



Rural schools in Argentina (1905-1960). A panoramic look¹

Las escuelas rurales en Argentina (1905-1960). Una mirada panorámica

Escolas rurais na Argentina (1905-1960). Um olhar panorâmico

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Abstract

The study of the History of Education has been neglected in Argentine historiography. In these last two decades, research has multiplied, however, we know little about rural schools. In this article I investigate official sources from the National Education Council, in order to analyze what were the diagnoses and the problems that they pointed out about schools sites of the campaign and what responses they produced. My hypothesis is that even in 1960 the objectives demanded in the education laws for rural areas are far from being fulfilled, and illiteracy continues to be a drama without solution. It is a panoramic and exploratory inquiry.

Keyword: Rural Schools. Illiteracy. Argentina.

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Resumen

El estudio de la historia de la educación ha sido descuidado en la historiografía Argentina. En estas dos últimas décadas se han multiplicado las investigaciones, sin embargo, poco sabemos sobre las escuelas rurales. En este artículo indago fuentes oficiales del Consejo Nacional de Educación, con el objeto de analizar cuáles fueron los diagnósticos y los problemas que señalaron sobre las sedes escolares de la campaña y que respuestas produjeron. Mi hipótesis es que aún en 1960 los objetivos exigidos en las leyes de educación para las zonas rurales están lejos de cumplirse, y el analfabetismo sigue siendo un drama sin solución. Se trata de una indagación panorámica y exploratoria.

Palabras claves: Escuelas Rurales. Analfabetismo. Argentina.

Resumo

O estudo da história da educação foi negligenciado na historiografia argentina. Nessas duas últimas décadas, as pesquisas se multiplicaram, porém, pouco se sabe sobre as escolas rurais. Neste artigo investigo fontes oficiais do Conselho Nacional de Educação, a fim de analisar quais foram os diagnósticos e os problemas que apontaram sobre os sites escolares da campanha e quais as respostas que, produziram. Minha hipótese é que mesmo em 1960 os objetivos exigidos nas leis de educação para o meio rural estão longe de ser cumpridos, e o analfabetismo continua sendo um drama sem solução. É uma investigação panorâmica e exploratória.

Palavras chaves: Escolas rurais. Analfabetismo. Argentina.

Introduction

The history of Education has always been the great forgotten in Argentine historiography. Undoubtedly, there are very relevant studies, but they are scarce and limited to very specific topics and periods.

It is only in the last 20 years that a significant advance can be seen in the production of research on the history of education in Argentina. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the history of rural schools records little research.

Almost all the bibliography that I use for this exploration is verified between 2007 and 2020. The writings on rural venues are focused on some provinces, and limited to certain areas of said territories. Studies of the province of Entre Ríos (Mayer, 2014), of Córdoba (Cragolino, 2013, 77-96), of La Pampa (Ferrari, 2014, 47-68; Billorou, 2015), and on all of Buenos Aires (Bustamante Vismara, 2007, 17-40; Bustamante Vismara, 2007b; Bustamante Vismara, 2016, 50-71; Gutiérrez, 2007, Lionetti, 2010; De Marco, 2014, 284-312; and Petitti, 2016). There are inquiries that stop at the training of normal rural teachers (Brumat, 2010; Rodríguez, 2019; and Rodríguez, 2020), and others that have traced very useful periodization for the study of rural schools in Argentina (Ascaloni, 2007, 373-424; Ascaloni, 2012, 309-324; and Ascaloni, 2017, 43-68).

It is enough to review these works to visualize an enormous advance in relation to the schools of the campaign, today we know much more than we could know twenty or thirty years ago, however, studying the history of rural schools in Argentina is still a question slope: we barely see the tip of an iceberg. In this article I will try to go a little further in this regard.

I am interested in investigating official sources, and for this I have selected articles and reports published by one of the areas of the public education system: the National Education Council (hereinafter: CNE). I analyze some of this annual reports and writings published in his publication organ, *The Monitor of Common Education*; and the Conference exclusively dedicated to rural schools, organized by this same organization in 1960.

In recent decades I have specialized in the history of the so-called normalism of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, limited to its associations, its schools, and the policies of different governments.

I have stopped in recent years to investigate the experiences of popular schools and popular normal schools in the provinces of Corrientes and Buenos Aires (Herrero, 2011, 63-84; and Herrero, 2018, 123-140).

One issue always remains in my mind: the training of teachers for rural schools, and the very situation of these venues. I decided, then, to open a new line of research around normalism and in particular the study of rural schools. My research always articulates the approach of the history of ideas and the new political history, I do the same in this new inquiry, which will be exploratory and panoramic.

I was forced to draw a picture from 1905, when the National Education Law was enacted to correct the drama of illiteracy in rural areas, until 1960, another key stage where education governments state that campaign headquarters are the great Argentine educational problem.

This panoramic approach has allowed me to deduce a hypothesis that I will try to endorse with a series of documents: in the late 1930s and 1960s, both the mandate of the national education law and the objectives of the governments for rural schools are far to be fulfilled and the drama of illiteracy continues to be a problem that is difficult to solve. From law no. 1420 of 1884 to law no. 4874 of 1905.

According to article 5 of the National Constitution of 1853, reformed in 1860, the provinces are responsible for the common or primacy education of the Argentine Republic. The scant compliance with this legal mandate occurs in a precise context. For a better understanding I will make a very limited overview.

Studies of political history and economic history have confirmed, by way of consensus, that armed conflicts prevail throughout the 19th century, a fact that began with the War of Independence against Spain from May 1810, and continues since 1818, a once defeated the Spanish armies. There is a transition from revolutionary war to another among the elites of the different regions of the country. The provincial states spend the scarce budget on weapons and other supplies for the militias, and the policies that today we would call public, for example on education, are always more declarative than effective.

Only in the second half of the 19th century and with the crystallization of what is called the second phase of the industrial revolution, different European or North American state slowly transformed into economies, which today we call capitalist and imperialist, and they need countries that consume their manufactures and, at the same time, demand raw materials. In the Argentine case, Great Britain was the main imperialist power that sold its manufactures and demanded its products from the campaign (products such as linen, wheat or meat, were exported from Argentina to different countries of the world and turned it into what was called “the granary of the world”).

With this international division of labor, Argentina, at the end of the 19th century, manages to become a modern society in many aspects, and its lands acquire an economic value like never before.

From the 1860s, approximately, the arrival of a powerful European mass immigration took place, and between 1870 and the beginning of 1880, a civil society that could feed the public treasury crystallized in some areas of the country, especially those on the coast from different provinces, and the nation.

At that time, the wars had a much smaller dimension, during the 70s the Argentine government signed border treaties with all the border countries with the exception of Chile, and carried out the so-called “desert campaigns” south of Buenos Aires and north of Santa Fe, exterminating communities of the so-called “Indians” or “savages” (typical words of the time which opposed the original peoples with the peoples of the “white race”, in their eye the race of civilization). With these “campaigns” the nation considerably increases its territory at the time of greatest increase in land value.

Since 1880, the nation state and the provinces have had resources like never before to put into practice the legal mandate of primary education, required in the national Constitution.

This meant that engineers, doctors, and educators entered state positions in the last two decades to define health, educational, and engineering policies; and in fact these doctors, engineers and educators become officials at different levels of the provincial states and the nation.

It is at this time that education laws are enacted in the provinces. The first, in 1875, is enacted in the province of Buenos Aires, and then from 1880 in all the other provinces, the last being Cordoba in 1896.

In 1880 the province of Buenos Aires was federalized, and the city became the Federal Capital of the republic, in turn, the territories obtained with the so-called “desert campaigns” became National Territories.

This supposes a legal vacuum because it was not foreseen in the Constitution of 1853 and its reform of 1860. The national state dictates a law in 1884 n. 1420, where he is in charge of primary instruction in the Federal Capital and National Territories.

The CNE, created in 1881, is the body in charge of enforcing this law.

In the debates in the Pedagogical Congress of 1882 and in the discussions of 1883 and 1884 that produced the law n. 11420, it had been made clear that the idea spread in the campaigns that supposes that just knowing how to read, write and count was enough

was part of a past stage of history, and that the nineteenth century defined as modern, demanded a system of public instruction where the students are trained in a school cycle, that is why the instruction had to be, inexorably, gradual and compulsory, and for it to be compulsory, the provincial and national states had to take charge that the conditions are given for the students to access and complete their education, and free education was presented as the other great requirement².

It must be pointed out, then, that mere literacy is questioned from the beginning, the objective is much more than literacy, it consists of training individuals for republican and modern life in a compulsory school year.

These observations are expressly noted in all education laws, those enacted in the provinces and in the nation.

In this work I will stop at law n. 1420, issued in 1884 and intended for the Federal Capital and National Territories. It is established in article 1, that “The school has the sole purpose of simultaneously promoting and directing the moral, intellectual, and physical development of every child from six to fourteen years of age”. In article 2, it provides that “Primary education must be compulsory, free, gradual, and given in accordance with the precepts of hygiene.” And in Article 5: it specifies that “The school obligation supposes the existence of free public school available to children of school age.” In article 6, it refers to the “minimum of compulsory education”, where knowing how to read and write is only the beginning of the school year. Let’s read this article:

The minimum compulsory education includes the following subjects: reading and writing, arithmetic (the four rules of integers, and knowledge of the decimal metric system and the law of coins, weights and measures); particular geography of the Republic and notions of universal geography, particular history of the Republic and notions of general history; national language; morality and civility, notions of hygiene, notions of mathematical, physical and natural sciences; notions of drawing and vocal music; gymnastics, and knowledge of the National Constitution.

For girls, knowledge of handicrafts and domestic economy will also be mandatory. For men, knowledge of the simplest military exercises and evolutions and evolutions, and in the campaign, notions of agriculture and livestock (Law 1420. 1884)

² Santa Olalla, one of the congressmen of the Pedagogical Congress in 1882, affirms that "There are people who still think that in the Campaign Schools only reading, writing and counting should be taught", a conception, in his opinion, typical, of another historical stage of social evolution (Santa Olalla, 1882, 401). These people, adds Santa Olalla, do not know how to differentiate “the times when tinder and sulfur straw were used, with the time of electricity and telephones. In a word, they are unaware of the true object of education” (Santa Olalla, 1882, 401). The error of interpretation, in the eyes of Santa Olalla, lies in the fact that there is a relationship between society and education, and these opinions disassociate one from the other: they speak of an education that does not correspond to the evolution of societies at the end of the century XIX. What is it that distinguishes, in the reasoning of this congressman, the "current educational stage" of 1882? For Santa Olalla, these people are unaware that "humanity is subject to the law of progress, and therefore, the child who was previously driven like an automaton, without exercising any intellectual faculty other than memory (...) today is driven by procedures modern, as being thinking (...) Teaching to read, write and count is to teach little more than nothing, because that is equivalent to putting in the hands of unconscious people, instruments of which they do not know how to use and that, therefore, get moldy soon, not knowing how or when to apply them profitably” (Santa Olalla, 1882, 401).

As can be seen, reading and writing are indicated at the beginning, because it is a requirement for them to be able to learn the other compulsory subjects linked to the training of citizens, their rights and obligations, learning about the constitution, training in hygiene and care of the body, training for the defense of the homeland in case it is threatened and training for work (at the time it was said “for the fight for life”), in addition, girls are trained to be mothers and educate their children as citizens and patriots.

In the case of field schools, subjects linked to agriculture and livestock are specified, at the time of the country’s greatest economic expansion, thanks to agricultural and livestock exports.

Illiteracy rates were undoubtedly alarming in the 1880s, the majority of the population was, and a minimum of inhabitants and citizens were literate, but the objective of the provincial states and the nation consisted of training for the insertion of the child and of the adult in a modern and republican world, that is why a school cycle and a gradual, free and compulsory education are proposed.

In the case of rural areas, itinerant schools are proposed because it was very expensive to establish schools and maintain them over time. This is specified in article 11: “Mobile schools, in campaigns where, due to the population being widely scattered, it is not possible to establish fixed schools with advantages”. And in article 12, a more limited number of compulsory subjects is proposed as a minimum: “it will include these branches: reading, writing, arithmetic (the first four rules and the metric system), morality and civility, notions of the national language, national geography, national history; explanation of the National Constitution, and teaching of the objects of the most common objects that are related to the industry of the students of the students of the school” (Law 1420. 1884).

A question orders this inquiry: is this legal command fulfilled in the provinces and in the nation?

In 1905, Senator Manuel Láinez, representative of the province of Buenos Aires, presented a project in the national congress to reform the public education system, since the level of illiteracy was more than 70% in the different areas of the country, a fact that indicated in his eyes that the provincial states could not take charge of the mandate of article 5 of the constitution. Said proposal was not accepted in this way because it violated, in the eyes of the legislators, the autonomy of the provinces, and finally it was agreed that the nation could establish primary schools in the provinces that requested it. The law n. 4874, it was called the “Láinez law” or “rural and field schools”.

The same enactment of the law, in addition to the census statistics, confirmed that in 1905, the drama of illiteracy remained, and the education laws that alluded to a compulsory, free and gradual school cycle were not fulfilled. Now, what do the CNE reports say?³

³ “The sanction of Law 4874 had as its origin a fact that with just reason had come to alarm the high authorities of the Nation: in the Argentine provinces approximately half of the children of school age did not attend any school, because they did not they had within their reach or because the existing ones did not have enough capacity to admit everyone (...) some had made a considerable effort to bring their schools up to their current demands, but even the most advanced still needed to double their school budget, and none were in a position to do so. In this situation of things, the H. Congress of the Nation, dictates on October 19, 1905, the law 4874 that endows the National Council with faculties and provides it with means to “establish directly, in the provinces that request it, elementary, mixed infant and rural schools, limiting their course to the minimum established by article 12 of the Common Education Law and indicating as a criterion to determine their location “the percentage of illiterates, resulting from the lists presented by the provinces to receive the school subsidy” Report 1909, 53) In the same report it is stated that all the provinces request these schools except Buenos Aires in the first year, “Only the one in Buenos Aires delayed its accession until the end of 1907” (Report 1909, 53).

In the first place, the official who makes the report recalls what the situation of the public education system was like in 1905, when Senator Láinez proposed a project to respond to the non-compliance with education laws both in the province and in the nation. In the tone and information offered, the school drama narrated by the CNE official can be appreciated:

The sanction of Law 4874 had as its origin a fact that had rightly alarmed the high authorities of the Nation: in the Argentine provinces, approximately half of the children of school age did not attend any school, because they did not have one within their reach or because the existing ones did not have enough capacity to admit everyone (...) some had made a considerable effort to bring their schools up to their current demands, but even the most advanced still needed to double their school budget, and none were in a position to do so. In this situation of things, the H. Congress of the Nation, dictates on October 19, 1905, the law 4874 that endows the National Council with faculties and provides it with means to “establish directly, in the provinces that request it, elementary, mixed infant and rural schools, limiting their course to the minimum established by article 12 of the Common Education Law and indicating as a criterion to determine their location “the percentage of illiterates, resulting from the lists presented by the provinces to receive the school subsidy (...) Only the one in Buenos Aires delayed its accession until the end of 1907 (Informe, 1909, 53).

Added to this drama is another: teacher training for rural schools. A major problem was focused on the poor training of teachers for rural schools, and worse still there was another enormously greater difficulty: teachers cannot adapt to rural areas, and their permanence was always very limited in time.

It is extremely noteworthy the response proposed by the official, which reveals the precariousness of state agencies to impose an effective policy. The official says:

But the training of a staff that fully responds to the needs of national schools, most of them in rural neighborhoods, difficult to access and with very limited resources, is a problem that I do not consider solved but only partially. The desideratum would be the mixed staff, since the school to serve the entire school population must necessarily be mixed; and going a step further, I would say that the ideal would be, in this respect, a marriage of teachers, or at least of people with teaching skills: teaching would thus be better attended in all its phases, and the school would instill in the neighborhoods the confidence and the respect that are indispensable for an educational action, capable of penetrating from the classroom to the home. But in order to achieve this, it would be necessary to be able to offer these teachers even acceptable housing. Under current conditions, only single men, or people living in the same locality, can accept positions in the schools of the most remote point (Report, 1909, 66).

The answer focuses on the male teacher, however, after indicating it, it points out a new problem:

On the other hand, there is little male element of sufficient preparation and the teachers who graduate in the normal schools, generally, cannot accept positions outside the localities where their respective families reside. This explains why, for schools with a relatively good situation, applicants abound to such an extent that there has been no lack of opportunity to offer ten or fifteen candidates for a single vacancy. On the other hand, it has been necessary to look for the candidate for the isolated school, and it was not always possible to carry an element with all the conditions that were desired (Report, 1909, 66).

From the difficult-to-solve problem of the teaching staff, the report moves on to the other great difficulty: the students do not come to school, and those who do drop out in the first grade, and the school year is never completed because the students have to work with their parents.

Box: Educating.

Provincias	Educandos	1er grado	2do grado	3er grado	4to grado
Catamarca	2878	2234	644	---	---
Córdoba	3229	2516	685	28	---
Corrientes	4386	3424	808	154	---
Entre Ríos	3144	2758	360	26	---
Jujuy	1110	1010	100	----	---
La Rioja	4008	2786	1121	101	---
Mendoza	2455	1827	628	----	----
Salta	2578	2068	422	88	---
San Juan	3486	3486	----	---	---
San Luis	2953	1902	829	222	---
Santa Fe	2865	2406	393	46	20
Sgo del Estero	2421	2092	329	---	---
Tucumán	2751	2163	547	41	---

Fuente: *Educación común en la Capital, Provincias y Territorios Nacionales. Años 1906-1907. Informe presentado el Ministerio de Instrucción Pública*, Buenos Aires, Talleres Gráficos de la Penitenciaría Nacional, 1909, 67-68.

The inspector, reading his statistics, points out: “it turns out that each teacher corresponds to 59 students. In this regard, Catamarca, Corrientes, and San Juan lead the way with 70, 69, and 66 students, respectively, and Salta, Jujuy, and San Luis come last, where the respective figures are 42, 43, and 44” (Informe, 1909, 68). In no case do the students attend the school year, only a few months “At the beginning the course always takes time to normalize, and towards the end it decreases significantly” (Report, 1909, 68).

The causes would be several: “the neglect of parents who do not understand the advantages of education, the extreme poverty of the inhabitants of certain regions, the long distances and the scarcity of means of locomotion” (Report, 1909: 69).

Added to these causes is another: child labour. It is notable that the report does not describe it as illegal for children to work since there was a law in this regard.

The report states: “the extraordinary work of the harvest season and other tasks in the field; all these, and many others that would be long to list, are factors that, permanently or temporarily, determine sensitive fluctuations in school attendance” (Report, 1909, 68-69).

When speaking of rural areas, aboriginal communities are also referred to, called by officials: tribes, savages, Indians, indigenous element, etc. On the one hand, they are defended because their intention is that they should be educated, and nationalized⁴, and on the other hand, the typical racist gaze of those years appears⁵. Did this situation change in the 1930s?

1930-1939

At the beginning of the 30's, the national authorities considered the national authorities considered the need to hold a major conference to deal with an educational drama: illiteracy⁶.

The origin of this national conference stems from a letter from the President of the Republic, Agustín Justo, dated June 19, 1943, to the Department of Public Instruction, the body that finally organized the conference in Buenos Aires in October and November 1934⁷.

⁴ “It is known that the indigenous element offers advantages as a social factor: deep love for the native country, faculties of adaptation and assimilation, appreciable energies for modern life. The different races only worried the statesmen when it was a question of dominating them by force and taking away their territorial domains; but as races capable of giving the State, through education, useful citizens, they have not been given due attention: no one represents in this respect vision, sentiment, or practical action. I refer only to the Indians who, in the Territories, are mixed or mixing with the white population representative of the staggered civilization, because it is almost impossible for the first lights of the school to reach the Indians who are in the middle of the desert” (Report, 1909, 85).

⁵ “Some form camps and dedicate themselves to livestock, in their own fields; the Namuncurá tribe in Paso San Ignacio, not far from the confluence of Catanlil with the Calloncurá; that of cacique Diego Ancatruz in Zaina Yegua, nine leagues from Piedra del Aguila; that of Miguel Ñancuche Nuhuelquir in Cushamen; that of Francisco Ñacufil in the Puelches etc. etc., Other Indians, immersed in idleness and misery, wander through distant fields and deserts, run here and there by what they call "unjust Christian", that is, by owners, tenants, authorities, intruders and others. men who form the thick vanguard of the expanding civilization. Others, as in the Chaco, leave the hidden awnings and reach the line of legal industry, more advanced towards the desert” p. 86. But it is necessary to read what Inspector Manuel B. Fernández says, to observe his look as a civilized white man and superior to the other who looks and describes: “The Indians live, in Colonia Las Palmas, in a state that differs little of the truly wild. Neither moral nor religious instruction, nor of any kind do they receive, inhabiting their primitive awnings, changing places frequently according to the needs of the company they serve; sometimes in the mountains cutting quebracho, others in the cane fields, a week here, two there, always wandering and nomadic, isolated from the rest of the inhabitants, in small groups of five, six or more per family. No indigenous children attend schools. To be able to give them some instruction under these conditions seems to me to be a less than impossible task, unless they were provided with a special teacher who, provided with a tent and the most essential tools, could accompany them on their constant pilgrimage through mountains and plantations” (Report, 1909, 68).

⁶ The results can be read at: First National Conference on Illiteracy. Background, minutes and conclusions. Ministry of Public Instruction, Buenos Aires, Graphic Workshops of the National Penitentiary, 1935.

⁷ “That, despite the concern and the permanent effort of the nation and the provinces to spread primary education, there are still high numbers of illiterates in different parts of the Republic (...) the results obtained according to published statistics confirm that the purposes that the national and provincial laws related to primary education were proposed have only been fulfilled in the Federal Capital, there being in the provinces and national territories a considerable number of illiterates that it is urgent to reduce (...) It is opportune to immediately hold a National Conference on the illiteracy constituted by delegates of the government of the Nation and of the provinces, of the governors of National Territories and of the National Council of Education”. National Conference on Illiteracy. Background, minutes and conclusions. Ministry of Public Instruction, Buenos Aires, Graphic Workshops of the National Penitentiary, 1935, 5.

One of the representatives of Nation Territories, Bergará Mujica, say: The Common Education Law n. 1420 establishes in a definitive way that “primary instruction must be compulsory, free, gradual and given in accordance with the precepts of hygiene” (Conference, 1935, 119). Remember this article and then conclude:

Those of us who have lived the life of the National Territories can affirm that this problem of the location of schools exists and is very difficult to solve, we can also affirm that in some parts of the campaign, the school obligation cannot be fulfilled, and that, in other cases, education is neither free, nor gradual, nor is it given according to the precepts of hygiene, as required by law” (Conference, 1935, 119).

The causes that he lists are many, but he prefers to dwell on two that, in his eyes, “are enough and more than enough to justify those cases of non-attendance at schools” (Conference, 1935, 119).

The first focuses on “the lack of proven pecuniary resources to dress the boys decently, to provide them with the means of adequate food for their maintenance during the time they remain away from home, or also to be able to do without the personal work they do the child in the house” (Lecture, 1935, 119).

And the second cause, which he considers more relevant because in his opinion, it would be “in some cases impossible to remedy, it consists of the absolute lack of means of communication to get to the school, which is usually several leagues away or separated by rivers and impassable streams” (Lecture, 1935, 119-120). In the same report, Bergará Mujica tells us about the sequence that is repeated:

It also happens, with some frequency, that the child who attended school one year, stopped going the next, or because the father had a bad harvest or lost his job, and he was left unable to afford those expense, or because he had to go work somewhere else, etc. (Lectura, 1935, 121).

In this story, he maintains that, for example, that student who passed the first grade returns to school after two or three years and can no longer enter the second grade because he has forgotten what he learned, having to repeat the first. And his, when he doesn’t stay without going back to school” (Lecture, 1935, 121).

This scene is told to conclude: It turns out that the instruction in those centers of the campaign of the National Territories, is not gradual either” (Conference, 1935, 121).

But that’s not all, he also adds that “it is not exceptional to find boys of 17 or 18 years old, who have been in school for one or two years and who are completely illiterate, for not having been able to fix the knowledge elementary, and for having forgotten everything they learned” (Conference, 1935, 122)

He maintains that the instruction is neither gradual nor obligatory nor does it follow the precepts of hygiene since “they spend most of the day traveling from home to school, and from school to their home, who arrive home at night, exhausted by fatigue, poorly fed, dirty, and embittered by the bustle of the day, be the instruction in accordance with the precepts of hygiene that prescribes the law” (Conference, 1935, 120).

Gratuity cannot be observed in the fields in National Territories either, since “the free public school is not only not available to children but they cannot reach it” (Conference, 1935, 121-122).

In another part of the conference, the lack of mobile schools in the campaigns is discussed. It states that it is “prescribed in article 11 of Law n. 1420” of 1884, however in the 1930s, it is stated that “its current almost non-existence is inexplicable” (Conference, 1935, 137). It claims the need to enforce this article as the best solution for the problems of rural areas. In addition, it raises the need to promote itinerant schools for Aborigines⁸. All this discussion continued throughout the decade.

In the 1938 report, which can be read in the National Council of Education, in relation to the campaign, it is stated that the education law of a compulsory and gradual school, with a minimum of subjects, is not complied with, and it is put the accent on desertion; but that is not all, the drama of illiteracy has not even been resolved, and there are no reliable statistics that reveal the depth of the problem (Costa, 1937, 14; and Gutiérrez, 1937, 25). Faced with this diagnosis, it is stated that “in the meantime and above all other initiatives, it is essential to intensify the creation of schools in rural areas” (Report. 1938, 832).

Objective that in turn has a previous problem: the lack of statistics. The report maintains that the joint collaboration of “General Inspectorates of Provinces and Territories supported in turn by inspectors, Sectionals, Visitors, Directors and teachers” is vital, to which must be added the active participation of “characterized neighbors and authorities”, in order to “gather documented information on the needs of each area, so that the Council can then adopt the preceding resolutions, and especially, so that, in the case of the creation of schools, it can proceed to install them and provide them with all the elements so that they are able to function regularly at the start of the next school year” (Informe.1938, 832).

Absenteeism, desertion, the school year that is never the same problems that were observed at the beginning of the decade and continue to be denounced at the end of it (Report. 1939, 14).

Whether in the CNE reports, or in the writings of educators, the conclusion is always the same: the mandates of the education laws for the campaign schools are very far from being fulfilled, even in 1939.

Is this situation a reality at the end of the 1930s or can something similar still be seen in the presentations by officials and educators at the 1960 Pedagogical Conference organized by the CNE?

Pedagogical Days of the CNE, 1960

In 1959 it was decided at the CNE to pay homage to the 150th anniversary of the revolutionary deed of 1810. Among the acts, it is thought of holding a Pedagogical Conference limited to the Rural School, inviting colleagues and officials from other Latin American countries.

⁸ “The National Conference against Illiteracy recommends the creation of mobile schools specially designed for Aboriginal children. These schools will accompany the movements of the *tolderías* and their program and schedules will be subordinated to the needs and conveniences of the place, means and elements that they have. (p. 139) They wonder why the State always fails to educate the aborigines and they answer: (..) Until today, the greatest difficulties that have opposed this derive from the ambulatory nature of the tribes that have prevented the child from being taken to school. There is a tendency for the school to go towards the child, accompanying him in the movement of the *tolderías*. Those who have studied in the field the problem of the education of the little Indian, examining his difficulties, have come to the conclusion that this type of traveling school can give the results, not achieved to date, of assimilating him to civilized life, through the sustained action of the school, within the indigenous environment itself, adapting it to its modalities as appropriate. It is known that the little Indian does not leave his *toldería*. In itself the school must carry out the work of conquest” (Conference, 1935,139).

In the presentation of these conferences in the CNE's dissemination body, The Common Education Monitor, it is indicated that the rural school is the "most forgotten school in the public education system", a remarkable fact in Argentina where the schools schoolchildren are located in the space of the campaign. The data is revealing: "In our country, out of a total of 7,310 common schools, 1,433 are located in urban areas, 800 in suburban areas, and 5,077 in rural areas, that is, these represent 69.45%, which gives the magnitude of its proportion and the importance of its social function" (Jornadas. 1969, 3).

But when comparing the different levels of the Argentine educational system, the rural school is clearly seen as the one that received the least attention from state policies. In the note of The Common Education Monitor it is said:

The reforms of plans, programs and objectives have been undertaken in the secondary and university technical schools and thanks to this, today there are hundreds of trained people to carry out many lucrative industries, not enough for all those that could be faced, but yes those essential to contribute to the consolidation of the national economy, so much in need of this contribution (Jornadas. 1960, 3).

At the secondary and university levels, the necessary changes were made to modernize the training of their students and propose a very precise orientation: training for tasks in the world of work, that is, for the training of citizens who can support themselves with their work and, at the same time, same time, to the State paying the taxes. It is true, from the CNE magazine not everything is optimistic, because they also point out that this story was not perfect nor did it meet its ideal, however its progress in various aspects can be verified, and graduates with orientation towards the labor market.

All this is pointed out to underline that the opposite happens in the Rural Schools. In The Common Education Monitor it is stated:

From our technical schools and universities there are already young people endowed with brilliant mentality and aptitudes to contribute to the national transformation, from a pastoral country to an industrial country, from a village of farmers to villages of artisans, industrialists and technicians capable of revitalizing our precarious and weakened economy. And in this transformation, only the rural school remains on the side of the road to overcoming (Jornadas. 1960, 3).

The criticisms towards the Rural Schools are very similar to those made in the CNE reports in 1937-1937. The diagnosis expressed by the editor of the magazine is devastating: the Rural School "with its primer" and "its sowing of the alphabet", continues almost unchanged the action begun, more than three quarters of a century ago without entering the rhythm of life of the time of the present" (Jornadas. 1960, 4). This situation must be understood, it is stated, within the national framework where there has been a negative trend that continues to worsen: "the phenomenon of depopulation of rural areas and human agglomeration in urban centers and the gradual but growing impoverishment of agriculture" (Journeys. 1960, 4).

That said, it is clear that it is not only an Argentine problem but also a Latin American one, so the conference would be the meeting of officials and educators from countries of the continent. It is a space where rulers, officials and educated share the diagnoses of their respective nations and can discuss the appropriate government policies for their solution⁹.

Now, without a doubt, the purpose was for government officials to debate and evaluate government policies, but it is clarified in “Art. 1: The Pedagogical Sessions will have an eminently informative purpose” (Jornadas. 1960, 7). It is further specified that “they will be held in the city of Buenos Aires, at the Félix F. Bernasconi Institute, between November 6 and 13, 1960, organized by the National Council of Education as part of the program of celebratory acts of the May Revolution. (Conferences. 1969, 8). And they will have representatives from the following countries¹⁰: Argentina, Mexico, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela (Jornadas. 1960, 12).

When examining some of the issues that were exposed, it is striking that even in 1960 there are still problems that run through the entire 20th century. One of the rapporteurs, Carlos Alberto Solimano, summarizes certain specific issues. But the most significant thing for this communication is that it states that even in 1960 the “Rural School does not meet its specific goals, that is, it has not managed to respond to the needs of the rural community or its individuals; this deficiency would be attributed to factors of the educational system”. To then clarify that the difficulty lies in the system and not in the teaching staff who “despite their not always sufficient preparation, put and put all their efforts at the service of the task, reducing the unfavorable consequences of the current organization” (Days. 1960, p. 29).

⁹ “Leave it established that in the current year it will be developed in the Pedagogical Conferences that are carried out as the only agenda, the one that refers to “The Rural School: its problems and its solutions”, approved on April 7, 1960. Resolution of general character n. 22 that says: 1.-The rural school, the peasant family, and the organization of the community. 2.-the rural school, the socio-economic research of the community. 3.- The rural school, and the organization of recreation and sports centers, library services, agricultural journalism, courses for adults. 4.- The rural school, provision and coordination of the general services of the community. 5.- The rural school, and subsidiary associations: former students, parents and neighbors, clubs, etc.- 6.- The rural school building and its grounds. 7.- The endowment of the rural school, furniture, supplies, teaching material, and tools, 8.- School transport in rural areas. 9.- The rural school, and its various types of organization: unitary school, school village, traveling school. 10.- The rural school in the general planning of education. The program. The degree of instruction and practical orientation. 11.- Rural education in relation to the activities of the region, its economy, health, school attendance and the community health service. 13.- The training and improvement of the rural school teacher. 14.- The orientation and control of the rural school.” (Meetings. 1960, 7).

¹⁰ “Of the agenda: Art. 5: The agenda of the conference, for its orderly development, is grouped into four main titles and their corresponding subtitles. It is as follows: 1-The rural school and its purpose. A) objectives of the rural school. B) The rural school in the general planning of education. C) The rural school program. D) The level of instruction and the practical orientation of the rural school. 2.- Material aspects of the rural school. A) The rural school building and its grounds. B) The endowment of the rural school: furniture, supplies, teaching material and tools. C) School transport in rural areas. 3.- The rural school and its organization. A) The peasant child, his way of life, and peculiar characteristics. B) The management and administration of the rural school. C) The training and improvement of the rural school teacher. D) The orientation and control of the rural school. E) The rural school and its different types of organization: the core school, the school shelter, the school village, the home school, the traveling school. F) Work methods and systems appropriate to the rural school system. G) Farm work in the rural school, regional industries and agricultural extension. 4.- The rural school and the community. A) The rural school and the peasant family. B) The rural school, socio-economic research and community organization. C) The rural school and the organization of recreation and sports centers, library services, agricultural journalism, courses for adults, etc. D) The rural school and subsidiary associations: former students, parents and neighbors, clubs, etc. E) The rural school and the problems of absenteeism, temporary exodus and desertion of students. F) The regional geographical, cultural and economic reality and its influence on the rural school. G) The rural school in relation to the activities of the region, the economy, health, food and assistance, the school and the community health service. Education, foundation and assistance to school and sentimental service”. (Conferences. 1960, 8-9).

When reviewing the different exhibitions, Solimano maintains that all of them "demonstrate", in a repetitive way, "the feeling of postponement of the Rural School and of a presumed lack of plan" (Jornadas. 1960, 30).

Solimano reproduces some expository passages to evidence their claims. José Luis Bruguera manifests, says Solimano, that "The Rural School deserves a more urgent special attention, because until now it has been the most forgotten" (Jornadas. 1960, 30). Or the sectional Inspector of Salta, points out the actors responsible for the situation of this neglect by saying:

The existence of large estates and their labor distribution system hinder the evolution of rural societies, constituting one of the major negative elements of the work of the school [...] large estates and lack of sources of work that impede progress and they perpetuate misery and ignorance in the agrarian population, they are coincident causes (Jornadas. 1960, 31).

In the eyes of the exhibitors, the school situation is remarkably precarious as it was throughout the century, with one teacher in charge of the entire school. "Jorge Reynoso states: we do not want a reduced school for the countryside, as is currently the case when 4,752 rural schools are operating with one teacher for all the staff. The field claims a complete Rural School; a reorganization and redistribution of the current rural schools is essential to allow the peasant child and the adult to reach the benefits of the six grades" (Jornadas. 1960, 33) Another important point is the legislation: Bruguera says: "Until now the rural schools they have not been distinguished from the urban ones, which is why I think it is convenient that the school reform should be definitively addressed by updating the legislation that governs us through the preparation of a law where the educational problem of our country is resolved in an integral way" (Jornadas. 1960, 3. 4). There is also a certain coincidence when they evaluate what policies should be adopted. For example, when dealing with planning issues, it is stated: "1.- Give due importance to the Rural School in the general planning of teaching. 2.- Plan the Rural School on real bases. 3.- Consider in the planning the economic, social, political and cultural factors of the environment where the educational system works" (Jornadas. 1960, 30).

Finally, and to reinforce the hypothesis of this article, it is relevant to reproduce an extensive passage by Calixto Suárez, representative of UNESCO, to show the seriousness of the situation of the Rural School in 1960. Calixto Suárez states the problem in this way:

We believe that the most important causes that make planners think about the restrictions of offers in rural schools are in desertion, absenteeism, migration, and in a general sense in economic reason and in the lack of trust that the organized rural school currently offers to parents and offers to individuals who have contact with it. The qualities of the offers of the rural school were known by the father, and he knows that they are the same ones that are going to be transmitted to his children, he has no faith in the education that we are going to impart to him, and when I am making this mention I am referring specifically to Argentina, but to the rural school of Latin America. We know that rural schools, both the unitary one, which is the one that exists the most, and some so-called consolidated ones, extend to the sixth grade, but to such a limited minimum of the population that practically the rural school is

deilliteracy and giving back to society, to the environment, to the community, to an individual who is going to return and is going to become illiterate again in a huge proportion, because there are no opportunities for that individual to feel the satisfaction or the pleasure of finding good books, of applying that simple deilliteracy that he achieved there (Jornadas. 1960, 72).

Final considerations

The first consideration is that rural schools, from the very moment that was discussed in the pedagogical congress in 1882, have been the most forgotten venue, and this was repeated in the 1930s and then in 1960, that adjective that is said over and over. Once it shows not only the high rate of illiteracy, but also the alarming dropout rate in the first grades, the scarcity of establishments, of teachers in charge, and that many students do not even have access to that instruction. But there is something even worse, in 1960 it is insisted that the national state and the provincial states in many cases are unaware of the school situation in rural areas: statistics are lacking. That is, the state does not even come to know the depth of the problem.

As has been perceived since Olalla's arguments in 1882 and later in others until 1960, the school must be a gradual cycle, as marked by the education laws, whether national or of each of the provinces. Because the objective is to train citizens, to train for labor insertion, to train Argentines for national defense, and in the specific case of rural schools to train students so that they take root in their area, however, what prevails, as the country begins its industrial cycle is the depopulation of campaign areas and schools not only cannot prevent it, but are not even capable of educating children and adults who need it.

If illiteracy continues to be a major problem in 1960 in rural areas, it is because it was not even possible to comply with an issue prior to the school cycle: that children and adults attend schools, and even less, that they complete a school cycle.

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