal diseases. Barcos, *Libertad sexual de las mujeres*.

for this type of education although the school could teach it through trained professionals.

Regardless of being closer to the Radical Party and more distant from anarchism, his ideas were still framed as dangerous because of the “immoral ideas” disseminated among teachers. Barcos was denounced primarily because he distributed two of his books, *La libertad sexual de las mujeres* and *La doble amenaza* (The Double Threat). The complainant, a school principal, blamed Barcos because he left his books in the school library and because he used his visit to the school not to observe teachers’ performance and instead met with teachers in celebrations, parties, and walks to the park. The interrogation of different community members and teachers illustrated the fear of CNE authorities around the topic of sexuality. Repeatedly, the inspector asked if children or teachers had access to the books. Everyone declared that children did not read the book and some teachers asserted that the reading was appropriate and necessary for teachers. The inspector concluded that even though it was the school principal who ordered to leave the books in the school, Barcos’ ideas clearly threatened the integrity of the family and the nation.

In his response to the investigation, Barcos defended his freedom of expressing his ideas and a vision of the school that, far from generating new conflicts, was able to pacify the society. There was no mention of the specifics of the accusation. Barcos did not mention his book, nor did he explain if he interacted with teachers in events. As a public figure and a published writer, the tone of the response differed from any other document written by teachers and principals who were under

the investigation of the CNE. He asserted that his political ideas were public and that the school authorities had no right to censor him. He wrote:

I find it simply amazing that at this stage of civilization, an investigation is initiated due to ideas, in the land of Alberdi and Sarmiento; of Alberdi who stamped in the Constitution ‘that all the country's inhabitants have the right to publicly express their beliefs without prior censorship;’ and in the land of Sarmiento, for whom, ‘the worst misfortune suffered by our Hispanic American peoples is that of lacking ideologues.’⁷⁹⁰

He argued that disagreement was not a reason to punish him. Barcos asserted that the Law 1420 was a conquest of tolerance and respect for all beliefs and that the school could not be subordinated to the class interests of the government since it was meant to serve the entire nation. Deploying his skills as a writer, Barcos used his defense as an opportunity to reflect his vision of a school open to the community, where ideas freely circulated and were debated, where ideas of patriotism did not mean the adulation of symbols like the anthem and the flag but a profound love for the people that lived in the American continent. Beyond his personal situation he talked in general terms about the role of the school: “If in the midst of this universal chaos of hatred that has transformed man into the fiercest of man's enemies, the School is not capable of being the great reconciler of the human race, since the only light that makes us react nobly is the tenderness that we all feel for children, it would be preferable to close all the schools.”⁷⁹¹ The CNE did not punish Barcos for the distribution of his books but decided to severely punish the principal for keeping the books in the school, where innocent children could read Barcos’ dangerous ideas.

⁷⁹⁰ Archivo Intermedio, Colección Consejo Nacional de Educación, Box 7, Expte 8021, 1924.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid.

The persecution against Barcos demonstrated that speaking up, proposing reforms, and participating in schools alternative to the state, did not come without costs for school reformers. The CNE monitored those who dared to challenge the limits of what was accepted within the school. Even when they were not expelled, they still were subject to procedures that put their legitimacy as teachers in jeopardy. The inclusion of sex education in the school, as a form of a structural reform as Camaña envisioned, or in the more subtle presence of a book in the school library, would take decades to be a reality in Argentine schools. But eugenic ideas circulating transnationally in congresses and magazines influenced school reformers to challenge state-sponsored education and to envision social change.

Conclusions

This chapter investigated how teachers reacted to the teaching practices imposed by *normalismo*. It introduced the school as a laboratory of pedagogical experimentation that allowed teachers to innovate teaching methods and to imagine possible futures. The first anarchist schools developed in alliance with unions at the end of the nineteenth century proved fruitful laboratories for radical teachers to engage with practices of self-management and to establish a network of collaboration with the local community. Inspired by the model of the Modern School of Barcelona, many Modern Schools were founded in Buenos Aires and Rosario. In 1909, with the execution of Francisco Ferrer, a coalition of teachers, physicians, socialist and anarchist leaders revamped the project of the Modern School of Buenos Aires through the publication of magazines. These magazines, the 1913 Congress of the Child, and the 1910 First Feminine International Congress participated in the network of the

school laboratory as an arena where teachers debated the tensions of state-sponsored education and the possible solutions to the social and pedagogical problems.

This chapter maps the multiple tactics that teachers developed to collectively challenge state-sponsored education. Using the writing skills required for their profession, teachers published in education-focused magazines like *Francisco Ferrer* and *La escuela popular*, as well as in other anarchist and socialist publications. Drawing on connections made throughout decades of anarchist and socialist organizing, teachers delivered talks in union halls to explain rationalist education to working class parents. Joining a transnational circulation of ideas, women organized the First Femenine International Congress in Buenos Aires led by teachers, principals and doctors. These instances of collective organizing that concluded with the foundation of the Argentine chapter of the Rationalist League for Children's Education in 1912, served as a platform for local teachers to raise their voice and advocate for transformations in the school curricula and the teaching methods.

Overall, teachers reformers criticized state-sponsored education for being authoritarian and routinary. Authoritarianism expressed in teachers' role in the classroom reciting the lessons and not allowing children to move and express themselves. Under the routinary rituals of *normalismo* children had to memorize concepts and obey teacher's orders. As a result, the school was portrayed almost like a factory that Marta Samatán associated with the symbol of the bell and the schedule. In defining rationalist education in their own words, teachers condemned the school curricula —such as the time assigned to physical education or the characteristics of a

patriotic education—, the teaching methods —memorization, repetition, orality—, and the school building that constrained children’s movements in the classroom.

The Modern School that teachers proposed drew on a set of discourses and practices inspired by eugenic thought. School reformers drew on pedagogical models imported from Europe and the U.S. but they also actively engaged in processes of translations and adaptations in their local contexts. In Argentina, the Modern School with capital letters as Barcos and other members of the *Liga Racionalista* imagined and the school-home that Camaña envisioned in her conferences did not occur. But outside state-sponsored education, the school laboratory was a fruitful space for the circulation of ideas and the experimentation with new pedagogies. In the Modern School, nature would replace the authoritarian teacher and the dark classroom. Children would spontaneously learn scientific truths from observing animals and plants. Children would learn from working and playing more than from reciting empty words. Conceiving children as naturally good, the countryside and outdoors activities would free children from the inquisitorial view of the teacher. Running and moving became the new norm in schools whose goals was to cure ill children, prevent diseases, and eventually regenerate the race. From their perspective, reformers looked for a more democratic classroom where children could exercise critical thinking, be in contact with knowledge about their own bodies and the natural world, and enjoy more freedom of movement. Reformers also advocated for a transformation in the school curricula that recognized women’s role in society as nurturers and mothers, and that provided knowledge about their reproduction and how to take care of their bodies, and defenders of a secular education and a co-education that they saw incomplete in

the educational system. Yet, aligned with doctors, the pedagogical practices of school reformers still subjected children to strict routines and medical examinations that constrained their movement and behavior in the school. Eugenic thought also inspired another type of utopian school, the “school-home” promoted by Raquel Camaña where parents and children would access scientific knowledge, especially the one regarding their own bodies and reproductive system. The next chapter will delve into how these reforms intersected with the feminist discourses and prompted a feminist pedagogy characterized by love and a new bond between teachers and students.

Chapter 5: A Laboratory for Women's Emancipation: Feminism and School Reforms in Buenos Aires (1900s-1920s)

Introduction

The previous chapter investigated the school laboratories from the perspective of anarchist and socialist teachers who drew on ideas circulating transnationally to criticize state sponsored education and challenge core aspects of *normalismo*, including the teacher's authoritarian role. This chapter centers women as pedagogical innovators and producers of knowledge about childhood. By the turn of the century, women presented their proposals of school reform in national and international conferences, published in magazines and journals, and practiced new methods of teaching in their classrooms. Trained in normal schools with the expectation of continuing their professional development through the reading and studying of magazines and journals, women joined educational debates, theorizing about childhood and education from their pedagogical experience.

This chapter investigates the links between *normalismo* and the emergence of feminism by asking how teachers contributed to the development of women's movements and how they translated women's demands into innovative pedagogical practices. I demonstrate that the foundation of normal schools was instrumental to the expansion of a feminist movement that connected women in the Americas. As we saw in the previous chapter, pedagogical experiments were born out of transnational circulation of pedagogical ideas. This chapter centers women as transnational actors

and carriers of an experiential knowledge that prompted new discussions on childhood and the role of women in society. Women who occupied leadership positions in the educational system as principals and school inspectors led the pedagogical transformations that in the 1920s would receive the name of the new school movement.

I suggest that women drew on a maternal discourse to challenge the authoritarian practices of *normalismo*. Discourses of bodily autonomy and rights permeated the classrooms and transformed teaching practices. Within public education, teachers sought to affect children's lives in the school by creating new assignments that made room for children's autonomy and freedom of movement and built a maternal bond between the teacher and the students. Through publishing and public speaking, classroom experiments expanded beyond the classroom, making possible the production of new pedagogical knowledge centered around children. While these practices of knowledge production were common among many teachers such as the rationalist teachers, women working in public schools were able to actually carry teaching methods that centered children's creativity and expression. Teachers disseminated classroom observations through articles published in journals of education, manuals to train teachers, and photographs that portrayed children learning outside the rigidity of the normalist discipline.

Female teachers as writers and pedagogical innovators have gained attention from historians over the last decade. Recent studies investigated the individual journey of socialist and communist teachers from a perspective that illuminates their

intellectual contributions.⁷⁹² My research joins this historiography drawing on a transnational approach that highlights the connections among women in the Americas.⁷⁹³ While, on the one hand, feminist discourses at the beginning of the twentieth century were deeply immersed in pedagogical debates, transformations in the school tended to be interpreted as disconnected from the impact of feminist organizing. On the other hand, studies focused on anarchist, feminist, and socialist education tend to circumscribe the impact of radical pedagogical practices outside state sponsored education. This disconnect between the history of education and the history of the left contributed to dissociate practices that were connected from the perspectives of teachers imagining and enacting pedagogical transformations. Thus, despite teachers being leaders of feminist movements, feminist praxis remains disconnected from the reforms happening in the school. Ultimately, connecting the discourses about women's education circulating in transnational arenas with the concrete practices developed by school reformers, illuminates how women's emancipation was deeply connected with ideas of children's rights.

The first section shows how *normalismo* functioned as point of entrance to feminist discourses that promoted women's education. As a space for women's

⁷⁹² Queirolo, Graciela, "Herminia Catalina Brumana. La maternidad social a través del magisterio y de la escritura", in Adriana María Valobra, ed., *Mujeres en espacios bonaerenses* (La Plata: EDULP, 2009); Marina Becerra, "Soy comunista y maestra: resistencias a la maternalización de las mujeres a través de la obra de Angélica Mendoza en la Argentina de los años 20' y 30," *Izquierdas* 49 (Abril 2020): 385-411; Myriam Southwell, "Ciencia y moral: Raquel Camaña y los desafíos abiertos para la nueva educación" in C. Suasnabar, N. de Campos, ed., *Educação no Brasil e na Argentina: Escritos de história intelectual* (Ponta Grossa: UEPG, 2013), 39-57; and Myriam Southwell "Raquel Camaña: pedagogía social, moral y sensibilidad en el comienzo del siglo XX," *Anuario SAHE* 16, no. 2 (2015): 109-124.

⁷⁹³ Katherine Marino *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019). Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

socialization, normal schools allowed women to enter into contact with contemporary theories, to write, travel, and advocate for women's leadership positions within the National Council of Education (CNE). Through the journey of U.S. teacher Jennie Howard, I identify that female leadership was a central aspect of the history of *normalismo*. Howard dedicated her life to training teachers and in 1908 proudly recognized that her labor led Argentine women's emancipation. The U.S-Argentine connections highlight the unequal relationships of power between North and South that, on one hand, enhanced women's education and, on the other, reproduced racial hierarchies. The traveling of Argentine teachers also contributed to the circulation of ideas regarding women's new role in society. Ernestina López's trip to the U.S. in 1905 to study the educational system illustrates that the U.S. continued to be a model for pedagogical modernization and women's empowerment. The modern education that López observed in the U.S., was led by women in charge of leadership positions in the school system and by innovative teachers who prioritized children's needs. The same demands resonated in the 1910 *Primer Congreso Femenino* organized in Buenos Aires, where women advocated for an integral and practical education that would emancipate women's bodies and contribute to the national economy as workers and mothers.

The second and third section zoom in on concrete reforms proposed and carried out in the first two decades of the twentieth century through two case studies. The second section studies López's classroom experiments at the Escuela Modelo Sarmiento, which implemented the study of nature and manual labor. In her school, children experienced learning through observing nature, collecting objects, and

collaborating in assignments centered on doing and playing. I argue that while López's pedagogy reflects some of the demands of the women's movement including a scientific and practical education, the training of children to work reproduced some aspects of *normalismo*. In other words, the teaching methods were different but the idea that the school had to prepare obedient workers was not radically challenged. Yet, López pioneered a maternal pedagogy that aimed to provide a more pleasant experience for children and that humanized the relationship between teachers and children. The third section explores the continuities of women's experiments through the work of Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano in the new school movement during the 1920s. As much as López, Guillén de Rezzano used the classroom to translate the pedagogical theory developed by school reformers abroad into concrete classroom assignments.

"Girls Woke to Intellectual Life and Vigor:" The Transnational Networks of Women's Organizing

In June 1908, U.S. teacher Jennie Howard published an article in the *Journal of Education* explaining the educational labor of U.S. educators in South America. The normal schools in Argentina, Howard wrote, "opened up a new horizon to the average Argentine woman, especially in the provinces outside Buenos Ayres."⁷⁹⁴ Howard proudly claimed that teaching had provided local women with "freedom of

⁷⁹⁴ Jennie Howard, "American Teachers in the Argentine by one of them," *The Journal of Education* 67, no. 23 (June 4, 1908), pp. 626-628.

arranging their own lives apart from marriage.”⁷⁹⁵ At the normal school, she affirmed, “girls woke to intellectual life and vigor.”⁷⁹⁶ In Howard’s account, some teachers, “experiencing a thirst for higher knowledge and other fields of usefulness, have prepared themselves in a university course as physicians and lawyers.”⁷⁹⁷ Others worked as typewriters, bookkeepers, and telegraphers. Women were able to be self-sufficient and support their families. For many women, the normal school provided new working or learning opportunities.⁷⁹⁸ Teaching also gave women experiences that they used to participate in debates on education. The feminization of teaching promoted by a national government that founded schools especially for women, contributed to the creation of a generation of women who slowly started speaking up in congresses, publishing in journals, and even rebelling against the patriarchal norms of *normalismo*, and the society as a whole.⁷⁹⁹

Howard’s own experience at the normal school in the U.S. must have informed her vision of education as an opportunity for women’s autonomy. U.S. normal students enjoyed the intellectual life of literary circles, attended conferences on pedagogy, and participated in debates regarding educational bills, women’s rights, and pedagogical

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., 627.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁸ According to Howard, alumni from the Normal School of San Nicolás continued their studies at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and La Plata where they graduated with the title of lawyer and physicians. Jennie Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Raigal, 1951), 78.

⁷⁹⁹ In the 1895 national census, women represented more than 70% in primary schools, more than 80% in Buenos Aires, and more than 90% in Santiago del Estero. There were other provinces such as Mendoza, La Rioja, and Catamarca when male teachers reached 40%. Dora Barrancos, “Maestras, librepensadoras y feministas en la Argentina (1900-1912)” en *Historia de los intelectuales en América Latina I: La ciudad letrada, de la conquista al modernismo*, Carlos Altamirano and Jorge Myers, ed., (Buenos Aires: Katz editores, 2008).

methods.⁸⁰⁰ As part of these circles, many normal students advocated for women's individual rights. In 1898, Lucille Potter a normal school student of San José, California, gave a speech in favor of women's equal rights: "She does not ask privileges or consideration above that accorded to her brother, but she demands recognition that shall give her equal opportunities for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (...) We are treading a path."⁸⁰¹ Accessing a job and a salary, normal training provided women with the possibility of not marrying which represented an important opportunity in their search for autonomy.⁸⁰² Educated in this context, Howard had reasons to believe that one of the benefits of normal education was to provide women with other options beyond marriage.

Instrumental to the foundation of normal schools, U.S. teachers like Howard contributed to women's education in Argentina. In order to train Argentine girls in the science of teaching, Jennie Howard traveled to Argentina in May 1883.⁸⁰³ Howard fulfilled Sarmiento's requirements who in a letter to Horace Mann written in 1870, shared his expectations: "The girls must be normal-trained, with considerable teaching experience. They must have irreproachable morals and manners. They must come from good families. They must be young and good-looking, if possible."⁸⁰⁴ Originally from

⁸⁰⁰ Christine A. Ogren "A Large Measure Of Self-Control and Personal Power: Women Students at State Normal Schools During the Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Fall-Winter, 2000, Vol. 28, No. 3/4, pp. 211-232.

⁸⁰¹ Ogren, 222.

⁸⁰² U.S. teachers' marriage rate ranged between 40 and 65 percent in comparison with the rest of the women in the country that reached 90 percent. Ibid.

⁸⁰³ The first group of teachers were known as the "Winona group" being the majority alumni from the Winona Normal School. Jennie Howard belonged to the second group that traveled with Clara Armstrong who went to the U.S. to recruit more teachers. Laura Ramos, *Las señoritas. Historia de las maestras estadounidenses que Sarmiento trajo a la Argentina en el siglo xix.* (Buenos Aires: Lumen, 2021).

⁸⁰⁴ Mónica Szurmuk, *Women in Argentina: Early Travel Narratives* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

Boston, Howard's mother was a writer and her father a descendant of an English noble family. Once her mother died and her father lost his fortune, she had to work for a living. Howard was an alumni from the Normal School of Framingham in 1869, today Framingham State University, the first normal school founded by Horace Mann in the U.S.⁸⁰⁵ After graduating, she worked as a school teacher and principal in Worcester, Massachusetts.⁸⁰⁶ In Argentina, she was assigned by the national government to work in Corrientes and Córdoba, and Buenos Aires. In 1888, Howard requested to move to Buenos Aires and was assigned to the Normal School of San Nicolás, where she stayed for sixteen years teaching pedagogical critique, arithmetic, and methodology.

Howard's experience teaching in Argentina gave her the opportunity to publish her own book and write for journals on education. In 1931, Howard published her book *In Distant Climes and Other Years*, where she portrays her own journey as a missionary of education in the distant lands of South America.⁸⁰⁷ Although she praised the labor of

⁸⁰⁵ In order to enter the school Howard must have submitted a certificate of good physical, intellectual, and moral education and pass an examination on reading, spelling, writing, defining, grammar, geography, and arithmetic. The tuition was free if students worked for the state of Massachusetts after graduating. The course work, which lasted two years for primary school teachers and four years for high school teachers, covered training in writing, reading, and social and natural sciences as well as the theory and practice of teaching in a primary school during the last year of training. As detailed by Howard's principal, students at the normal school learned reading with attention to "sound and vocal gymnastics," writing, spelling, punctuation, grammar, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, physical and political geography, map-drawing, physiology, botany, zoology, geology, chemistry, natural philosophy, astronomy, mental and moral philosophy, school laws, civil polity of Massachusetts, English literature, vocal music, drawing, and exercises in composition, gymnastics, and object-lessons. *Catalogue and Circular of the State Normal School, Framingham, Massachusetts* (Boston: Press of Rand, Avery & Co, 1872).

⁸⁰⁶ Juan Gauna, "Jennie Howard. La mujer" in Jennie Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes*. Professor Gauna, a former student of Howard, originally published this article in a local newspaper of San Nicolás, Buenos Aires in 1904.

⁸⁰⁷ Jennie E. Howard wrote *In Distant Climes and Other Years* in 1931. The Spanish version that I used for this research was first published in 1951 under the title *En otros años y climas distantes*. The book starts with the life of Sarmiento, portrayed as the Horace Mann of Argentina, and continues with the U.S. teacher's journeys founding and organizing normal schools in Argentina. Almost as a recognition of the work of her and her colleagues, the last chapter enumerated the list of U.S educators

Sarmiento and Mann, Howard's goal was to highlight the role of U.S. teachers in the history of education in Argentina. She hoped that when passing next to the statue of Sarmiento in Boston, readers "dedicate a memory to the group of self-sacrificing North American women who answered his call, followed his direction in their own distant land, and assisted him in realizing his enthusiasm."⁸⁰⁸

The transnational pedagogical project that Sarmiento planned provided a unique opportunity for U.S. women to exercise their autonomy far away from their home country. As Howard explained:

"Some of these young women accepted the offer induced by a spirit of adventure or for the desire of changing scene and environment; others felt attracted by the perspective of having a better job, in less cultivated lands, where the results could be recognized more rapidly; while others did it animated by an elevated ideal to broaden horizons, in an impulse for helping the less favored in educational advancement."⁸⁰⁹

Despite the different reasons that animated the trip, U.S. teachers joined Sarmiento's educational project believing they would find a good opportunity to develop professionally, advance their role as educators, and fulfill their desires to travel and live abroad.⁸¹⁰ Howard and her colleagues traveled from New York to Liverpool. Then, they spent some days exploring London before leaving for Buenos Aires. Once in Argentina,

and the institutions in which they worked. For an analysis on Howard's book from the perspective of women's traveling and writing see: Szurmuk *Women in Argentina*.

⁸⁰⁸ Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes*, 34. It is possible to see Howard's statement about the statue of Sarmiento in Boston as a lack of recognition of their labor in the U.S. Yet, Howard's labor was recognized in Buenos Aires by her former students and the local community. In 1904, Howard received a medal that she kept in her personal archive available in Framingham State University. The medal reads: "Labor. There is no Republic without educated people. To miss Juana Howard, former Regent of the Normal School. From the people of San Nicolás 1888-1904." Jennie E Howard Papers 1841-1930, Folder 4, Framingham State University.

⁸⁰⁹ Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes*, 14.

⁸¹⁰ The language of changing the environment appeared in a 1869 letter that Mary Gorman, among the first teachers to arrive in Argentina, sent to Sarmiento. In her letter, Mary also mentioned the need to earn money and send it back to her brothers. Ramos, *Las Señoritas*.

U.S. teachers embodied the modern life of educated women, working independently and active in the social and intellectual life of the elites. Upon their arrival in Buenos Aires, the American educators were visited by the U.S. consul and were introduced to U.S. families living in Buenos Aires including Samuel Brown Hale, owner of banks and a farm house, the site of gatherings where U.S. teachers met influential local families.⁸¹¹ U.S. teachers traveled around the country, depending on the locations assigned by the national government. Even when the mobile character of their work represented a challenge since most of the time teachers responded to the national authorities' needs, it also provided a sense of freedom that many single local women did not have.⁸¹²

While the foundations of normal schools gave women across the Americas a venue for emancipation, the modernizing project expresses the unequal relationship between U.S. and Argentine women. Howard contextualized women's advancement within the framework of racial inferiority of Latin American peoples. She explained: "the school, where the influence of North American teachers was deep and lasting, created for the Argentine girl, new aims, ambitions, and ideals of life, the power of which could only be understood by those who have knowledge of the trammels, traditions, and customs of the Latin races."⁸¹³ Howard placed herself in a hierarchical position vis-a-vis local

⁸¹¹ Ramos, *Las Señoritas*. Howard recalls that local members of the community received U.S. teachers with gifts or "sent their servants with trays of fruits, flowers, and pies along with offering their services for anything they might need." Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes*, 40.

⁸¹² Not all U.S. teachers were single. Some of them traveled with their families. For example, Sara Eccleston moved to Argentina with her daughter and son, Emily and John Eccleston. George Stearns traveled with his brother and wife. According to Szurmuk, about a third of the teachers who moved to Argentina stayed in the country and continued teaching either in public or in private schools.

⁸¹³ Howard, "American Teachers in the Argentine by one of them." Howard's ideas that U.S. teachers contributed to the regeneration of Argentine people continue reverberating even after her death. An article published in 1951 summarized Howard's work and cited Howard's quote. A. F. Faust, "The Influence of the United States upon the Developing Argentine Normal School," *History of Education Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter, 1951), pp. 62-64.

women. Howard decried that “young women were kept in partial reclusion during their earliest maidenhood,”⁸¹⁴ they never seen in public alone, and their closely monitored specially with “friendships with the opposite sex.”⁸¹⁵ Contrasting the experience of U.S. and local women, she wrote:

It was difficult to imagine the difference between the free social life of a single girl in the United States of America and the subject life of another from the same state in Argentina. This, even after being married, was still under the constant surveillance of her husband, perhaps more rigid than that of her own parents.⁸¹⁶

Howard also criticized the rituals of courtship since the lovers could not see each other alone until the wedding night. In opposition to women’s reclusion and surveillance, Howard expressed that young men had too much freedom and acquired social vices from an early age.

The story of Jennie Howard illuminates a core aspect of normalismo as a state project that opened opportunities for women while reproducing racial hierarchies. In Howards’ narrative racial hierarchies appeared in commentaries of unhygienic living conditions, food, and work. Regarding the arrival in the port of Buenos Aires, Howard narrates being “surrounded by a motley crowd of peons gesticulating babbling in an unknown language as they fought each other with the ladies for possession of the carry-on baggage.” Later, state officials and English-speaking residents “freed the group from the screaming horde.”⁸¹⁷ Recalling her arrival to Buenos Aires, Howard wrote: “walking through the streets was exciting, if not exhilarating, as you must be careful not to fall

⁸¹⁴ Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes*, 55.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid, 17-18.

from the high and uneven sidewalks onto the road, paved in stretches with pebbles and generously strewn with animal remains and other debris.”⁸¹⁸ At the Hotel Nacional or ‘Nastier-than-all,’ as the U.S. teachers acerbically referred to it, they encountered “indescribable smells [that] emanated from everywhere.” Howard recalls: “there was a trap door near the entrance that communicated with the lower part where chickens, pigs, goats, etc. were kept, by which, when it was opened —and this happened frequently— an invasive atmosphere that penetrated the whole house.” Howard complained that teachers could not sleep during the night due to stray cats and local insects. As soon as they recovered from the impact of the cats, “fleas of a voracity and a size never mentioned by any naturalist occupied their attention for the rest of the night.”⁸¹⁹ At Paraná, Howard described the hotel room as: “a dark and smelly room, in which a naturalist would have found a rich field of study since there must scarcely have been any kind of insects that had not found their home there.”⁸²⁰ The streets and housing conditions of Argentina caused Howard the impression of arriving at a dirty, chaotic, and exotic place waiting to be discovered by naturalists and educated in modern hygienic habits.⁸²¹ Howard depicted the local people of Corrientes and their nutritional habits with the same contempt. She

⁸¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid., 18-19.

⁸²⁰ The comments about non-modern Argentina circulated in letters and postcards that Howard sent to their compatriots. For instance, in a postcard from Paraná that shows the Plaza 25 de Mayo, Howard referred again to the “dark ill smelling room.” Jennie E Howard Papers 1841-1930, Folder 15, Framingham State University.

⁸²¹ Howard’s understanding of South America refers to a long tradition of male naturalists studying the region. The travels of Charles Darwin to Argentina between 1831 and 1836 are analyzed by Héctor Palma, *Las huellas de Darwin en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2016). See also Patience Schell, *The Sociable Sciences: Darwin and His Contemporaries in Chile* (New York: Palgrave, 2013). For an analysis of the U.S. scholars and scientists who continued to visit Latin America throughout the twentieth century see: Ricardo Donato Salvatore, *Disciplinary Conquest: U.S. Scholars in South America, 1900-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

bemoaned the daily diet, composed of beef, bread with no butter, and oranges.⁸²² Howard explained: “This lack of vegetables was not due to the fact that the soil was not suitable to produce them but because the people who could cultivate it were too lazy to put the seed in the ground”⁸²³ Howard described the local population’s vices, considering smoking as “a national habit and, according to some male scientists, the cause for the height of the race.”⁸²⁴ She stated: “three fourths of the inhabitants reveal the influence of indigenous blood. The *guaraníes* of pure blood lived in Chaco and they constitute an emaciated race of miserable aspect.”⁸²⁵

Teachers’ racist discourses were accompanied with a genuine belief that education could regenerate the body. Through education U.S. teachers could transform a Latin American “emaciated” race into a strong one.⁸²⁶ Drawing on Herbert Spencer, U.S. teacher Mary Graham believed education was an act of “educating the good animal and childhood was a crucial moment to pay attention to nutrition since at this age a “poor diet determined incurable diseases.”⁸²⁷ Believing that children’s bodies could be molded, at normal schools U.S. teachers transmitted a knowledge considered valuable for students

⁸²² Rebecca Earle has shown how in colonial encounters between European and indigenous people in the Americas, the project of civilization was concerned with changing indigenous diets. Since the colonial period, food has been essential to mold bodies according to ideas of civilization to make sense of racial difference. Rebecca, Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race, and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁸²³ Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes*, 46.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸²⁶ Kyla Schuller shows that racial through the U.S. nineteenth century appearing in literary texts conceived the body as impressionable, and therefore subject to change. Kyla, Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling : Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

⁸²⁷ Raquel Camaña, “El prejuicio sexual y el profesorado en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras,” *Revista de Derecho, Letras e Historia*, vol. 37, Dec. 1910, 578.

to take care of their bodies. Camaña recalled the lessons from Mary O. Graham asserting that she did not miss an opportunity to explain:

“what kind of breakfast and lunch suited us best; when we should work and when to rest; how to take advantage of rainy days — in a country whose school year is interrupted by months of humidity, rain and cold — to show us how we should defend our feet, our hands and our clothes from the rain and the freezing wind, inculcating in us ideas of economy and of comfortable elegance.”⁸²⁸

Gymnastics was another way for U.S. teachers to incorporate knowledge and practices that would regenerate women’s bodies. In her memoir Howard wrote: “Argentines considered fat in women as a sign of beauty. Judging by this pattern, they were most delighted when, at twenty-five years old, they grew enormously as a result of their fondness for sweets and their aversion to any exercise.”⁸²⁹ The teaching of gymnastics, the walks in the park, and the informal lessons on nutrition aimed to counteract Argentine traditions and discourses around the body. These practices, as Howard saw it, had positive effects on women’s bodies who exhibited a “funniest silhouette and less loaded with superfluous meats.”⁸³⁰

Howard’s personal archive reflects the bodies that normal school students should aspire to obtain.⁸³¹ A healthy body was particularly important for women in order to fulfill gender expectations of beauty. Howard archived a series of portraits of what she called “A type of Argentine Beauty.” The pictures portray young white women wearing elegant dresses and jewelry, and accompanied with roses. The portraits were taken in a

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

⁸²⁹ Howard, *En otros años y climas distantes*, 55.

⁸³⁰ Ibid.

⁸³¹ Jennie E Howard Papers 1841-1930, Framingham State University.

studio, a practice of wealthy people.⁸³² These white wealthy women contrast with the poor women that appear in Howards' archive. In this case, women were portrayed in relation to labor and domestic tasks. "*La cuna en la campaña*" (The Cradle in the Campaign) shows a woman in the southern territories, looking at her baby. As the title implies, the main focus is not centered on women but on the baby and the mother's surveillance of her baby. Similarly, another postcard entitled "*Horno*" (Oven) shows an indigenous woman standing next to an outdoor clay oven. In the postcards, women are closer to nature, to the countryside, and the animals. These images had different goals, media of distribution, and uses but they lived together in Howard's archive as an example of the bodies that represented beauty and white civilization and those other bodies, from indigenous and poor women that education would regenerate.

⁸³² I found similar portraits taken by U.S. teachers at the Alice Houston Luiggi Papers. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book Collection & Manuscript Library, Duke University Libraries.



Image 3: A type of Argentine Beauty I
Source: Jennie Howard's Papers, Courtesy of Framingham State University



Image 4: A type of Argentine Beauty II
Source: Jennie Howard's Papers, Courtesy of Framingham State University



Image 5: A type of Argentine Beauty IV
Source: Jennie Howard's Papers, Courtesy of Framingham State University



Image 6: A type of Argentine Beauty III
Source: Jennie Howard's Papers, Courtesy of Framingham State University



Image 7: Postcard “La cuna en la campaña”
Source: Jennie Howard’s Papers, Courtesy of Framingham State University



Image 8: Horno
Source: Jennie Howard’s Papers, Courtesy of Framingham State University

When in 1908 Howard wrote the article on normal school training in Argentina, she had reasons to believe that women were “waking up.” The changes in women’s role was part of global transformations happening in the Americas but while Howard presented women’s emancipation as a product of U.S. influence, local factors prompted the emergence of a vibrant political movement. Among them was the fact that by the turn of the twentieth century, Argentine women started occupying new spaces in educational institutions and claiming to be protagonists in modern Argentina. Women who had access to normal and higher education became advocates for the expansion of women’s education.

Through a discourse that associated women’s liberation with access to education, normal teachers actively participated in the emergence of a feminist movement. Normal training had provided women with the tools to write and disseminate their voices in magazines and congresses. In 1902, teacher María Abella Ramírez and director of the magazine wrote “women are starting to rebel”⁸³³ Ramírez directed the magazine *Nosotras* with the goal of women’s liberation and the term feminism clearly stated in the magazine’s subtitle.⁸³⁴ A year prior, Elvira López wrote her dissertation about the feminist movement in the country and Latin America. Her work, studied the origins of feminism Europe and the U.S. and analyzed feminist ideas in the country. Not surprisingly, she dedicated two chapters to women’s education and professionalization. Contesting arguments against women’s education

⁸³³ The article is written by Silvana Fredes but Barrancos attributed it to María Abela Ramírez, signing under a pseudonym. Barrancos, “Maestras, librepensadoras y feministas en la Argentina (1900-1912).”

⁸³⁴ The complete name of the magazine was *Nosotras. Revista feminista, literaria y social*. (U.S. Feminist, literary, and Social Magazine).

she wrote: “There are those who think that educated women, with the greatest freedom that knowledge gives, will become vicious: this is false; the enlightened woman will have more means to resist what generally drags evil: misery.”⁸³⁵

Education was for López and for the many women who disseminated feminist ideas a way to stop being a “woman-doll” that decorated the husband’s home.⁸³⁶ While for poor women, the need of an education to access better job opportunities might have been more evident, for middle class women as well education meant to acquire a voice within and outside the home.

Feminism was a heterogenous movement. There were political differences among women who advocated for women’s emancipation. Asunción Lavrin distinguishes between a liberal feminism and a socialist feminism. The latter was more focused on women’s organization within the framework of the Socialist Party and pushed towards legislation that protected women and children. The former promoted the reform of the Civil Code that made women dependent on men, advocated for full political rights and equal pay for equal work. Not all Argentine

⁸³⁵ Elvira López, *El movimiento feminista. Primeros trazos del feminismo en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Nacional), 2019, 89.

⁸³⁶ The concept refers to women as superficial and beautiful and points out the objectification of women utilized as a decoration by men. López asked “And how does the man educate the woman? In a way that she is weak to resist him, although he later condemns her for it; building her character in an incomplete way, abandoning everything vain and futile, ends by turning her into a big girl, into a toy, into a lovely doll to accompany his pleasure, but unable to second him in the serious work of life. López, *El feminismo en Argentina*, 88. An article published in *La escuela popular* referred to the “woman doll” as women who complained about women's freedom, viewed with contempt at single women who go out without being surveilled and were “horrified by divorce, by the separation of the Church from the State and by other no less logical things, such as the moral elevation of women and their equal rights with men, their legal and civil equality at least, their political equality considered as a monstrosity.” “La mujer muñeca,” *La escuela popular*, no. 13, Nov. 15, 1913. Another article reads: “It will be impossible to lead humanity towards the conquest of social justice, if women must remain as toys, more or less caressed by men, unaware of their noble mission.” W. Heaford “La infancia y sus derechos,” *La escuela popular*, no. 1, Oct. 1, 1912.

women advocated for women's right to vote. Elvira López described the suffragists as radical feminists that "believed that as long as they don't have women participation in public power, as long as they cannot themselves send their representatives to the parliaments so that sustain realize their aspirations, they will not be able to obtain the reforms that they deem essential in order to improve their current condition."⁸³⁷

Elvira López considered that women "might be wrong and that might not be a path toward the desired solution."⁸³⁸ However, there were points of confluence among women regardless of their adherence to socialism. Especially when it came to advocating for women's equal access to education and the protection of motherhood. Lavrin identifies three pillars of feminist agendas throughout the Southern Cone including the defense for women's intellectual capacity, for the right to work in any occupation that they had the abilities for, and their right to participate in civic life and politics. It was precisely through their assertions of women's intellectual capacities and their right to work accordingly where teachers found a space for intervention since they embodied the evidence of women's intellectual advancement at the same time they faced male arguments regarding their incapacity to develop in certain tasks within the educational system. Feminism gave them the tools to claim their place in society as mothers and educators. In the same way not all feminists agreed on what female emancipation meant, not all teachers were avid participants of feminist movements. Yet, teachers were in close contact with the discourses that planted the seed of concepts such as emancipation, autonomy, and equality.

⁸³⁷ López, *El movimiento feminista*, 166

⁸³⁸ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

A major expression of Argentine women claiming a place in politics and production of knowledge was the *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional* (First International Femenine Congress, PCFI) held in May 1910.⁸³⁹ The congress was led by “Universitarias Argentinas,” a female organization of students and alumni from Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires. The date was not accidental since it coincided with the governmental celebrations around the centenary of independence. Normal teachers were part of this initiative. In the opening speech, Ernestina López, declared: “It has been said that each age has its men and why should we not also say that it has its women?”⁸⁴⁰ The congress represented an advancement in women’s collective organizing and a statement of women’s new role in Argentine society.

A normal teacher and principal from the Escuela Modelo Sarmiento for girls, Ernestina López gave the opening speech in the congress. She defined as feminists all who even without wanting to be identified as such “work to raise the material and moral level of their sex.”⁸⁴¹ The first goal of the congress was “to establish ties of union between all the women in the world.”⁸⁴² The second goal was “to link women of all social positions to a common thought: female education and instruction; the evolution of ideas that fortify physical nature, elevate their thinking and will, for the benefit of the family, for the betterment of society and perfection of the race.” Finally, the organizers aimed to “modify prejudices, trying to improve the social

⁸³⁹ The original organizing committee included Emilia Salza, Petrona Eyle, Julieta Lanteri, María Adela Zauchinger, María T. Martínez Bisso, Leonor Martínez Bisso, Adela Lagarde, Isabel Kaminsky, Irma Vertua, and Sara Justo. Through multiple meetings women planned the logistics, marketing, and organized the submissions into sections.

⁸⁴⁰ Ernestina López, “Sesión Inaugural,” in *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la República Argentina. Historia, actas y trabajos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ceppi, 1911)

⁸⁴¹ López, “Sesión Inaugural,” 29.

⁸⁴² *Ibid.*

situation of many women, exposing their thinking and their work to highlight the various phases of female activity, and uproot the causes and effects that determine their influence at home, their status as a worker, professional, etc. and solutions of a general and particular nature that tend to improve their situation.” The goals of the congress reflected a diagnosis of women’s problems in terms of labor and its invisibility both in the home and in the factories or professional spaces; a eugenic mission for women’s role: to elevate the family and the society by perfecting the race; and the media to achieve it through female instruction and education and via transnational collaborations, encounters, such as the congress that would create a common thought, a common agenda, and potentially proposals for legislation and reforms.⁸⁴³

The congress gave visibility to Argentine women and put them in contact with ideas circulating transnationally.⁸⁴⁴ Women from other Latin American countries participated in the congress, who had presentations in Spanish and Italian language. Chilean educators presented in the educational section. Socialist leader Alicia Moreau commented that the congress was among the best manifestations around the anniversary of independence where the “feminist question” was treated as a human and social question. Reflecting upon the legacies of the congress, Moreau affirmed: “If someone would ask what the practical result of this congress has been, we can

⁸⁴³ The transnational solidarity that the organizers aimed to promote can be seen in the support of international figures such as Marie Curie and Ellen Key, the participation of Chilean educators Maria Espindola de Muños (Principal of the Liceo de Señoritas de Chillán) and Elicenda Parga (Principal of the Escuela Profesional Superior de Santiago de Chile) as honorary presidents. There were a number of presentations delivered in Italian.

⁸⁴⁴ Organizers put energy in the international adhesion. As part of the executive commission, teacher Sara Justo collected support for the congress while traveling to Europe.

answer that if in truth most of the voted statements are purely... lyrical, something has been very practical: it is the given example, the open road.”⁸⁴⁵ The congress, as Moreau put it, advocated “for all forms that ensure the individual in full enjoyment of existence, since the fact of being born implies the right to live.”⁸⁴⁶ Women from Buenos Aires, in alliance with feminists of other geographies “have carried out a great work — Moreau concluded— since it contains the noblest conception that the modern thought has reached.”⁸⁴⁷

Evidencing the crucial role that education played in women’s agendas, the section on education received more submissions than any other section in the congress.⁸⁴⁸ The more than thirty presentations, approved by the congress and published in the minutes, delved into women’s labor, children’s moral education, and teaching methods. Some presentations focused on the teaching of specific subjects such as history and physical education.⁸⁴⁹ Others presented a more general picture of

⁸⁴⁵ Alicia Moreau, “Congreso Femenino Internacional,” *Humanidad nueva*, no. 6-7, June-July, 1910.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁸ While there were seven thematic sections (sociology, law, education, science, literature, and arts, and industry), education was the thematic area with more submissions, with more than a hundred, followed by sociology with forty proposals. Sociology covered forty-six topics such as labor, women’s economic situation, women’s associations and sociability, and motherhood. The topics in the Law section included women’s civil rights, and other central issues in feminist agendas such as divorce, and patria potestad. After sociology, Education was the section with more suggested topics by the organizers including co-education; moral, intellectual, and physical education, women’s professional and commercial education. Other topics related with the eugenic agenda of the congress such as education for “abnormal” children and colonies (colonias de vacaciones). The science section also reflected the eugenic agenda with puericulture, hygiene, alcoholism, and anti-tuberculosis leagues. The Letters section delved into topics such as women in literature, poetry, and journalism, while Industries included the teaching of home economics (domestic education) and the schools to prepare women workers. Finally, Arts included the role of women in the field, and women’s artistic education in schools.

⁸⁴⁹ Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane “La enseñanza de la historia” and Ana A. de Montalvo, “Educación Física Femenina,” in *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la República Argentina. Historia, actas y trabajos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ceppi, 1911).

the transformations needed in the teaching methods.⁸⁵⁰ Proposals with explicit eugenic solutions to social problems focused on the education of “abnormal” children and camps for vagabonds.⁸⁵¹ Despite the different perspectives on what constituted the most urgent changes to be made in the school, speakers agreed that structural changes were needed in order to respond to the challenges of the modern world including industrialization and urbanization.

Teachers utilized the congress as a platform to recognize their teaching experience as sources of legitimate knowledge. For instance, teacher and later doctor Cecilia Grierson, known for her pedagogical labor among adult working class women in the *Escuela Técnica del Hogar*, exposed her ideas on home economics.⁸⁵² She criticized the current theoretical approach of home economics in the school and proposed a more practical education, a “truly home economics science,” that included cooking, child care, cleaning, laundry and ironing. Aligning herself to the scholastic models of home economics in the U.S. and other European countries that trained women in their duties as mothers and wives, Grierson, along with Ernestina López, advocated for a normal school for teachers in home economics. For educators, like

⁸⁵⁰ María Mercedes de la Vega, “Nuevos Rumbos,” in *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la República Argentina. Historia, actas y trabajos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ceppi, 1911).

⁸⁵¹ Dra Elvira R. de Dellepiane, “Los niños débiles ante la educación” and Corina Echenique Uriarte “Colonias de vagabundos ” in *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la República Argentina. Historia, actas y trabajos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ceppi, 1911).

⁸⁵² Other leaders of the Escuela Técnica del Hogar participated in the congress such as Virginia Moreno de Parkes. The Escuela Técnica del Hogar was born in 1904 in La Plata as an initiative of the Association of Home Economics of the Women’s National Council. The school was run by middle class women who donated the materials for the teaching of cooking and other subjects such as typing, hairstyle, and languages. Cecilia Grierson was the Honorary President of the Organization that led this pedagogical effort “convinced that the biggest benefit that can be done to the women of our country is to teach them to work intelligently, preparing them for the best hygiene and organization of the home.” *Informe de la Escuela Técnica del Hogar Profesional para Mujeres 1904-1908* (La Plata: Talleres de Impresiones Oficiales, 1909).

Grierson and López, urgent transformations should lead towards women's professionalization if they were to effect true social change. Based on his experience as principal of the Escuela Modelo Sarmiento and later the Liceo de Señoritas, López gave a couple of presentations advocating for technical schools for women within and outside Buenos Aires. She proposed the foundation of schools for the teaching of horticulture and gardening where women would learn chemistry, physics, and botany among other subjects.⁸⁵³ The teaching would be practical. Students would sow and grow their own vegetables and learn how to commercialize their products. López envisioned a protagonist role for women in the provinces to develop what she called the "feminine national industries."⁸⁵⁴ The problem, according to her, was that "provincial women who never left their village lacked the necessary artistic taste" and "ignored the modern procedures of spinning and dyeing."⁸⁵⁵ National wealth was possible only if these women were educated on modern technologies. Other presenters at the congress agreed on this argument. Chilean M. Aurora Argomedo concluded that the increase of feminine industries is urgent in the world, and the foundation of well-equipped schools should be the constant preoccupation of any good government.⁸⁵⁶ Along with Argomedo, Elisenda Parga directly linked the development of national industries with democracy. "The preparation of feminine

⁸⁵³ Ernestina López, "Creación de escuelas de horticultura y jardinería para mujeres," in *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la República Argentina. Historia, actas y trabajos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ceppi, 1911).

⁸⁵⁴ Ernestina López, "Las industrias nacionales femeninas en las escuelas profesionales," in *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la República Argentina. Historia, actas y trabajos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ceppi, 1911).

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁶ M. Aurora Argomedo, "La moralidad y el trabajo como fin supremo de la instrucción," in *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la República Argentina. Historia, actas y trabajos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ceppi, 1911).

democracies is needed—” Parga argued— and its foundations were in the industrial schools.⁸⁵⁷

Similar to Howard’s modernizing discourse, participants of the congress proposed demands from a privileged position. Those who were able to participate in congresses were not the majority of teachers but a select group of women who utilized teaching as the first step towards higher education. Some presenters had experience in representing Argentina in international congresses and had the economic and symbolic resources that many teachers around the country lacked. They were from Buenos Aires, had access to understanding and speaking other languages including English, and had the connections to travel and utilize their experience abroad to publish and give conferences once they returned to Buenos Aires. Middle class, professional women, presenters aimed to better educate working-class, rural, and immigrant women, considered as lacking the appropriate education to raise their children. As Howard as well, Argentine teachers saw themselves as “illuminating feminine consciousness” and making a “human and regenerative” labor.”⁸⁵⁸ Editors of *Unión y labor*, called for adhesions to celebrate the freedom of the *patria* by honoring the intellectual progress of Argentine women.⁸⁵⁹ They considered the congress as signaling the time of Argentine civilization, characterized by one where women were “the true and egalitarian partner of men.”⁸⁶⁰ While fighting for a

⁸⁵⁷ Elicenda Parga, “Escuelas profesionales o industriales,” in *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la República Argentina. Historia, actas y trabajos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ceppi, 1911).

⁸⁵⁸ López, “Sesión Inaugural.”

⁸⁵⁹ “Congreso Femenino Internacional,” *Unión y labor*, no. 4, January 21, 1910.

⁸⁶⁰ “Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional Ruso,” *Unión y labor*, no. 3, January, 21, 1909.

protagonist role in the nation, organizers claimed that women were the carriers of civilization. The reforms proposed by *Unión y Labor* illuminates the view of middle-class women towards working class students. The first proposition one was to complement primary education with practical schools for boys in order to “prevent laziness and exploitation in the factories.”⁸⁶¹ Second, they requested the actual implementation of fines for those parents who did not send children to the schools. The first point was approved by attendees and socialist teacher Sara Justo who advocated for technical education since first grade. Regarding the second point there was controversy. The editor of *Unión y Labor* Matilde Flarioto, insisted that the CNE had to comply with the regulations and impose fees to the parents. Socialist Carolina Muzzili, known for her work researching women and child labor, asserted that children do not attend schools because there were not enough institutions in their neighborhoods. Representing the CNE, Elvira Rawson de Dellpiane asserted that the city of Buenos Aires was implementing the double shift to better respond to the needs of working-class children and their parents.⁸⁶²

While Argentine teachers built a transnational network to socialize pedagogical theories and practices among Latin American educators, the U.S. continued to be a powerful model for a modern education. The ties initiated by Sarmiento in the nineteenth century, and carried over through the labor of Howard and dozens of teachers, endured in the twentieth century. Ernestina López, was among those educators who led educational reforms in Buenos Aires, participated in

⁸⁶¹ Propositiones por Grupo Femenino “Unión y Labor” in *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la República Argentina. Historia, actas y trabajos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ceppi, 1911).

⁸⁶² Propositiones por Grupo Femenino “Unión y Labor.”

the Argentine women's movement, and saw in the U.S. model for the modernization of Argentine education. In 1905, she described the U.S. pedagogical environment, and not "old Europe," as one of "revival of something that is not precisely new; that something is an idea that, although dormant, has remained unshaken as the ideal that carries within itself a principle of life."⁸⁶³ Turning to the U.S. as a pedagogical model meant to value the protagonist role of women in shaping pedagogical theory and practice. López traveled to the United States in 1905 with José Berruti and Ernesto Nelson to represent the Argentine Commission at the Saint Louis Universal Exposition.⁸⁶⁴ The exposition was only one of the many opportunities that Argentine educators had to exchange pedagogical ideas and observe how U.S. teachers advanced pedagogical practice. Over a period of seven months, López visited U.S. schools, talked with principals and teachers, skimmed textbooks, glanced at children's notebooks, and interacted with them.⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶³ Ernestina López, "Concepto de la enseñanza primaria," *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 390, July 31, 1905, 974. In the Other school reformers saw in Sarmiento a pioneer of the new school. Ovidio Fernández Alonso, "Hacia la escuela nueva," *La obra*, no. 1, Feb. 20, 1921.

⁸⁶⁴ The selected members of the commission had hierarchical positions in the educational system. Berruti and Nelson were school inspectors and López was the director of the Escuela Modelo Sarmiento. The exhibition, characterized by its Director Frederick J. V. Skiff as "a collection of the wisdom and achievements of the world" aimed to bring together "the most comprehensive and representative contemporary record of the progress and condition of the human race that may be devised." Official Catalogue of Exhibitors. Universal Exposition. St. Louis, U.S.A. 1904: Division of exhibits. Department A. Education by Louisiana Purchase Exposition (1904 : Saint Louis, Mo.), available online <https://archive.org/details/officialcatalogu00loui/mode/2up>, last seen September 28, 2021.

⁸⁶⁵ I did not find in the archive the details of the trip regarding how the trip was funded, where the Argentine representatives stayed. It is through the conferences given by López that we know that she stayed seven months and that during her visit she traveled throughout the United States visiting schools and interviewing educators. She visited Hyde school from Boston; the Horace Mann School part of the Teachers College at University of Columbia, the Hyannis School in Massachusetts directed by Baldwin. López also visited Normal Schools, in particular she referred to schools of applications in California, Iowa, Colorado, and Utah. In her conferences, López drew on programs from the schools and articles from U.S. journals. Thus, we can assume that during her trip she also took the opportunity to do some research on school curricula and teaching methods.

Upon her return to Buenos Aires, López gave a series of conferences to share with Argentine teachers her experience visiting schools in the U.S.⁸⁶⁶ Despite presenting the series as an objective description of teaching methods for teachers to critically value and ponder its benefits, it was evident that López felt compelled by the pedagogical practices developed in the northern country. As López saw it, U.S. modern pedagogy challenged traditional models perceived as static, unimaginative, and stuck in old times. A modern school centered the children's experience, allowing and encouraging children's own activity and expression. Other institutions and actors outside the school formed part of the children's pedagogical experience including the family, who was an active collaborator of teachers, factories and parks legitimate pedagogical spaces where children learned outside the traditional classroom. In sum, this modern pedagogy —López affirmed— would provide children with “strength and joy that result from the harmonic and complete exercise of all their physical energies, making the children more moral, useful, happy, through work and action.”⁸⁶⁷ López's depiction of U.S. pedagogy reinforced colonial relationships between the U.S. and Argentina where the former epitomized modernity and the latter represented the backward traditions that needed to be overcome. Yet, Argentine teachers appropriated certain aspects of U.S. pedagogy according to their agendas

⁸⁶⁶ The four conferences were published in *El monitor* between July and October 1905. There is no information regarding where the conferences were held and how many attendees they had. Ernestina López, “Concepto de la enseñanza primaria en los Estados Unidos,” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 390, 31 de Julio de 1905; “El estudio de la naturaleza en las escuelas primarias americanas,” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 391, August 31, 1905; Ernestina López, “La enseñanza manual en los Estados Unidos,” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 392, September 30, 1905; and “La enseñanza primaria desde el punto de vista social en los Estados Unidos,” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 393, Oct. 31, 1905.

⁸⁶⁷ López, “Concepto de la enseñanza primaria en los Estados Unidos,” 982.

including a more protagonist role of women in leadership positions and transformations in the school curricula that led to a practical education.

Ernesto Nelson contributed to picture U.S. society as truly modern since women were considered equal than men. In 1909, Nelson gave a conference at the Sociedad Mariano Moreno in collaboration with Universitarias Argentinas, Centro Feminista, and Club de Madres.⁸⁶⁸ Nelson considered that U.S. women provided an example for the type of social action that women could have through the organization of campaigns against child labor in the factories, the promotion of female suffrage, and the multiple manifestations of social work, such as the Mothers Clubs. Through teaching, women could exercise what he called a moral and intellectual motherhood that made the school more “human” and challenged the violent environment to which teachers subjected children. Nelson asserted: “Until now, what we call Western civilization has been a social process in which the masculine character predominates, a civilization in which not only the will and appetites, but also the ideas peculiar to the adult male, has been priority.”⁸⁶⁹ He added “there is not a single one of the rights of childhood that has not been unknown, resisted, mocked, run over, in the whirlwind of a civilization cast on the moral standard of the adult man.”⁸⁷⁰ Thus, Nelson not only critiqued the centrality of men in the process of decision making in the school but he also condemned a school centered around an adult view of the world.⁸⁷¹

⁸⁶⁸ Ernesto Nelson was a recognized figure among school reformers. Asunción Lavrin identified Nelson as a feminist ally. Lavrin, *Women, Feminism and Social Change*.

⁸⁶⁹ Ernesto Nelson “Una faz de la acción social de la mujer en los Estados Unidos,” *Unión y labor*, no. 1, Oct. 21, 1909.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷¹ I read this statement as pioneering discourses against what in Spanish we refer as “adulto-centrismo.” The explosion of feminism since the emergence of #niunamenos in 2015, has inspired a rich intellectual production on childhood and pedagogy. These works challenged the adult-centered

As an active advocate of school reforms in Argentina, Nelson adopted the elements he considered proper for improving education in his country. In his view, women were in a strategic position to lead a modern education that centered children's perspectives and respected their nature. According to Nelson, women comprehended children and understood that the traditional school and teaching methods violated children's rights since children were not happy in the school. Nelson directly attributed the emergence of the "new school" movement to the development of women's organizing in the U.S. In doing so, he encouraged Argentine teachers to take the lead in the school reforms. Nelson determined "the new school in the U.S. is nothing but the expansion of maternal education, the lap school, with all its essential elements of stories, rhymes and above all that tolerance that can only reside in the soul of a woman to accept as a reality, the naive world of a child."⁸⁷² In his definition, Nelson linked school reforms with maternity, attributing to women the responsibility to take care of children and to introduce in the school the tolerance and even the physical contact between teachers and students that a masculine perspective of pedagogy had not provided. Finally, Nelson stated the benefits of women's leadership from the teachers' perspective. The presence of women in positions within the school inspection and school directorships provided a working environment in which female teachers felt more comprehended and

perspective on education, proposes innovative ways to teach sex education, and makes visible the stories of trans children. See: *Niñez en movimiento. Del adultocentrismo a la emancipación*, Santiago Morales y Gabriela Magistris, ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Chirimbote, 2020); Carla Elena, *Esi. Haciendo camino al andar* (Lomas de Zamora: Sudestada, 2021); Gabriela Mansilla, *Yo nena, yo princesa. Luana, la niña que eligió su propio nombre* (Los polvorines: Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento, 2021).

⁸⁷² Nelson "Una faz de la acción social de la mujer en los Estados Unidos."

comfortable. In sum, as Avellaneda imagined during his administration of the Ministry of Instruction, women's presence would transform the school into an "illuminated home."⁸⁷³

This section showed the connections between teachers and feminism through the discourses of women's liberation circulating transnationally in congresses and magazines. Since the foundations of normal schools, *normalismo* provided women across the Americas with tools for their emancipation. U.S. teachers modeled for Argentine women the life of a modern woman with autonomy to travel internationally and perform in leadership positions in schools. As Argentine women graduate from normal schools or continued their studies in the university, a feminists discourses circulated in Buenos Aires informed by feminists in Europe, the U.S. and Latin America. The Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional was an expression of such a movement led by women. As privilege middle class teachers and professionals, feminists reproduced racial hierarchies between North and the South America. López and Nelson's fascination towards the U.S. is only one expression of the colonial relationship established by Sarmiento. Yet, teachers traveling to the U.S. such as López and Nelson strategically utilize their to raise their trip to the U.S. to advocate for school reforms that would potentially liberate children from the traditional aspects of Argentine *normalismo*. The next section investigates how Ernestina López translated the debates and the lessons learned in the U.S. into classroom experiments for the education of girls in Buenos Aires.

⁸⁷³ *Informe anual. La escuela Normal del Paraná en 1910* (Buenos Aires: Compañía sudamericana de billetes de banco, 1910).

Ernestina López's Pedagogical Experiments at the Escuela Modelo Sarmiento

The circulation of pedagogical ideas in international congresses and magazines inspired teachers to experiment with new teaching methods. For López, her trip to the U.S. encouraged her to imagine and implement pedagogical innovations. This process was not one of imitation but a conscious effort to adapt those aspects of U.S. education that she deemed appropriate for children in Argentina. The Escuela Modelo Sarmiento, a school for girls in the city of Buenos Aires, was López's pedagogical laboratory. As its principal, López had a position of power that allowed her to lead transformations in the classroom. The school experiments developed by López reveal Argentine teachers' initiatives to innovate in teaching methods. At the same time Mercante and other women were studying children's nature through experimental psychology methods, López was building another type of laboratory. She implemented new assignments, documented children's learning experience in the school, and disseminated pedagogical knowledge for other teachers around the country. According to López, U.S. modern pedagogy systematized, compiled, and debated teacher's experience in order to create a pedagogical science.⁸⁷⁴ López took seriously the systematization of her teaching experience and invited others to do the same. In 1906, she theorized about modern pedagogy in a series of articles published in *El monitor de la educación común*, where she documented the daily activities of the school through photographs.⁸⁷⁵ Like Mercante,

⁸⁷⁴ Other key elements of the U.S. modern education had to do with the budget allocated to education, and the collaboration between parents and teachers to create a "propitious pedagogical environment." López, "Concepto de la enseñanza primaria en los Estados Unidos."

⁸⁷⁵ Ernestina López, "Las actividades manuales en la escuela primaria. La enseñanza de la historia," *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 404, Agosto 31, 1906; Ernestina López, "Las actividades manuales en la escuela primaria. La enseñanza de la historia," *El monitor de la educación común*, no.

her observation in the classroom became the basis of a book that aimed to train teachers. The book, titled *La escuela y la vida*, was a manual of practical pedagogy, that promoted a major pedagogical principle defended by women at the First Feminine Congress and beyond, that of the need of modern pedagogy to be practical and better prepare children for life.⁸⁷⁶ This section investigates how López translated the teaching methods she learned in the U.S. into her model school in Buenos Aires.

In Buenos Aires, López transformed the teaching methods through the study of nature and manual labor. According to López, the study of nature was not a subject in the school equivalent to natural history or biology but an approach that guided classroom activities, “an aptitude, a point of view, a means of contact” between humans and the natural world.⁸⁷⁷ Educating children through these methods had implications for the entire humanity, advancing towards a better future. Putting children in contact with nature was in López’s view “the normal condition of the child’s development and has been the principal media for the progress of the race.”⁸⁷⁸ López adhered to the belief that education could change children and had an impact on the children’s bodies. Because of women’s reproductive roles, the implication of educating healthy girls in the school had a clear impact on future generations. The study of nature had humanistic and scientific goals since it instilled in girls a love

405, Sept. 30, 1906; Ernestina López, “El estudio de la naturaleza en la escuela primaria.” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 407, Nov. 30, 1906; Ernestina López, “La actividad infantil. Centro de la enseñanza primaria.” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 408, Dec. 31, 1906; Ernestina López, “El trabajo manual y el dibujo. Su vinculación en la escuela,” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 409, Jan. 31, 1907.

⁸⁷⁶ Ernestina López, *La escuela y la vida. Lecciones de pedagogía práctica* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta y casa editora de Coni hermanos, 1907).

⁸⁷⁷ López, “El estudio de la naturaleza en las escuelas primarias americanas,” 3.

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2

towards nature, making them more reasonable and tolerant, and enriched the scientific methods of investigation and experimentation. In López's words, the study of nature aimed to promote in children an "intimate relationship with the objects and phenomena among which they lived," teaching the feeling of sympathy, at the same time it sought to promote a rational and scientific education through observing the causes and consequences of the natural processes.⁸⁷⁹ The proximity to plants and domestic animals would teach children to develop feelings such as love, empathy, and responsibility. Based on her classroom's observations, López wrote that children "do not see animals as inferior beings but as equals as men."⁸⁸⁰ Because the school had the potential to teach new habits and feelings, López believes that the changing of teaching methods would "shake the masses."⁸⁸¹

Although developed within a public school, the study of nature challenged the theoretical lessons of the traditional normalist classroom. The feelings and habits that children developed toward plants and animals were more important than classifying the type of seeds or memorizing the names of plants. López defended this pedagogical approach by arguing: "I believe that the knowledge that children acquire will be of much more practical value, but even assuming that they had learned nothing from Botany, they would have achieved something infinitely more precious, the aptitude to be interested in others and the power to communicate with nature

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., 4.

without the need for intermediaries."⁸⁸² Therefore, through her articles López argues about how children learned.

Through her writing, López disseminated classroom assignments for other teachers. One exercise asked children to take care of domestic animals. Figure 9 image shows three girls of the Escuela Modelo Sarmiento sitting in the school hall touching and feeding a rabbit during the break.⁸⁸³ Regarding this exercise, second grade student Elisa Conforti wrote in her notebook, “the other day the teacher brought to the school a little rabbit inside a cage. His eyes are very sharp, and his ears are very long (...) When we go for a break, we open the cage so he can run and move a little. When we let him go, he always follows us because we do not mistreat him and because he loves us very much.”⁸⁸⁴ The girl continued explaining the characteristics of the rabbits, the type of food they eat, and how they move. In addition, teachers at the EMS encouraged students to do periodic observations of domestic animals and vegetables.⁸⁸⁵ Through the interactions with the natural world outside the classroom children learned both how to observe and to love nature. The language in Elisa’s homework suggests the moral lessons that teachers imparted in regards to nature. But at the same time, teachers used children’s interactions with the natural world to teach about scientific observation.

⁸⁸² Ibid., 9.

⁸⁸³ López and Nelson left indications of these types of activities when they returned from the U.S. suggesting that due to their docile character rabbits were the most appropriate animal for the school.

⁸⁸⁴ López, “El estudio de la naturaleza en la escuela primaria.”

⁸⁸⁵ A third grade student observed a potato and described its changes as it reproduced. This diary, with entries every day for two months, gave children the responsibility of observing nature and documenting the changes she was interpreting.



Image 9. Un aporte en el recreo
Source: Ernestina López, “El estudio de la naturaleza en las escuelas primarias americanas,” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 391, August 31, 1905.

Like rationalist pedagogical experiments, the emphasis on nature challenged the rigidity of the traditional education learned in most public schools. By doing so, López aimed to demonstrate that children acquired knowledge in close contact with the natural world. The school stopped being an institution of quietness and reclusion that feared the external dangers of outside illness and dirt to allow new actors, especially animals and plants, to penetrate the borders of the school. López introduced a number of activities that allowed children’s freedom of movement such as outdoor explorations to collect plants or insects. Girls then became “little naturalists,” sowing seeds and observing a plant’s development. Based on the change of seasons, for example, children acquired knowledge of their proximate world. During the autumn they would collect the leaves falling from the trees and use the collection of little treasures on their way to the school to learn about the different

types of plants that surrounded the school. Organizing the program around seasons, was introduced by educators as a more flexible program not randomly imposed from outside by integrally following the natural laws and the nature's lessons. Figure 10 shows a group of students returning from an outdoor expedition. The students hold plants in their hands that would later be used to create exposition (see image 11 and 12), like the ones that López observed during the Saint Louis International Exposition. Image 13 portrays how the study of nature challenged the rigidity of the traditional classroom. Students are scrutinizing insects in a hall. Some girls are standing observing insects in the terrarium while the two children on the left are sitting on the floor suggesting girls' freedom of movement to sit on the floor.



Image 10. Regreso de las excursionistas
Source: Ernestina López, "El estudio de la naturaleza en la escuela primaria," *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 407, Nov. 30, 1906

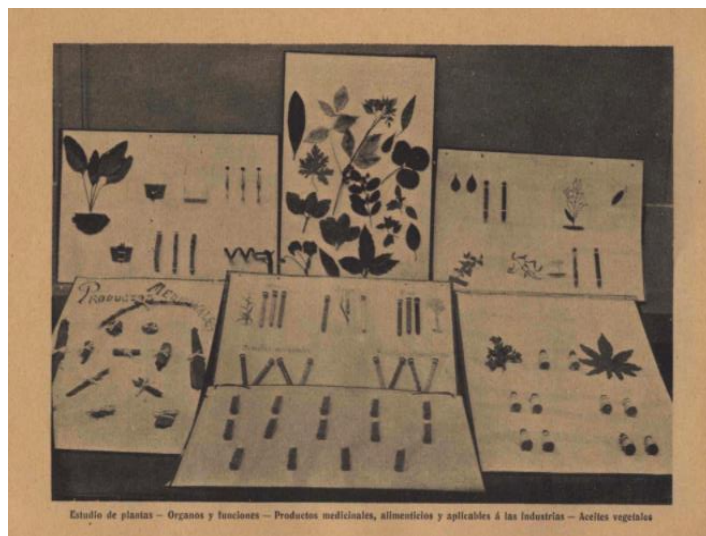


Image 11, Estudio de plantas.
Source: Ernestina López, "El estudio de la naturaleza en la escuela primaria," *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 407, Nov. 30, 1906.



Image 12: Preparando colecciones de insectos
Source: Ernestina López, "El estudio de la naturaleza en la escuela primaria," *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 407, Nov. 30, 1906.



Image 13: Estudiando los insectos en un medio artificialmente preparado

Source: Ernestina López, “El estudio de la naturaleza en la escuela primaria,” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 407, Nov. 30, 1906.

A second pedagogical principle applied by López in her school experiment was manual labor. As the study of nature, it was not conceptualized as a specific subject in the school curricula but a “modus operandi” for every signature.⁸⁸⁶ Teaching manual labor would benefit children’s natural development and freedom of expression. López defined manual labor as “everything that is a product of the individual effort to externalize a thought or emotion.”⁸⁸⁷ Because children had less capacity for abstraction, putting them to work facilitated children’s expression. De-emphasizing teacher's lessons and valuing children’s experience, manual labor allowed for children’s activity and curiosity. Berruti suggested the benefits of manual

⁸⁸⁶ López drew on U.S. teacher Parker Francis W, Parker, one of the referents of the progressive education movement.

⁸⁸⁷ López, “La enseñanza manual en los Estados Unidos,” 123.

labor as an activity where no “hollow words confused children; no theoretical lessons that tired them without benefit; no impositions that may kill their better energies.”⁸⁸⁸ According to López, under traditional methods, the school only functioned as an artificial environment that restricted children’s movement. Outside the school—López asserted— children were constantly moving, but when they entered the school teachers asked them to stay quiet. When the child was not able to express him or herself, was “turned into a machine that can have all the precision that you want, but to which you never have to ask for initiative, because we do not give it the interest that stimulates it.”⁸⁸⁹ In the classroom, manual labor meant that teachers “put children to work” encouraging skills such as drawing, painting, molding ceramic, and sewing.

One activity incorporated in the school was the creation of mock-ups. In history classes children created mock-ups representing different cultures, such as indigenous peoples before colonization. The pedagogical goal was to put children in contact with the different ways in which societies throughout history built their home, obtained food, and created clothing.⁸⁹⁰ But as teachers encouraged children to value the advancement of industry, the mock ups continued reproducing ideas of civilization and barbarism. In the mock ups children recreated the “other,” including eskimos, feudal, oriental, and indigenous populations in the South of Buenos Aires, were characterized as “primitive” (Image 14). The representation of the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas is another example of the racial thought

⁸⁸⁸ José. J. Berruti, “La escuela Horacio Mann,” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 392, September 30, 1905.

⁸⁸⁹ López, “La enseñanza manual en los Estados Unidos,” 124.

⁸⁹⁰ López, “Las actividades manuales en la escuela primaria. Enseñanza de la historia.”

taught in the classroom. The mock up represented this historical event as an encounter between “modernity” and backwardness (see image 15). On the left children created three indigenous peoples with their clothing holding their weapons, while on the right the European conquerors, next to the boat, are not displaying any weapons. The indigenous peoples are standing up next to their “primitive” house while the Europeans are next to the boat, a symbol of communication, technology, and modernization.



Image 14. Habitaciones primitivas

Source: Ernestina López, “Las actividades manuales en la escuela primaria. Enseñanza de la historia,”

El monitor de la educación común, no. 404, August 31, 1906



Image 15. Llegada de Colón a América.

Source: Ernestina López, “Las actividades manuales en la escuela primaria. Enseñanza de la historia,”

El monitor de la educación común, no. 404, August 31, 1906

In the context of an industrialized world, manual work had the pedagogical value of teaching children the process behind the industrialized products they consumed. López shared a conversation she had with a U.S. teacher concerned with the fact that children were not able to appreciate the progress of industry since:

From the moment he wakes up, he enters that world: that electric bell whose mechanism is a mystery to him, he remembers it on his bed, an object that comes from one factory, while mattresses and clothes come from others. He bathes, in a vessel made of clay by processes that he ignores and uses the soap that has been prepared in a factory of which most of the time he does not even know the situation. He dresses in different pieces of clothing, each of which has already been completed from the store. He has not seen the sheep being washed or sheared, nor has he heard his mother spinning during the morning hours, nor has he witnessed the operation of dyeing the fabrics with the principles of bark that he himself will help to collect.⁸⁹¹

⁸⁹¹ Ibid, 127.

The mock-up activities as well as the learning of modern cooking, housing, and clothing children were taught to value the progress of modernization and how nature had been dominated by humans. But the assumption was that only by children performing the process, they would actually see and understand.

Because the Escuela Modelo Sarmiento was for girls, manual labor taught students how to become a modern wife and mother. Figure 16 reflects the gendered discourses that girls learned in the EMS. As girls are in front of the classroom surrounded by the sand table, the tale in the blackboard tells the story of Rebeca who wished for her son a “kind, hard-worker, and loving” wife. Girls incorporated this knowledge as they learned to read and write, while in manual labor activities they acquired the skills to be a hard-workers mother. Contemporary to López’s pedagogical experiments in Buenos Aires, Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano (1880-1951) promoted the teaching of home economics based on his observations in Europe.⁸⁹² Guillén de Rezzano’s articles published in *El monitor* agreed with López that manual labor was fundamental for children’s development. Guillén de Rezzano explained that the teaching of cooking, weaving, and other domestic tasks, had the goal “to associate, in the broadest way, intelligence to the action of the fingers; to develop the taste and ability of girls; to make them understand the importance of manual work, to

⁸⁹² As an inspector in domestic education, Guillén de Rezzano she traveled to Europe. These trips, promoted by the Argentine government, functioned as an opportunity for teachers to learn about schooling systems. Upon her return, Guillén de Rezzano wrote for *El monitor de la educación común* where she advocated for domestic education, “the science of household,” in working class neighbors. Clotilde Guillén, “Algunas consideraciones sobre el funcionamiento de las clases de cocina,” *El monitor de la educación Común*, no. 406, October 31, 1906; “La enseñanza de la costura en las escuelas elementales de Francia,” *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 407, November 30, 1906. As we will see in the next section, similarly to López, Guillén took advantage of her role as principal at the Normal School No. 5 in the city of Buenos Aires to experiment with teaching methods.

get used to it and to make them love it.”⁸⁹³ The love for working, however, was not necessarily natural but created through the habits imposed by teachers.

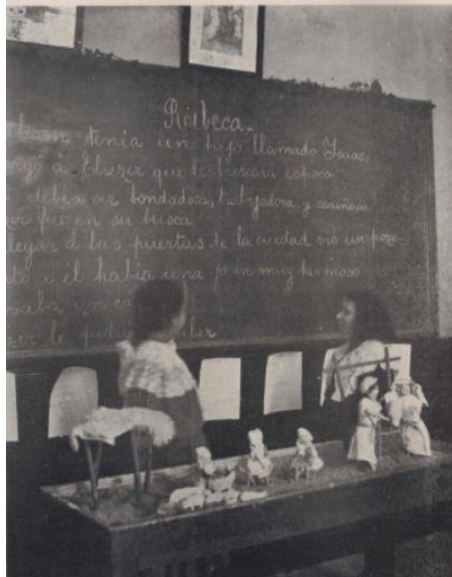


Image 16 Rebeca dando de beber a Eliezer.
Pastores Hebreos.
Source: *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 405, September 30, 1906.

In order to teach children habits of work, the tasks were constant. Among the distinctive characteristics that López portrayed about the learning environment was the image that children were continually working. Children are not looking at the camera as in a more traditional classroom photography. Even when they are portrayed inside the classroom, the focus is on the objects that students created. For instance, in image 17 children are pointing to the camera the objects of the Fenitian culture that they recreated as showing the appreciation and pride of something produced by their hands. In an effort to depict the school as an enjoyable place, López depicted children

⁸⁹³ Guillén de Rezzano, “La educación de la costura.”

in the school as if they were playing. In image 18, girls are exploring a modern stove, serving food, and interacting with each other. The same type of interaction is depicted in figure 1, the epigraph shows that girls are learning how to wash, stain, card, and weave. The idea was, therefore, to inculcate in children that learning, as much as working, could be enjoyable.



Image 17, Objetos del comercio fenicio
Source: *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 405, September 30, 1906.



Image 18. La cocina moderna,
Source: *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 405, September 30, 1906.



Image 19. Lavando, tiñendo, cardando, y tejiendo
Source: *El Monitor de la educación común*, no. 405, September 30, 1906.

While the introduction of new classroom assignments was innovative in centering children’s activity in the school, the teaching of manual labor contributed to molding children into workers. The fact that López’s experiments were developed within public schools suggests that she did not radically challenge the school curricula deemed as necessary for the school authorities. In her school, López continued disciplining children to be efficient housewives. The transformations happened at the level of the methods, tone, and ways of teaching. Drawing on U.S. educator James Baldwin, López perceived manual labor as helping children develop in a harmonious manner by respecting children’s natural inclination to produce something.⁸⁹⁴ In this conceptualization, introducing children to manual labor was not

⁸⁹⁴ López quoted Baldwin who asserted that “Manual labor is not an isolated matter demanding admission to an already overloaded program: it is the appropriate foundation for the entire education of the child. It recognizes the fact that educating is helping the child to develop in a natural and harmonious way, from the first to the last stage of its evolution; that the development of the child must be active and that it is best carried out when the activity results from its own needs. In other words, it is

an imposition from the outside industrializing world but a natural path to follow human's instinct towards production.

López recalled an interview with a U.S. teacher who explained children's labor in the school in comparison with a factory. While the narrative does not mean that López actually implemented these methods in her school, through her article published in *El monitor* López contributed to translate this pedagogical model to Argentine teachers. A U.S. teacher from the School of Hyannis in Massachusetts explained:

At 3pm the school turns into a factory where each child does something. In the first grade room, a group of little boys working in pairs are busy knitting woolen blankets for the doll's bed; while some weave, others weave raffia to make mats. In the second grade classroom, the students make cardboard furniture, while part of the class has gone to work in the garden. In the third grade, the children make wicker baskets, while the fourth grade is in the garden. Of the students in the upper classes, some work as carpenters; a group of girls is sewing by machine, while a class has undertaken an excursion to study birds.⁸⁹⁵

The comparison between the schools and the factory speaks to an institution that aimed to develop children's working aptitudes as future workers. This regimentation of the school showed that the authority of the teacher in defining the daily routines of the school was less natural than reformers wanted their audience to believe. The goal was still to influence children beyond the school but unlike normalist teachers that made children incorporate new words and knowledge as if they were empty vessels,

the recognition of the natural demand of the normal child who claims to produce something." López, "La enseñanza manual en los Estados Unidos."

⁸⁹⁵ López, "La enseñanza manual en los Estados Unidos," 126.

reformers believed that it was through labor that the lessons will be “engraved in a more intelligible and intense way.”⁸⁹⁶

While López’s pedagogy reproduced elements of the traditional education imparted in the public schools, she transformed the bond between teacher and students and aimed to improve children’s experience in the school. The “lap school” that Nelson attributed to women’s leadership in the development of U.S. pedagogy, was one that emphasized the maternal love that teachers should have towards their students. The model for this pedagogy was the home and the family and the theoretical perspectives inspired by Froebel’s and Pestalozzi’s pedagogical ideas. Indeed the whole pedagogical theory written by Froebel was based on the direct observation of the relationship between mothers and children.⁸⁹⁷ A U.S. kindergarten teacher asserted that “Now the spirit of Froebel is penetrating this vast desert of elementary education; and behold, kindergarten has won its place, and wood, clay, scissors, and colors, are going to speak eloquently to children's fingers.”⁸⁹⁸ Manual labor was essential for an education that aimed to create in the classroom a space where children could move, experiment, and express themselves freely.

López illustrated the principles of maternal pedagogy. While teachers taught children to love nature, they embodied the same love towards children. A picture that portrays the teacher and the students in the school patio reflects this approach to teaching. Image 20 portrays the students in the school patio, seated in a semicircle,

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., 128.

⁸⁹⁷ Carolyn Steedman, “‘The Mother Made Conscious:’ The Historical Development of a Primary School Pedagogy,” *History Workshop*, no. 20 (Autumn, 1985): 149-163.

⁸⁹⁸ López, “La actividad infantil, centro de la enseñanza primaria.”

talking to each other. The teacher is seated against the camera surrounded with a couple of students who seem to be talking with her. Out of the sixty-two photographs published in *El monitor*, this is one of the few pictures where the teacher appears. The teacher in these photographs speaks to a new positionality —both symbolic and physical— that López wanted to popularize. The teacher and the students are sitting on a semicircle outside the classroom. We see the teachers and students interacting in closer proximity than in the traditional classroom. Two students are talking with the teacher, suggesting not only that children could move from their chairs but also that the teacher was open to talking and interacting with the students as the rest of the children interact with each other. Even when this type of classroom environment did not completely erase the traditional classroom arrangement that we see in other pictures, the innovations introduced in the Escuela Modelo Sarmiento and the its advertisement through the most popular journal read by teachers throughout the country, allowed for new imaginations of what the classroom can look like and how the teachers can physically relate to her students. The “lap school” as Nelson called it, departed from the distant relationship that the science of teaching taught in normal schools under positivist models. Yet, women continued to value scientific knowledge that taught children to observe nature.



Image 20. Un jardín de cáscara de huevos
Source: *El monitor de la educación común*, no. 407,
November 30, 1906

Along with a closer contact between teachers and students, the study of nature and manual labor promoted a closer contact among peers. Assignments such as the mock-ups required collaboration as multiple students worked on the same project. The “sand tables” where students created their mock-ups and represented societies and daily scenarios, were located in the front of the classroom, allowing children more interaction. The study of nature and manual labor also displaced the teacher as the only producer of knowledge in the classroom. Students learned from the lessons of the natural world and from their observations. In the school, students learned from each other and were able to interpret and produce objects and narratives where their voices were at the center. There is no historical record of children’s experience in the Escuela Modelo Sarmiento beyond the pictures and narrations collected by López, but it is possible to assume that children had a more enjoyable experience while playing and exploring. New objects and animals were brought into the school for them to

play, new classroom assignments allowed them to explore the world outside the school, and a new pedagogical approach made space for more interactions not only with the teacher but among peers.

The pedagogical practice developed by López in the Escuela Modelo Sarmiento modeled the transformations that women could lead in the classroom and beyond. Her teaching practice gave López the authority to travel abroad, give conferences, and write books on pedagogy and textbooks to be used in the classroom at the national level. Her pedagogy, based on the study of nature and manual labor, departed from a conception of children's natural development that promoted movement and expression in the classrooms. Through her pedagogical theory and practice, López encouraged teachers to value children's natural skills toward work and activity and to make space for children's voices and stories in the classroom. In this sense, López pedagogical experiments challenged traditional teaching practices by promoting children's expression. López's experiments suggest the presence of a maternal pedagogy emerging in the schools across the Americas. This pedagogy allowed for a closer bond between teacher and students challenging the distant relationship of the normalist teacher. A modern education, as she defined it in her book, was scientific (concerned with the facts) and practical (useful for life). Both principles were at the center of pedagogical proposals that women at the First Feminine Congress would advocate in the following years.⁸⁹⁹ As we will see in the next section, women continued to lead pedagogical experiments in the 1920s when

⁸⁹⁹ López, *La escuela y la vida*.

the emergence of the “New School” movement advanced the notions of children’s autonomy and activity.

Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano and the New School Teaching Methods in the 1920s

Historians have understood the emergence of the new school movement in Argentina as part of a political transformation occurring at the national level after Hipólito Yrigoyen was elected president. The new school emerged as a criticism of *normalismo*, the pedagogical project of the conservative republic (1880-1916).⁹⁰⁰ Yet, as we saw in this chapter, teacher demands for the democratization of the school had circulated in previous years due to a transnational circulation of pedagogical ideas and the practice of teaching, which gave teachers the experiential knowledge to argue that, under the rigid structure of *normalismo*, children could not be effectively educated. Therefore, new school ideas cannot be associated solely with changes in national politics but need to be understood as part of a pedagogical movement inspired by the teachers’ praxis.

The new school movement was heterogeneous and acquired different characteristics in each country. For instance, while in European countries new school experiments occurred within private schools, in Argentina, school reformers sought to transform public education. Sandra Carli describes the new school movement as the “production of mixtures, a combination of traditions and innovative movements giving rise to hybridized discourses.”⁹⁰¹ New school advocates adhered to the

⁹⁰⁰ Sandra Carli, “The New School Movement in Argentina,” *Paedagogica Historica* 42, no. 3, (2006): 385–404.

⁹⁰¹ Carli, “The New School Movement in Argentina,” 395.

“normalist democratizing political project focused on expanding public education, but also revising the foundations of school pedagogy, seeking to innovate in the field of teaching from a distinct view of the child population.”⁹⁰² Because of the importance of normalismo as a state project and the fact that school reformers were school inspectors, principals, and teachers of state-sponsored education, teachers implemented emerging pedagogical ideas that sought to transform the student experience in the school, while navigating the remaining teaching traditions from the past.

Despite its local developments, new school teachers shared pedagogical principles across national borders. New school advocates believed that children’s education had to be integral, active, pleasurable, open to the world, creative, and that it had to promote children’s freedom.⁹⁰³ Recognized figures of this movement around the world included Maria Montessori (1870-1952), Ovide Decroly (1871-1932), and John Dewey (1859-1952). Teachers came into contact with pedagogical ideas through transnational exchanges and the circulation of pamphlets and magazines. Pedagogues such as Maria Montessori and Adolphe Ferrière (1879-1960) visited Argentina in the 1920s, contributing to the dissemination of pedagogical ideas that challenged the traditional teaching practices of *normalismo*. In Argentina, teachers accessed the work of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and Friedrich Fröbel (1782-1852) translated by José María Torres and Sara Eccleston, respectively.⁹⁰⁴ These works

⁹⁰² Ibid.

⁹⁰³ Germán, Gregorio, Liliana Abrate, M. Juri, and Cristina Sappia. "La Escuela Nueva: un debate al interior de la pedagogía," *Diálogos pedagógicos* 9, no. 18 (2011): 12-33.

⁹⁰⁴ Carli, "The New School Movement in Argentina."

praised children's expression and originality, encouraging teachers to reimagine pedagogical methods based on new understandings of child psychology. Thus, a central site for school reforms was the normal school.⁹⁰⁵ If a new education needed to be implemented in primary schools, it was necessary to train teachers in a new pedagogy.

Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano was among the most vocal advocates for the new school movement in Argentina. Like other women of her generation, Guillén de Rezzano started his educational journey in a normal school to later access higher education. Alumni from the Escuela Normal de Profesores, Guillén de Rezzano graduated with a doctoral degree from the Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires. Between 1900 and 1905 she worked as a school teacher; she later became a school inspector of home economics (1905-1908) and went on to become professor of pedagogy and psychology at the Escuela Normal no. 5 of Buenos Aires (1909-1932).⁹⁰⁶ Her contact with pedagogical renovation did not come from the U.S. as in the case of López, but from Europe. Yet, like López, the experience of traveling abroad in her role of inspector changed her perspectives on teaching methods. In the 1920s Guillén de Rezzano became a leader of the new school movement organized

⁹⁰⁵ Evidence of the importance of normal training for school reforms are the articles that are dedicated to criticizing normal training and to show alternative forms of teaching pedagogy in normal schools. Pablo Pizzurno "La escuela normal y el maestro," *La obra*, no. 12, Aug. 5, 1921; José Mas, "En torno a los nuevos egresados," *La obra*, no. 20-21, Dec. 20, 1921; "La reforma educacional y las escuelas normales," *La obra*, no. 47, Feb. 21, 1923; "En la escuela normal," *La obra*, no. 72, March 20, 1924; "Las escuelas normales y la nueva educación," *La obra*, no. 146, April 15, 1928; "Apuntes pedagógicos," *La obra*, no. 18, Nov. 5, 1928.

⁹⁰⁶ Belén Schneider "Abriendo nuevos caminos, gestando ideas: la historia de Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano" in *Maestra. Fundadora de la educación pública argentina*, Flavia Vitale ed. (Buenos Aires: Esi Lúdica, 2021).

under magazine *La obra*, and *Nueva era*.⁹⁰⁷ Her work in these magazines reached European audiences. For instance, in 1927, at an international Conference in Locarno, Switzerland, Adolfo Ferriere read out loud the pamphlet written by Guillén de Rezzano, on behalf of the League for New Education in Argentina.⁹⁰⁸

La escuela popular and *Fracisco Ferrer* were instrumental in the dissemination of the Modern School, but the magazine *La obra* became the most important publication for the dissemination of the new school ideas. On February 20, 1921, teachers published the first issue. Although its editors claimed it to be an independent magazine not related with any political party or religion, the language clearly stated the political goal of “renovating” the school. They wrote:

The fight has tempered our spirits. A good number of our people have broken the mold of the old prudish routine and have entered the little trodden path of action. Noble and intelligent vanguard of the teaching profession that has placed its experience, art and talent on the altar of an ideal: renewal. Burn your existence in it if you love humanity; make the material of our life burn like a flame.⁹⁰⁹

The magazine became the main media to express a movement of teachers who continued advocating for transformations of the school curricula. Guillén de Rezzano collaborated in *La obra*, along with other school reformers not considered as part of this movement by historians, such as Julio Barcos or Víctor Mercante. For instance, while historians have identified Mercante as representative of the positivist and

⁹⁰⁷ *Nueva era* was first published in July 1926, as the official magazine of the *Liga para la Nueva Educación* (League for New Education). The Argentine chapter joined a league functioning in Switzerland, France, Belgium, England, Bulgaria, Germany, Italy and Hungary.

⁹⁰⁸ “Congreso Internacional de Locarno,” *Nueva era*, no. 11, April 1927; “La escuela Argentina en Locarno. Contribución Argentina a la Realización de la Escuela Activa,” *Nueva era*, no. 13, June, 1927.

⁹⁰⁹ “La obra,” *La obra*, no. 1, February 20, 1921, 1.

normalist teachers that the new school opposed, *La obra* published his articles, including those who disseminated his laboratory experiments.⁹¹⁰

Guillén de Rezzano was instrumental in putting into practice the values of a new education. In February 1928, she launched a new section in *La obra* entitled “The New School in Action” where she propagandized teaching methods implemented in normal schools in Buenos Aires.⁹¹¹ In her words, the goal was to offer “information regarding the systems most disseminated around the world as well as its adaptations in our schools”⁹¹² Unlike Mercante, who attempted to find an uniform teaching method, Guillén de Rezzano warned the readers that in pedagogy there were no “absolute formulas,” and the information provided in those pages would not be as organized as she had wished since “investigation and experience are frequently untidy and chaotic.”⁹¹³ Instead of universal formulas, she believed each reformer should adapt the methods to the local schools. López’s reflections show an approach to knowledge-making that, unlike the experimental methods that Mercante practiced in the previous decades, emerged from the teachers’ direct observation and self-reflection.

⁹¹⁰ Carli, “The New School Movement in Argentina;” Adriana, Puiggrós, “La educación argentina desde la reforma Saavedra-Lamas hasta el fin de la década,” in *Escuela, democracia y orden (1916–1943)*, Adriana Puiggrós (ed.) (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1992). Víctor Mercante “Examen Antropométrico,” *La obra*, no. 27, April 5, 1922 and Víctor Mercante, “El examen psíquico,” *La obra*, no. 30, May 20, 1922, 9-10.

⁹¹¹ “The New School in Action” was composed of reports written by teachers and teachers-in-training that described with detail children’s activity and work, students and furniture distribution, and the bond established between teachers and students. Some articles seemed to be written by *La obra* reporters who visited the school and observed a common day in the new schools. Other articles showed teachers-in-training observations of a classroom. The section also published a conference by school reformers who reflected on her teaching methods and the school environment. *La escuela nueva en acción*,” *La obra* 8, no. 143, February 15, 1928, 21.

⁹¹² *Ibid.*

⁹¹³ *Ibid.*

As López in the previous decade, Guillén de Rezzano utilized her position as principal to experiment with new teaching methods. To experiment in the classroom was not to measure children's abilities to learn but to practice new assignments that departed from the knowledge on child psychology that teachers shared. Guillén de Rezzano wrote about conceptualized child as follows:

a) The child is a being in constant renovation with unexpected transformations that requires, not *a priori* systems, but adaptations successively renovated according to his needs (...); b) His level of attention is weak; it needs to be sustained by the child's favorite activities; c) His memory is sensorial; intuition should be the point of departure of all knowledge; d) His imagination is intense (...); e) His reasoning is limited due to the limitation of his ideas but he is sharp and fast as a consequence of this limitation; f) The child has a vivid sensibility; g) The child has extraordinary abilities of invention and construction; h) the child is capable of a subconscious activity of ancestral origin able to defeat, only if the education from outside does not destroy it.⁹¹⁴

In this definition of children, it is possible to see many categories disseminated by teachers in the previous decades. The studies on attention, imagination, and the senses conducted at the Laboratory of Psychopedagogy at Universidad Nacional de La Plata, constructed some consensus to categorize children's psychology. School reformers translated this knowledge into classroom activities. For instance, the premise that children had "extraordinary abilities of invention and construction" centered the learning process as working and playing.

Through her writing, Guillén de Rezzano popularized Ovide Decroly's "centers of interests" for a wider audience. The centers of interests proposed a reorganization of the school curricula that rejected the division under subjects and

⁹¹⁴ "La escuela nueva en acción," *La obra*, no. 143.

proposed that children instead learn through topics related to children's concrete needs such as housing and food. As explained by Guillén de Rezzano in her book *Los centros de interés en la escuela* (Centers of Interest in the School), this methodology consisted of a "series of school occupations that maintained children in constant activity, provided them the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and techniques of reading, writing, grammar, drawing, etc. according to their own capacities."⁹¹⁵

The methods applied by Guillén de Rezzano continued with a tradition of school reformers that prioritized children's movement and interests. The centers also contemplated the student's capacities in a way that respected children's timing and desire to learn. As in López's Escuela Modelo Sarmiento, under the Decroly's method "exercises of observation, experimentation, and construction, put children in contact with things."⁹¹⁶ At the Normal School no. 5 directed by Guillén de Rezzano, teachers experimented with new methods with children from six to eight years. From first to third grade, children learned in subjects divided into arithmetic; observation, experimentation, and construction; language; and physical exercises that included dance, manual work, and drawing.⁹¹⁷

In her attempt to educate future generations of teachers with new methods, Guillén de Rezzano showed specific classroom activities. Teachers in the city of Buenos Aires used cards to teach children how to read and write as if they were playing. The teacher distributed the "language box" to each student and gave them

⁹¹⁵ Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano, *Los centros de interés en la escuela* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1940), 15.

⁹¹⁶ Ibid.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid., 20

cards with the words that she wanted them to employ in the composition and grammar exercises. The vocabulary was divided into three categories: name (noun), quality (adjective) and actions (verb). Children put all the nouns in a column, next to them the qualities associated with the nouns, and in the last column children arrange verbs.⁹¹⁸ Children also used the language box to classify types of words according to their accent mark and amount of syllables.⁹¹⁹ According to reformers, the cards were beneficial since they taught children in an entertaining way. Almost like a game, children observed, imitated, ordered, reasoned, and classified information.

Following one of the new school principles that the learning process had to be creative and pleasurable, the articles described children's work in the classroom as recreational. In a visit to Escuela de Méjico in Buenos Aires, a student-teacher asserted that children were "constantly in the middle of tasks of creation and re-creation."⁹²⁰ She wrote:

It is unnecessary to say that the work was achieved with absolute happiness. The traditional task performed by each student with a set of cards finds a complement in the help that suddenly is offered by a classmate with naturality and kindness, indicating that the card is posed or chosen wrongly. We experience a big pleasure when we see scenes of children collaborating so fecund in the spiritual formation of the children."⁹²¹

⁹¹⁸ Guillén de Rezzano, *Los centros de interés*, 23-24.

⁹¹⁹ In another exercise the teacher presented a poster board with sentences. Children read the phrase a couple of times. Then, the teacher distributed "cards-words" and asked children to put the words in order in their lectern imitating the poster board. Once the children accommodated the words in the correct order, the teacher requested to start over. When the teacher saw that children identify the words rapidly and independently from each other, she distributed the cards-syllables and children repeated the same procedure now trying to put the syllables in order. In the last step, the teacher distributed cards-letters. "La escuela nueva en acción."

⁹²⁰ "Por las escuelas activas de Buenos Aires. Escuela Nro 7 del Consejo de Educación XIII, Republica de Méjico," *La obra*, no. 157, Oct. 15, 1928, 686.

⁹²¹ *Ibid.*

The description of children as working with happiness and in solidarity reassembles the narratives of *La Colmena*. In the new school, classroom activities promoted a new type of collaboration among children that allowed them to learn from a collective perspective. One teacher from Escuela Jose Manuel Estrada asserted: “the common life of children grouped in tables and chairs made this collaboration incessant and necessary. Instead of being considered as a crime, collaboration acquired in the new school a huge pedagogical value.”⁹²² The image of children collaborating and talking to each other stands in contrast with the classroom where children were reprimanded or even punished to turn and talk with their classmates⁹²³

From the perspective of female teachers, the new methods changed their teaching experiences. As Carli asserts, the new school movement resulted in a new identity for teachers, going from a disciplinary and rigid figure, to one that guided and accompanied children in their learning process.⁹²⁴ A teacher from the Escuela de Méjico in Buenos Aires mentioned the “huge pleasure” experienced by the teachers in the classroom as they saw the new methods working favorably. Marta Samatán offered a similar narrative when recalling the “winds of renovation” of the new school.⁹²⁵ She writes: “for me the event had a meaning of maximum importance. At last I found what until that moment I had only sensed: school and life together,

⁹²² “Por las escuelas activas de Buenos Aires. Escuela Nro. 4 del Consejo de Educación 1, José Manuel Estrada,” *La obra*, no. 155, Sept. 15, 1928, 595.

⁹²³ Two examples from chapter 3 are the boy who was punished by the teacher for turning around and talking with a classmate and the children who was supposedly corporally punished by the teacher for the same reason. Andrés Calcagno, *El niño y sus fiestas* (La Plata: Taller de Impresiones Oficiales, 1913), 171; Archivo Intermedio, Consejo Naional de Educación, Box 9, Exte 1550 “Denuncia castigo corporal,” 1888.

⁹²⁴ Carli, “The New School Movement in Argentina.”

⁹²⁵ Marta Samatán, *Campana y horario* (Rosario: Editorial Ruiz, 1939), 69.

united. That discovery made me happy (...) It was the only time of true joy that I have had in my career.⁹²⁶ Teacher's statements demonstrate the liberatory effects that methodological transformations, even in a small scale, had in their teaching experience.

By practicing the new methods, teachers embraced a new role in the classroom. In order to "respect the personality of the child and its autonomy," Guillén de Rezzano explained that the teacher:

1) Should be guidance that shows the path, "extend your hand" to save the hard steps, support when there is no energy, 2) should be in continuous physical, sensorial, and intellectual activity, 3) should put the child in contact with everything that could interest him/her, leaving him/her to penetrate personally in the truths that his/her brain is in condition of perceiving.⁹²⁷

For instance, articles portrayed that when children were working with the cards, "the teacher goes from one group to another and, if she notices an orthographic or conceptual mistake, the only thing she does is to indicate that the students compare what they wrote with the book or the cards."⁹²⁸ The card allowed the teacher not to directly tell children that they were wrong. Instead, teachers' suggestion was limited to "indicate," pointing out to the card for the children to notice their errors. A teacher interviewed by *La obra* asked the reader to imagine the "transcendence of all this compared with the correction systems that are used in many common schools where in the majority of the cases the correction is being made by the teacher, not by the student. This means a correction coming from the outside to the inside, materialized

⁹²⁶ Ibid. To refer to the union between school and life, Samatán uses the word "hermanadas" as united by "natural" or biological bonds of solidarity.

⁹²⁷ "La escuela nueva en acción."

⁹²⁸ "Por las escuelas activas de Buenos Aires. Escuela Nro 1 del C.E. del XVI, Coronel Olavarría," *La obra*, no. 156, Sept. 30, 1928, 637.

with shocking highlights for the student not to forget, followed by the repetition of the term five, ten, twenty times...”⁹²⁹ Another teacher asserted: “I prefer not to intervene when they are busy with a task. I do not want to hinder them. I show up next to them the least possible and only when I sense that they really need me.”⁹³⁰

The school in action or the “active school” literally translated into teachers’ movement in the classroom. Teachers’ constant movement from one group to another was central to destabilizing the spatial arrangement of the traditional classroom.

Defying the rigidity of the normalist teacher, articles explained:

the teacher moves throughout the classroom, which has no front or back since there is no desk or stage. She observes the work of everybody, she stands where her suggestions are needed, she sits next to the students who requires her teaching and there, with very few words, but with the eloquence of the facts, order the material, outlines the associations, and allows that the child perceives, according to the case, the similarity of difference, makes abstractions, judges, and reasons. The teachers prepare the path, the child goes through it.⁹³¹

In José Manuel Estrada School children in first grade learned arithmetic by playing the dice as the teacher “with all the prudence and with exquisite touch goes table by table and proves the results of the sum while in the classroom reigns a super intense activity. All the activity is interior, without the strength to translate it into gestures, corporal agitation, etc. This incessant work of thirty little children devoted to their tasks with an unspeakable seriousness is impressive...”⁹³² In these accounts, the

⁹²⁹ Ibid.

⁹³⁰ “Por las escuelas activas en Buenos Aires. Escuela Nro. 2 del Consejo Escolar VIII”, *La obra*, no. 159, Nov. 15, 1928, 782.

⁹³¹ “Un ensayo argentino,” *La obra*, no. 143, Feb. 15, 1928, 22.

⁹³² “Por las escuelas activas de Buenos Aires. Escuela Nro 4 del Consejo de Educación 1, José Manuel Estrada,” *La obra*, no. 155, Sept. 15, 1928, 596.

disciplinary role of teachers appeared in a more subtle way, almost aligned with the reference to teachers' "exquisite touch" to talk with children.

The new teaching role was embodied through a series of gestures and bodily postures that transformed the distant figure of the normalist teacher. As mentioned in the school chronicles, teachers' mobility had implications in the interactions between teachers and students. While the movement from one table to the other allowed teachers to observe children more closely, it also allowed for a more intimate relationship in the classroom. The pamphlet presented in Locarno, portraying the pedagogical labor of Guillén de Rezzano, evidence the same physical proximity that the one that López promoted in the Escuela Modelo Sarmiento.⁹³³ As we see in image 21, the teacher sat next to a student while the other classmates who share the table are forming words with "cards-syllables." In a gesture of intimacy, the teacher poses her left arm in the student's chair almost as if hugging the child. These glimpses into the quotidian practices in the classroom through pictures are not merely representations of the new school methods, but discourses through which school reformers sought to transform the role of teachers. It is possible to read the pamphlets and chronicles of the new school within Guillén de Rezzano's pedagogical goal of training teachers.

⁹³³ "La escuela Argentina de Locarno. Contribución argentina a la realización de la escuela activa," *Nueva era*, no. 13, June 1927.



Image 21. Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano
Source: *Nueva era*, no. 13, June 1927.



Image 22. Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano II
Source: *Nueva era*, no. 13, June 1927.



Image 23. Vista de la escuela antes de ser modificada
Source: *Nueva era*, no. 13, June 1927.

As educators around the world were making evident, the new school teaching methods required a new classroom spatial arrangement.⁹³⁴ For instance, to transform learning into a collaborative process children shared a table. Unlike the individual chairs and desks, round tables encouraged children to relate with each other and to even learn from each other. Bigger tables allowed group activities, favoring children's collaboration. The traditional arrangement of chairs in rows (image 15) was replaced with oval tables and chairs according to children's size.⁹³⁵ In addition, reformers incorporated cabinets to organize the school supplies: cards, notebooks, lecterns, games. According to reformers, the classroom should invite children to a pleasant experience, replicating the home. Plants, frames, cabinets, and regular tables tried to mimic a living-room where children play and learn. Guillén de Rezzano

⁹³⁴ Reformers like Maria Montessori expressed the limitations of traditional furniture. *La obra* published about this topic on multiple occasions. See: Maria Montessori, "Una remora. El banco escolar," *La obra*, no. 44 Dec. 1922; "Tratamiento profiláctico de la escoliosis en la escuela. El banco escolar," *La obra*, no. 25, March 1922; Luis Robin, "La silla y el banco," *La obra*, no. 150, June 15, 1928.

⁹³⁵ "La escuela Argentina de Locarno."

explained the reason behind this transformation: “Being convinced that the school has been and still is an organism in transition and that the home, nature, and society are the truly educational factors, we have looked for the way in which the school can be: home, nature, and society. In order to be home, the school has suppressed everything that is artificial, starting with the classic school furniture, replacing it with common furniture.”⁹³⁶

Because the implementation of the new methods required transformation in the material conditions of the classroom, Argentine educators faced serious challenges putting into practice the new school. Unlike Europe and the U.S. where the experimental schools were private, new school experiments in Argentina depended on public funds. According to Guillén de Rezzano pedagogical experiments in Buenos Aires occurred in a “field of limited action due to the current prescriptions. An extensive application of the Montessori, Decroly, and Dalton systems, would have demanded essential modifications in the building and a longer school journey in our schools.”⁹³⁷ While structural modifications in the school building did not occur, Argentine reformers changed the scale of their laboratory aiming to, at least, transform their classrooms advocating for modifications in the school furniture. But even smaller transformations would imply a budget that the government did not offer. As a result, in many cases reformers relied on the local community’s collaboration. For instance, in Parque Centenario at the Escuela Presidente Urriburu, Catalina B. de Barón donated furniture for children in the first grade. According to *La obra*, the

⁹³⁶ Ibid.

⁹³⁷ “Un ensayo argentino,” *La obra*, no. 143, Feb. 15, 1928, 21.

donation was a proof of the parents' interests in the reforms of the school.⁹³⁸ Yet, in working-class neighborhoods school reformers faced more constraints. Even if they managed to receive new furniture, teachers at Escuela Coronel Olavarria in Villa Urquiza, could not replace the traditional chairs since during the night the school functioned as an institution for adult education. Teachers did not complain about this impediment. Instead, they emphasized the "splendid presentation of the classrooms, with the cabinets divided into thirty-something compartments with individual spaces for the school supplies."⁹³⁹

When confronting the material impossibilities of public education in Buenos Aires, reformers ultimately posed more responsibilities on the teacher. A reformer from the School no. 2 acknowledged that the new school functioned in the first grade because of the teacher's "full adhesion to the principles of the new school, in conferences and in conversations with her colleagues."⁹⁴⁰ The teaching methods as promoted by Guillén de Rezzano did not require expensive school supplies. Yet, all the responsibility, labor, and energy was posed in the reformer who had to prepare the teaching materials. The multiple cards, poster boards, and other teaching materials used in class were in charge of the teacher. As explained by reformers in Escuela de Olavarría, "the active school require teachers that are truly teachers, in their soul, with a big capacity for sacrifice in the sense of stifling their vigorous personality for the sake of the one that grows every day in their disciples, assisting in a loving and smart

⁹³⁸ "Donación de un equipo de escuela activa," *La obra*, no. 149, May 1928.

⁹³⁹ "Por las escuelas activas de Buenos Aires. Escuela Nro 1 del C.E. del XVI, Coronel Olavarría."

⁹⁴⁰ "Más vale un ejemplo que mil argumentos," *Nueva era*, no. 14, Aug. 1927.

way.”⁹⁴¹ In this way, the pedagogies promoted and embraced by school reforms continued to put into women the burden of sacrificial labor for children’s education.

The new school movement in Argentina grew out of the individual and collective efforts of teachers like Guillén de Rezzano who made the classroom a laboratory to experiment with new methods of teaching. Her labor translating pedagogical theory from abroad, implementing reforms in the classrooms, and publishing her methods in books, pamphlets, and magazines, modeled for teachers a pedagogical praxis that did not end in the classroom and extended beyond national borders. Like López a decade earlier, female teachers in the 1920s demonstrated that women were not just implementers of state prerogatives but active participants in the debates regarding how to teach and how to conceptualize children. Their writing evidenced that women utilized their teaching experience as a source of knowledge, although their methods in observing children’s aptitudes differed from the experimental psychology inspired by positivism. As the editors from *Unión y labor* explained in 1909, “the fundamental point of scientific pedagogy must be the freedom of students in a way that allows the development of individual spontaneous manifestation of children.”⁹⁴² As the editors explained, “in vain we wait for the pedagogical renewal from the methodical examination of schoolchildren today, according to the guide offered by pedagogical anthropology and experimental psychology.”⁹⁴³ Guillén de Rezzano’s work helps understand how teachers

⁹⁴¹ “Por las escuelas activas de Buenos Aires. Escuela Nro 1 del C.E. del XVI, Coronel Olavarría.”

⁹⁴² “Metodo Montessori,” *Unión y labor*, no. 21, Oct. 19, 1909.

⁹⁴³ *Ibid.*

challenged *normalismo* and positivism not only as pedagogical practice but as an epistemological approach to study childhood.

Conclusions

This chapter reflected on the impacts of education in the role of women and the transformations that women led in education. I showed that teaching was, for women across the Americas, an opportunity to travel abroad, innovate teaching methods, and theorize about pedagogy and child development. Argentine teachers found a model to follow in U.S. teachers who crucially contributed to the foundation of normal schools. Many teachers used their teaching diploma as a platform to access spaces traditionally occupied by men, including leadership positions in the schools, university classrooms, and editorial boards. For women, teaching provided a window towards feminist organizing through magazines and congresses. By the turn of the twentieth century, women started graduating from universities with doctoral diplomas. In alliance with teachers, they built national and transnational networks to advocate for women's emancipation. This chapter explored women's collective organizing and the feminist agenda on education through the *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional*. At the congress, teachers expressed their visions of a practical, scientific, and less authoritarian education and socialized their teaching experiences. Educators like Jennie Howard and Ernestina López illuminate the characteristics of many participants of the women's movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. Professional, middle class, European descendant women from Buenos Aires built an authoritative voice in a male dominated world by positioning

themselves in a hierarchical position vis-a-vis working class mothers who needed to be educated in school.

At the same time, women utilized their positions of power to advocate for children's liberation. Through the work of Ernestina López and Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano, this chapter analyzed how the transnational circulation of ideas and people prompted school reforms that challenged the authoritarian practices of *normalismo*. The case studies reflect that women innovated teaching practices in a moment of the emergence of feminist and new school movements utilizing classrooms as sites for pedagogical experimentation. The laboratories López and Guillén de Rezzano constructed were different from the one built by Víctor Mercante in the Universidad Nacional de La Plata. The knowledge that emerged from the classroom was not based on statistical analysis, intelligence tests, and anthropometric measurements but relied on teachers' close observation of children's activity. In doing so this chapter demonstrates that women advanced pedagogical theory and practice utilizing the tools of observation and experimentation learned in the normal schools while challenging the authoritarian and distant figure of the teacher-scientist.

Conclusions

The most lasting teaching experiment taking place under the influence of the new school movement occurred in the province of Santa Fe, between 1930 and 1950. The “Serene School” was led by two sisters, Olga and Leticia Cossettini. Through memoirs, interviews, and epistolary exchanges with educators from Latin America and Europe, both sisters popularized their teaching methods centered on children’s freedom of movement and expression.⁹⁴⁴ As with pioneers from previous decades, the Cossettini sisters innovated pedagogically while disseminating their classroom experience through their writing. Olga Cossettini conceptualized children as an “inexhaustible force that explores, observes, researches, works, and loves.”⁹⁴⁵ The child “starts to know, to form their science because he started to love; only love makes the discovery of the more hidden secrets of nature, and the child feels love of nature.”⁹⁴⁶ In the Serene School teachers encouraged children to learn from outdoor expeditions, using local resources such as gardens, the Paraná river, factories, and *vecinos* with historical knowledge of the city. In Olga Cossettini’s words, the “Serene School” was a “vital school,” where the classroom expanded and the school became the world.⁹⁴⁷ The school opened to the world through school assemblies where children exposed their knowledge on particular subjects, debated among peers, as an audience of children from other grades, parents, and teachers served as the audience.

⁹⁴⁴ I found epistolary exchanges between Olga Cossettini and Uruguayan teacher Jesualdo Sosa. Archivo Pedagógico Cossettini. In addition, Cossettini mentions her exchanges with Italian educator Giuseppe Lombardo Radice. Olga Cossettini, *Sobre un Ensayo de Escuela Serena* (Santa Fe: Instituto Social de la Universidad del Litoral, 1935).

⁹⁴⁵ Cossettini, *Sobre un Ensayo de Escuela Serena*, 47

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

During the assemblies, children proposed the agenda, determined the order of the topics, and took notes on a board. Children learned to sustain an argument, provide evidence, ask questions, and respect their classmates' opinions. Beyond the school, the children disseminated their knowledge in "cultural missions" through which they taught the local community about a particular topic, generally from the sciences.

The "Serene School" was the result of many decades of trial and error in the classroom and continued inspiring generations of teachers to come. When, in 1939, Marta Samatán wrote *Campana y horario*, she dedicated her book to Olga Cossetini asserting that the Serene School "has been the fulfillment of my desires, the ideal school that I had dreamed of. That's why I delight in it as if it were mine."⁹⁴⁸ As a model school for teachers and intellectuals throughout Latin America, including Uruguayan José Sosa and Chilean Gabriela Mistral, the "serene school" demonstrates that women's practices of teaching and research were transmitted from generation to generation of school reformers.⁹⁴⁹

This dissertation proposed the school laboratory as a category to analyze the relationship between science and teaching in the making of modern Argentina. The school laboratory, as I showed, illuminates the contention over children's education in a moment where children, education, and science brought hope to the future of the nation. As in other Latin American countries, the promises of modernity came with

⁹⁴⁸ Marta Samatán, *Campana y horario*.

⁹⁴⁹ I see these practices through a genealogy of school reformers that appeared in *Vida Femenina* in the 1930s and 1940s. For instance, collaborators of the magazine wrote on reformers Gabriela de Coni and Fenia Chertkoff maestra. "Tres luchadoras," *Vida femenina*, April 15, 1935. They also praised the work of Raquel Camaña, Isidoro Ayala, "Mujer, naturaleza y arte," *Vida Femenina*, no. 75-76, Jan.-Feb. 1940. Samatán celebrated the serene school, Marta Samatan, "Un ensayo escolar santafesino," *Vida Femenina*, no. 27, Oct. 1935.

an ideal of whitening for the newly arriving immigrants to the cities and the rural populations throughout the country. As a scientific endeavor, the school laboratory pursued the whitening of the nation through children's bodies. Chapter 1 shows that it was in the school more than in any other institution where elites sought to mold its population, to "normalize" it. Student-teachers, who entered the normal school as adolescents, were instructed in their missionary role to improve the nation. Once they graduated, a generation of teachers trained under the influence of positivism, taught thousands of children how to speak, move, and labor. *Normalismo* promoted an orderly and hierarchical school—and therefore society—where children respected their superiors and complied with the rules.

The process of universal schooling, which in Argentina resulted in the foundations of normal schools by the national government, represented an opportunity for women to acquire material and cultural capital. Through national and provincial fellowships, normal schools gave women the promise of social mobility and certain economic autonomy from men. From the perspective of the state, women were targeted as mediators between state prerogatives on hygiene, labor, and gender norms, and the "savage children" from poor families. As I showed in chapter 3, women's authoritative voice in pedagogical matters grew in collaboration with a disciplinary state project, but women themselves suffered the consequences of a hierarchical school system that supervised their bodies and kept them away from the hierarchical positions within schools and the National Council of Education. Primary schools subjected children *and* teachers to a disciplinary and punitive system that embarrassed and mistreated children when they misbehaved and forced teachers to

navigate a hierarchical system that, at times, ended with their expulsion from the school and the community. Yet, women fought patriarchal power making arguments against the school inspector, making alliances with the local communities, and petitioning for fair treatment.

While recognizing the limitations that women faced in building their authority in the school, I identified that Argentine *normalismo* gave teachers the possibility of participating in scientific debates. The normal school put teachers into contact with contemporary scientific theories and prepared them to write, speak in public, and make arguments. In the practice school, teachers were encouraged to observe children, to experiment with new methods, and to critique. Thus, the school laboratory opens the possibility to understand how women, first generation students, from immigrant parents, came into contact with science. Throughout this dissertation science appeared as scientific knowledge disseminated in the school such as the medical discourses of *higienismo*, or the evolutionary theories that circulated in the normal school which challenged religious ideas. I identify science from the perspective of the practices of observation and experimentation that teachers developed in the classroom. I show that through observation and experimentation, teachers promoted different types of laboratories both inside and outside state-sponsored education.

By the turn of the century teachers transformed the classroom into a laboratory of experimental psychology. The laboratory was the product of teachers' creative endeavors in conversation with transnational studies on child psychology and criminality. The national context of mass migration along with state efforts of

universalizing education gave Argentine teachers a unique opportunity to transform the classroom into a laboratory to study children's behavior. As I trace in chapter 2, the study of children, as led by Víctor Mercante and many women in Buenos Aires in the first decades of the twentieth century, had lasting consequences in the history of teaching. Educators were encouraged to teach children obedience and self-control on the premise that children were potential criminals. Laboratory practices reinforced the role of teachers as a distant observer of children. Part of a network of scholars that studied intelligence, Mercante and his mentees classified children's bodies and mental abilities from intelligent to "retarded." Thus, the school laboratory contributes to understanding the role of schooling in the history of race in Argentina. Children were racialized in the classroom through anthropometric studies that measured their muscular strength, weight, vision, hearing, and "tendencies" to work or steal. From a pedagogical perspective, teachers explained the need to study children to better educate children based on their abilities. Thus, the knowledge that emerged from the laboratories of experimental psychology would serve school reformers in the 1920s to advocate for transformations in the school.

Outside state-sponsored education, teachers utilized the classrooms to experiment with new pedagogies. Private schools, built in alliance with workers and activists functioned as laboratories for teachers to practice alternative pedagogies that challenged hegemonic practices of *normalismo*. The Argentine context of working-class organization had impacts in the school. Teachers joining the socialist, anarchist, and feminist movements organized under leagues, published in magazines, traveled abroad to learn about alternative teaching methods. The school experiments that I

analyzed in chapter 4 demonstrate that teachers used scientific education to complain about the incomplete process of secularization in public education and to re-imagine the school building, the school curricula, and teaching methods. Modern School advocates, analyzed in chapter 4, incorporated new assignments, gave children more freedom of movement, emphasized the teaching of hygiene and physical education. However, the core of their views on children, as in need of help from an educated elite of professionals, remained untouched. Although the practice of teaching proved to be more disciplinary than the theoretical discourses promoted in educational magazines and conferences, teachers' pedagogical endeavors outside state-sponsored education contributed to popularizing critiques that sought to liberate children from what they perceived as an authoritarian education.

Women played a crucial role in translating pedagogical critiques circulating outside state-sponsored education and beyond the national borders into concrete classroom practices. Challenging what teachers saw as authoritarian practices, women sought to democratize the classroom. Chapter 5 proposes the school as a laboratory for women's emancipation considering the links between *normalismo* and *feminismo*. As with any other student in the country, in normal schools, student-teachers socialized in female spaces and were in contact with feminist discourses that praised education as the path toward economic and intellectual emancipation. Many teachers contributed to feminist organizing through student organizations, magazines, and international congresses. Through the lenses of Ernestina López it is possible to see that teachers sought to articulate the demands of the women's movement towards a practical and integral education into a pedagogical approach towards teaching girls.

In opposition to the pedagogies of cruelty that dominated the school, women proposed a pedagogy based on love and empathy towards children. I suggest that a maternal pedagogy emerged in the first decade of the twentieth century that can be understood in relationship with the *maternalismo político* (political maternalism) of women claiming for children's rights and protection from the state.⁹⁵⁰ If women were responsible for children's education and had been picked as the secular apostolate for modern Argentina, they would teach children on their own terms, with the methods they considered more appropriate to children's nature. This pedagogy predated the core principles of the new school movement. It was a pedagogy of networking, committed to opening the school to the local natural world and to local and transnational institutions. It respected children's expression and movement. Although these alternative pedagogies remained as an unfinished project and did not achieve hegemony, women transformed the school into a space for political emancipation. Thus, I propose that women's commitment to critical pedagogies needs to be understood within a broader Latin American contribution to mass popular education theorized by Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire.

The process of knowledge making in the different school laboratories presents similarities and differences. While teachers aimed to experiment in a controlled environment, using standardized tests and scientific studies on children developed by women in Universidad Nacional de La Plata (UNLP), feminist teachers in the 1910s and leaders of the new school movement in the 1920s, observed children's

⁹⁵⁰ Marcela Nari, *Políticas de maternidad y maternalismo político. Buenos Aires 1890-1940* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2004).

spontaneous reactions. The type of knowledge they created about children and how to communicate the results to a broader audience differed. Experimental psychology at UNLP analyzed children within a group seeking to find “abnormalcy.” The knowledge that emerged from teachers’ direct observations and active participation in the classroom, characterized children’s process of learning beyond the mathematical results, while contemplating children’s needs and interests. These studies on childhood had similar pedagogical interests and ultimately drew on and contributed to child psychology. However, the representation of children that emerged from the publications and the role of teachers involved in the process of knowledge-making responded to a different understanding of children —as potential criminals or as naturally good.

My dissertation proved the conflictive relationships between pedagogical theory and practice. As an arena of conflicting authorities, the school was never the perfect disciplinary model planned by the elites or the utopian regenerative space imagined by activists. On the ground, teachers faced serious limitations in successfully performing their tasks. Ill-suited buildings with insufficient classrooms demonstrate that in many ways *higienismo* remained as an ideal more than a reality in the daily life of the school. Despite the extremely high stakes of their work, teachers had to cover their material needs with scarce salaries, often in distant towns and far from their families. When imagining structural reforms within the school or alternative schools outside state-sponsored education, school reformers encountered the material impossibilities of building new classroom spaces. In comparison with their counterparts from the U.S. and Europe, Argentine teachers lacked the

technologies and resources for the school laboratory. Perhaps the lack of resources explains the Latin American ingenuity and creativity teachers developed to teach, study children, and implement new methodologies. Argentine teachers show that innovative techniques to study children such as intelligence tests, and innovative assignments to teach manual work could be developed with school supplies such as chronometers, rulers, and papers.

I located the schools in Argentina within a transnational network of pedagogical ideas and practices. From the founding of normal schools the project of modernizing Argentina was transnational. Throughout the dissertation I showed that the connections with the U.S. and Europe inspired pedagogical innovation. Yet, Argentine teachers did not uncritically copy imported models. They broadly read pedagogical theory produced abroad and adapted it to local contexts. With less material resources than teachers abroad they were creative in creating laboratories with accessible resources. More importantly, Argentine teachers advocated for their own space in the transnational production of knowledge, positioning Argentine schools as legitimate objects of study. While at times Latin American teachers tried to emulate European models, they saw Latin America as the place where modernity would take place vis-a-vis traditional Europe. Still, many teachers reproduced problematic hierarchies between North and South, contributing to the racialization of children's bodies in the school.

This dissertation opens questions for future research. One of the aspects that requires further study is the connection between Argentina and the U.S. While I traced this relationship through the journey of U.S. teacher Jennie Howard in

Argentina and the travels of Ernestina López to the U.S., many teachers continued traveling to the Teachers College to learn from the new school methods practiced by U.S. School reformers, including Víctor Mercante, Ernesto Nelson, and Olga Cossettini who were involved in Pan American relations that connected children and teaching practices across the Americas. Related with the transnational circulation of women's ideas in the school, I would like to further investigate the reception of Maria Montessori's pedagogy in Argentina. Her laboratory of experimental pedagogy influenced Argentine feminist and new school teachers in the 1920s. Another aspect that requires further research in the archives is the relationship with the school and the local community analyzed in chapter 3. The sources I have collected during this research that I was not able to incorporate in this dissertation along with others that I identified during the pandemic, would allow me to further explore teacher political participation in the local communities and the resistance they found from the local communities and the authorities of the CNE.

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