



The ruralist pedagogical movement in Uruguay and its strategies for training rural teachers (1940-1960)¹

El movimiento pedagógico ruralista en Uruguay y sus estrategias para la formación de maestros rurales (1940-1960)

O movimento pedagógico ruralista no Uruguai e suas estratégias de formação de professores rurais (1940-1960)

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Abstract

The ruralist pedagogical movement in Uruguay (1930-1960) carried out a variety of training experiences of rural education for teaching students and practicing teachers. Among these experiences were the Divulcation Center of School Practices, the Socio-Pedagogical Missions and the Normal Rural Institute. These programs relied on practical training that contemplates the singularities of the work of teachers in rural schools and strive for the integral development of the populations of the fields in Uruguay.

Keywords: Movement. Rural Teachers. Uruguay. Rural education.

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Resumen

El movimiento pedagógico ruralista en Uruguay (1930-1960) llevó adelante diversas experiencias de formación en educación rural para estudiantes de magisterio y para docentes en ejercicio, desatándose entre ellas el Centro de Divulgación de Prácticas Escolares, las Misiones Socio Pedagógicas y el Instituto Normal Rural. Todas estas propuestas apostaron por una formación práctica que contemple las particularidades del trabajo de los maestros y maestras en las escuelas rurales y que procure el desarrollo integral de las poblaciones de los campos en Uruguay.

Palabras claves: Movimiento. Maestros rurales. Uruguay. Educación Rural.

Resumo

O movimento pedagógico ruralista no Uruguai (1930-1960) realizou várias experiências de formação em educação rural para professores estudantes e professores praticantes, incluindo o Centro de Divulgação de Práticas Escolares, as Missões Socio Pedagógicas e o Instituto Normal Rural. Todas estas propostas estavam empenhadas numa formação prática que tivesse em conta as particularidades do trabalho dos professores nas escolas rurais e que procurasse o desenvolvimento integral das populações rurais no Uruguai.

Palavras-chave: Movimento. Professores Rurais. Uruguai. Educação rural.

Introduction

In Uruguay, between the 1940s and 1950s, the training of rural teachers was driven by the "Movement in favor of a new rural school" (Soler, 1987), (hereinafter MeFER)². This movement was basically formed by male and female teachers, although it also included student teachers and school inspectors. The educational proposals that they elaborated and that they managed to put into practice were mainly related to primary education in rural areas and to the training of rural teachers.

The MeFER promoted the configuration of a rural pedagogy³ in Uruguay; and as part of that process, between 1940 and 1960 the movement problematized and promoted various strategies for the training of rural teachers. The notion of configuration (Rockwell, 2007 and Elias, 1982) in this case of a pedagogical movement, allows us to give historicity and complexity to the generation of a pedagogy that, according to Redondo and Martinis (2006), forged the matrix of the Uruguayan teaching profession. Although primary teacher training was common, the debates, projects and experiences developed by MeFER generated a special identity in the country within the rural teaching profession linked to work with the community, which, in turn, influenced teaching at the national level.

The ruralist pedagogy began to take shape from the questions that rural teachers and school inspectors made to the institutionalized traditions of schools in rural areas. This questioning brought to new ways of conceiving schools and their relationship with their contexts and with the subjects that inhabit them. Although they did not define a name to identify themselves as a movement or organization, they developed joint projects for years and held meetings such as the Teachers' Congresses. Its main referents were also promoters of the process of union organization of the teaching profession between 1930-1960, thus being the development of rural education linked to debate processes promoted from the incipient union organizations (González Sierra, 1996). Teacher training for rural teachers was one of the demands that this movement always had and for which it promoted various strategies, whether for initial training, in-service training and specialization.

During Terra's dictatorship (1933-1938), in a repressive and unfavorable political context for the development of progressive educational proposals, incipiently the rural teachers who lived in the countryside and were familiar with the conditions of poverty and isolation of rural workers and their families (many of them were occasional day laborers on large farms) began to publicly denounce this situation and to develop pedagogical political proposals. Some teachers began to exert political pressure, first individually and then collectively, to enable the development of different experiences in the field of public education aimed at transforming this situation, seeking to bring primary education to develop the rural sphere not only from an economic perspective but from an integral one.

² Miguel Soler Roca (1922-2021) was not only one of the leading teachers of the MeFER but also dedicated a large part of his life to reconstructing and reflecting on the history of this movement.

³ The concept of "ruralist pedagogies" (Civera, 2011) refers to educational practices, conceptions, programs and policies that argued that education in rural areas should acquire a specific orientation, differentiated from education in large cities. They had their greatest development during the first half of the 20th century; they were educational proposals for the inhabitants of the countryside, they constituted a commitment to life in that context and therefore they sought to provide knowledge that responds to the needs of those who lived and worked there; their educational practices went beyond the walls of the school premises and included both boys and girls as well as young people and adults. It is worth clarifying that this is an a posteriori theoretical category and not a historical denomination created by the subjects involved.

From 1943 to 1960, in a climate of democratic reopening⁴ and with the support of Neo-Batllista governments, the MeFER⁵ managed to institutionalize various proposals related to rural education and teacher training. In this paper we will analyze three of these experiences: The Divulcation Center of of School Practices, the Socio-Pedagogical Missions and the Rural Normal Institute.

Training teachers for the rural areas

Until the 1950s, there were two Normal Institutes in Uruguay, one for men and one another for women, both located in Montevideo. Those who lived in the rural areas, had to settle in the capital to pursue these studies. Those who could not afford this expense and had obtained good grades in school, could compete for a scholarship to study in Montevideo. Another way to acces to the degree was to prepare themselves and take the exam to be a primary or normal teacher. Once they passed the last exam, "they graduated as first grade teachers, with which they acquired the same rights and responsibilities as graduates of official institutes" (Silveira, 2012:97).

The training was the same regardless of where the teachers went to work once they had their title. It was common for recent graduates to find available places in rural schools located in small hamlets or ranches. Settling there was, in many cases, their first experience in a rural environment unknown until then. Soler Roca, one of the referents of the MeFER, who began as director of a rural school in 1943, pointed out that "the isolation of rural populations determined the isolation of their teachers, not to mention their loneliness. Lacking incentives and acting in environments that were often hostile, they emigrated as soon as possible to urban schools, so the rural ones suffered from an extraordinary turnover of teachers" (Soler Roca, 1987: 33). In turn, Soler Roca pointed out, the majority of the teaching professionals were female teachers, who "confronted even more serious problems, of which no one spoke" (Soler Roca, 1987:34)⁶.

Most of the rural schools in 1940 were unitary, that is, they had only one teacher, who at the same time served as director; this teacher had to attend an average of 49 children, while in urban schools used to have an average of 31 students per teacher ⁷. According to

⁴ The government of Amézaga (1943-1947), which represented a process of democratic transition, was receptive to the demands of the teachers and allowed the reorganization of the movement, as well as repairing dismissals of public officials committed during the terrorism for political reasons, such as the case of teacher Jesualdo Sosa.

⁵ Luis Conrado Batlle Berres, great-grandson of the nephew of José Batlle y Ordóñez, was elected Vice President of the Republic in the 1946 elections, accompanying Tomás Berreta. After Berreta's death on August 2, 1947, Batlle Berres assumed the Presidency of the Republic; during it, he developed a statist and protectionist policy, which in various aspects continued the import substitution policy created in the 1930s, which is why this period is known as neobatllism. This political stage culminated in 1958 when the National Party won the elections; This change in the political scenario had its consequences for the development of the MeFER. This ceased to have an impact on educational policies and teacher training strategies, together with all the initiatives aimed at Rural Schools, were dissolved at the beginning of 1961 due to an administrative and budgetary reorganization carried out by the National Council for Primary and Normal Education (PNES and N).

⁶ This note, written by teacher Soler Roca in 1987, shows how gender issues related to the teaching profession in rural areas was an "unspoken" issue during the 1940s and 1950s and that, in 1987, the the author dared to outline but without developing it in greater depth.

⁷ According to data collected by teacher Jorge, in 1936 there were 1008 rural schools in Uruguay, of which 87% had a teacher as the only person in charge of it; that is why he expressed "the school is what the teacher is individually" (Jorge, 1939: 43).

Soler Roca, the teacher's movement during the 1940s was concerned about the low technical level of teacher training for rural teachers. This was due both to normal teaching not oriented towards education in rural contexts as well as to the lack of technical support during the exercise of this trade (Soler Roca, 1987).

Divuligation Center of School Practices

One of the first initiatives built by one of the initiators of MeFER to accompany and guide practicing teachers was the Divuligation Center of School Practices. This was a proposal elaborated by the Regional Inspector Agustín Ferreiro in his book [La enseñanza primaria en el medio rural" (1937)] "Primary education in rural areas" (1937). This work was presented in the Annual Pedagogy Contest of 1936, organized by the National Council of Primary and Normal Education. To participate in it, the text had to respond to the slogan: "What reforms, applicable immediately, should be introduced in the rural school to meet with our aspirations?. Ferreiro's book was not awarded and therefore was not published by the authorities, but the Inspector did not give up and in the town of Durazno, in an "almost homemade way with the help of some friends" (Santos, 2018), he made the first publication of his book in 1937.

Despite having been an unofficial publication and having few copies, the book had a great impact within the teaching profession. This importance could have been due to the recognition that the Regional Inspector had by the important sector of the teaching profession. According to Santos, this work "is part of the founding scene of the movement in favor of rural education that would extend during the following two decades" (Santos, 2010:10). A sample of the circulation that this work had at the time of its publication can be seen in the note by Julio Castro, "Comentarios sobre un excelente libro "La enseñanza primaria en el medio rural" por A. Ferreiro" ["Comments on an excellent book "Primary education in rural areas" by A. Ferreiro"], published in the bulletin of the National Union of Teachers (UNM, 1937).

In this mentioned book, Ferreiro analyzed the problems related to education in rural contexts and proposed a series of "immediate application" measures, among which was the creation of an Emission Center. This involved using the mail as a vehicle to deliver printed materials to schools. The students would take these publications to their homes and through them they would reach their relatives and circulate the culture written by the "peasant homes". He considered that the "isolation of the teacher and the country man was the main problem to overcome" (Ferreiro, 2010: 52) and for this, the school and, above all, the children could officiate as inter-communicators, since "everyone and every day the peasant household establishes contact with the outside through the children" (Ferreiro, 2010: 53).

This proposal was recovered and began to be implemented in 1941 after the approval of the National Council for Primary and Normal Education (CNEPN). The beginning of its implementation took place a year before the national elections, from which, Terra's dictatorship was left behind and a new democratic cycle began. This pre-electoral climate was more prone to the development of this type of initiatives, which, although they did not imply an educational reform, at least favored the circulation of ideas and knowledge about education in different contexts. Below we transcribe a fragment of the circular in which the Regional Inspector Agustín Ferreiro informs the National Teachers of the creation of the Divuligation Center of School Practices.

Mr. Teacher: It has occurred to me that it may be useful to disseminate, through the written word and in the form of circulars, practices that some teachers carry out and that, due to their nature, deserve to be generalized. Don't we do that verbally when we visit schools? It is up to the teacher to apply them if he deems it convenient, modify them to adapt to the state of his class or the circumstances of the environment, or reject them at all if he thinks so.

The continuity and goodness of the work we are starting today will depend on the collaboration provided by the teachers. If they help us with the shipment of material, it is likely that we can remain firm in the company. I leave here all comments; I have the feeling that the material I am providing today clearly reveals what my goals and intentions are. I am very pleased to greet the colleague with my highest consideration Agustín Ferreiro (CNEPyN, 1941)⁸

This proposal materialized in the Magazine of the Divulcation Center of School Practices and continued until 1961. The magazine periodically reached teachers throughout the country; at first they were more than fifty sheets printed in mimeograph and later they began to be sent in the form of pamphlets. The publications contained proposals for school practices that arose from visits made by the inspectors, including Ferreiro himself, to the schools, as well as from the ideas that the teachers themselves sent in the form of contributions.

The Divulcation Center of School Practices was made up of people initially called by Ferreiro, who could be retired teachers as well as active teachers who wish to do so without neglecting their work obligations. Teachers and university teachers could also be summoned.

Socio-pedagogical missions

Another of the proposals elaborated by the MeFER that dealt with the training of teachers for rural areas were the Socio-Pedagogical Missions, which were inspired by the Mexican Cultural Missions and the Pedagogical Missions of the Second Spanish Republic⁹. In Uruguay these emerged as an initiative developed in the Normal Institutes of Montevideo for the training of future teachers. The initial objective was that the teaching students had the possibility of having contact prior to the labor practice with the rural contexts in which they will probably obtain a place when they graduate.

In 1941, the first tests of the Pedagogical Missions were carried out¹⁰, which consisted of one-day visits, presided over by the director of the Normal Institutes, María

⁸ Full text available at: https://www.educacionrural.org/?page_id=342.

⁹ “The two closest precedents of the Uruguayan socio- pedagogical missions arose from state initiatives in a context of profound political transformation: in the revolutionary Mexico of the 1920s and in the republican Spain of the 1930s. It was in these two countries where a word that until now had been associated with evangelization, mission, began to be used to designate a certain type of secular sociocultural intervention that tried to alleviate the evident inequality between the educational possibilities that could be found in the city and in the field” (García Alonso and Scagliola, 2012:37).

¹⁰ The first visits of the normalist students to the ranches began by being called Pedagogical Missions, the same name as the Spanish ones, until in 1947, the year in which the second mission was held, it acquired the name of

Orticochea, and made up of professors and students of the “rural specialization” course. Two visits were made, one to San José and the other to Rivera, in which talks were given, dramatizations, musical presentations and dance were performed. From these first experiences, the students made a project of Pedagogical Missions that would integrate three types of actions, the Cultural, the Social and the Teaching Improvement, but it was only in July 1945 when the Association of Teaching Students managed to organize the first Mission Pedagogical, which lasted nine days and took place in Caraguatá, department of Tacuarembó.

The Association of Teaching Students invited the Association of Medicine Students and the Center for Law Students of UDELAR to send delegates to the mission to Caraguatá. Thus, a group of 18 normalist students plus one medical student was formed, who, at the request of the director of the Normal Institutes, were accompanied by professors Francisco Olivares, Josefa Arrien Jaureguiberry and Julio Castro¹¹, along with the film operator Atilio Saturno (García Alonso and Scagliola, 2012). Although the missions were an initiative of the student associations, the participation of authorities, professors and technicians from the Normal Institutes can be observed in their organization and execution. It was no coincidence that the chosen place was Caraguatá; Rural School Number 28 worked there, which was directed until 1944 by the teacher Elsa Fernández de Borges, who was one of the promoters of the MeFER

The analysis of the documentary sources¹² allows us to identify three central dimensions of the Socio-pedagogical Missions, one linked to the training of future teachers, although it also included the possibility of the participation of university students related to agronomy and health, mainly. At the same time, another dimension relates to territorial with territorial intervention, which had cultural and care components. And, finally, a political dimension, linked to the pressure on public opinion that they intended to generate by publishing reports, chronicles, photographs, statistics, and other documentation that accredited the living conditions in the ranches.

As an example of the publications made by the students after returning from the missions, we can analyze the chronicle of José Gómez Gotuzzo, a medical student who participated in the first mission, who published his experience in Caraguatá in a students’ magazine.

Socio-Pedagogical Mission. “...the following missions would change their adjective to «socio-pedagogical» because, without abandoning the cultural tools that allowed entertaining and promoting artistic sensitivity where it was practically impossible to enjoy it—as well as causing laughter, one of the most precious assets of every human being—, they would also try to improve some material conditions that would allow dignifying life in the ranches” (García Alonso and Scagliola: 2012:203).

¹¹ Julio Castro was, together with Miguel Soler Roca, one of the main referents of MeFER.

¹² To reconstruct the experience of the Socio-pedagogical Missions, two sources were investigated. One is the interview conducted with Jorge Bralich in 2019 in Montevideo, who, in addition to being a Uruguayan professor and researcher, a specialist in the history of education in his country, was in his youth, one of the students who actively participated in the missionary movement among 1954 and 1960. The other is the book “Misiones Socio-Pedagógicas del Uruguay (1945-1971). Documentos para la memoria” (García Alonso and Scagliola, 2012) This book is a compendium of more than 600 pages of primary sources on the missions, which were managed to gather thanks to the contribution of various teachers, researchers and, mainly, protagonists of said missions, being, Bralich, one of the collaborators.

Another day we came to a small ranch, so small that we had to bend down to be able to cross the threshold of the door that was covered by a canvas. A woman came out to greet us. I had a small, the only child, sick, with pulmonary congestion. The doctor had been the day before to see him, leaving him some medicine. We wanted to see it. A four-year-old boy lying down and covered with burlap lay feverishly on something that didn't exactly look like a bed. All this passing a septum. An immense darkness was in that corner of the ranch. We lit a match to look at his face. The creature trembled with cold rolled up. At that time the mother had nothing else to give him than porridge water. We left and later our companions returned with two blankets and a varied assortment of food. They themselves managed to get a liter of milk and took it too. We have said, regarding this same visit, that Caraguatá, an area of ranches, is not unique in our country. More than 150,000 people live like this, throughout the country (Gómez Gotuzzo, 2012:248)

In this quote it can be seen how Gómez Gotuzzo denounced the existence of more than 150,000 people living in ranches in the country. Later, the note ended by proposing that, in order to overcome this social situation, "a substantial transformation of the economic exploitation of the peasantry was necessary: by the Agrarian Reform, by intensive livestock farming, by the industrialization of the countryside, that is, by the creation of sources of productive work that allow raising the average standard of living of rural wage earners" (Gómez Gotuzzo, 2012:249). The words of Gómez Gotuzzo show the political nature that these missions had from the beginning, which should not be analyzed in a reductionist way as only as an action of student volunteering or cultural extension.

The mission to Caraguatá was the first of 38 Socio-pedagogical Missions carried out between 1945 and 1960 and was organized by the Montevideo Mission Center. The development of the following missions promoted not only the organization of Mission Centers in the departments where they were carried out, but also led to the creation of Departmental Normal Institutes (García Alonso and Scagliola, 2012), since until then it was only possible study teaching in Montevideo. This process led to the construction of a missionary movement at the national level and allowed student teachers to come into contact with social realities they were unaware of. This knowledge was systematized in reports on living conditions in the ranches through various methodological tools such as censuses, statistics, photographs, maps, etc. All this documentation was used to make it publicly visible and exert political pressure so that the problem of the ranches is addressed by the governments in power.

The third mission was carried out in Arroyo de Oro in 1946 and the accompanying teacher was Miguel Soler Roca.

Figure 1: Miguel Soler, with a mobile cinematographer, together with missionaries crossing the Arroyo de Oro.



Collection: Miguel Soler. In Garcia Alonso and Scagliola (2012:269)

After his return to Montevideo, the Center for Socio-pedagogical Missions of that city held a public information event in which Soler Roca read the report he had prepared entitled “Juicio crítico sobre la misión socio-pedagógica a Arroyo de Oro” [Critical judgment on the socio-pedagogical mission to Arroyo de Oro]. “The term “critical judgment” may indicate an attitude that is not very condescending towards a process in which Soler Roca himself was a part as an accompanying teacher:

These missions come to fill a gap in the professional practice of student teachers. We want to train comprehensive teachers, capable of educating in the countryside and cities, of understanding the children of our suburbs and the children of our knives, capable, in short, of contributing effectively to the overcoming of our nationality. However, hundreds of teaching students from the capital and from rural areas carry out a partial, citizen, insufficient practice. And our rural schools continue to receive young teachers full of will and vocation, but without adequate preparation, left to their own initiative, silent fighters whose essential weapons are that will and that vocation.

Let us therefore congratulate and thank these missionaries for their work of professional improvement. Let's recognize that their action is a call, let's accept that they have found themselves in deficit in front of society and in front of their conscience as budding professionals. In this way we will properly locate their missions, we will promote them, we will generalize them. Only a handful of twenty-five boys have participated in the experience, hundreds will no longer have the opportunity to do it and, if life leads them to it,

they will take charge of a rural school with a bookish vision of its importance and its purpose. The preparation of teachers for the field is a problem, already stated at length; its possible solutions are numerous, but when taking stock of the achievements, we must give a very prominent place to these missions and recognize that, although precarious and insufficient, the experience has a great impact on the future peasant teacher (Soler Roca, 2012: 264 -268).

Soler Roca considered that participating in a Socio-pedagogical Mission was, for a student teacher, a "precarious and insufficient" experience, although it had a "great impact" on the formation of the future "peasant teacher". He asked for the promotion and expansion of the missions. Here it can be seen how the teacher Soler Roca had a broader political-pedagogical perspective, he positioned himself as what he was: a director of a rural school and a MeFER referent, and from that position, he demanded the execution of substantive solutions to the problem of "preparation of teachers in the countryside".

Rural Normal Institute

In January and February 1949, a National Congress of Rural Teachers was held in Uruguay in which a new Program for Rural Schools was defined. This program, with a clearly ruralist orientation, demanded a teacher that had an according training. Towards the end of that same year, the Rural Normal Institute (RNI) was created. Unlike the Rural Specialization Course that existed until then, which worked in the Normal Institutes of Montevideo, the MeFER demanded that the RNI be located in rural areas, so that teachers could be trained in the same environment. where they were going to perform This requirement was taken into account and the RNI settled in the Farm School No. 56 of González Station, one of the schools in which, since 1944, the weekly practice of the Farm Schools subject of the Rural Specialization Course was carried out.

Teachers already received participated in the RNI, who were selected from among those who held managerial positions or teachers in rural schools or farm schools by Departmental Inspectors of Primary Education, with the intervention, as of 1958, of the Rural Education Section, a technical-administrative body which depended on the RNI, the Farm Schools and the Socio-Pedagogical Missions. These teachers continued to receive their salary during the months that the course lasted and had to return to their places of work when they finished the course (Angione, 1987).

This institute went through two stages, one between 1949-1957 and a shorter one, between 1957 and 1960. Initially, the National Council for Primary and Normal Education (CNEPyN) "opted to preserve much of the experience already accumulated. Claudia Tapia de Arboleya became Director of the RNI, she had been the Number 56 School principal, the Sub-Inspector of Farm Schools and participated in the evaluation of CER students when it was held in Montevideo" (Batista, 2016:50).

The RNI, according to its regulations, should have functioned as a boarding school, but due to budgetary problems this was not possible.

The first year, the students traveled daily to the nearest city –San José– to stay in a hotel, and in 1953, the Institute did not even work.

Regarding the training proposal, about 40% of the curriculum was occupied by workshop spaces dedicated to non-agricultural manual activities, where crafts were made that were then exhibited at the end of the year. The practice activities always took place in the farm school with which it shared the property and address; the visits –to model rural establishments or to talks and exhibitions in the departmental capital-, were scarce. In five years of operation, only one activity oriented towards direct work with the school's neighbors was recorded in the daily book: the promotion of a census to be carried out in the town in 1956, work coordinated by the Professor of Rural Sociology (School Farm no. 56: 117). In addition, the observation of the points of the program was privileged over the period of contact of the teacher with the rural environment (Batista, 2016:50)

Faced with these difficulties and observing that the RNI did not work as the MeFER would have intended, in 1955 the Uruguayan Federation of Teachers (FUM) criticized the performance of the RNI, asserting that it did not achieve the purpose of training the teacher in an integral way to the performance of the tasks set by the current Rural Schools Program. In turn, the FUM requested that the RNI have greater interference in the area where it was located; that the work of the teachers-students be given with the children in the schools of the zone, with the families in their homes and in the Agrarian Clubs and with the community. They also demanded that RNI professors have been trained in post-graduate courses. To do this, the FUM asked the CNEPyN to accept UNESCO's offer to grant scholarships to five teachers so that they could be trained in Fundamental Education at CREFAL (Pátzcuaro, Mexico)¹³. The CNEPyN accepted this last request and also appointed a Pro-Reorganization Commission of the Rural Normal Institute (Batista, 2016).

These criticisms gave way to a second stage of the RNI. After Tapia's retirement, in 1957 the teacher Homero Grillo was appointed as director, who was recognized for his work as director of the Farm School Number 16, in Estación Ortiz, Lavalleja department. Along with Grillo's appointment, new teaching staff were selected, two of whom, Ana María Angione and Weyler Moreno, were teachers who had been trained at CREFAL¹⁴. In turn, on the recommendation of the Rural Education Section, the RNI was relocated to a place known until then as the "consolidated school" of Cruz de los Caminos, located in the department of Canelones. This building, reported Ana María Angione, "offered ample comfort, both for the operation of classrooms and workshops and for housing the teacher-students, although the area of land that surrounded it was not as abundant as it would have been desirable" (Angione, 1987:120).

¹³ A constitutive part of the doctrine of Fundamental Education was based on experiences and educational projects developed in rural Mexico between 1920 and 1940, some of the teachers who taught courses at CREFAL being veteran missionaries (Reisin, 2021).

¹⁴ "The fact that I had done the Fundamental Education Course in Mexico, determined that we had a preparation. Both me and my husband, Weyler Moreno, had a special preparation, in the field of Fundamental Education. As a new experience was going to take place in Cruz de los Caminos, the members of la Educación Rural called us to join the work team. The Director was Homero Grillo, a very outstanding teacher la Escuela Rural who had been Director for many years at la Escuela NNo. 16 of Lavalleja, -a rural school- and we who had been rural teachers here in Uruguay, had been for eight years at la Escuela Rural Number 24, Rincón de Conde, in the department of Canelones. We did not return to the School but we returned to this Institution that was reorganized in Cruz de los Caminos" (Angione, 2010).

The fact that there was not enough land to carry out agricultural practices was seen by the MeFER as a potentiality, since they considered this limitation would force the teachers-students to work together with the neighbors on the family lands, since they considered that this reality representative of the situation in which the majority of rural populations found themselves. On this aspect, Batista highlighted that it is "significant that the poverty of the area and its productive backwardness have been a factor that ended up deciding the transfer" (Batista, 1987: 52).

Finally, the Rural Education Section defined a new study plan for the RNI, ensuring that it is consistent with the Rural Schools Program approved in 1949. Among the objectives, in addition to teaching agricultural production techniques, was added the study of the social phenomena typical of the rural environment and the teaching of methods for working with the community (Batista, 2016).

Between 1959 and the beginning of 1961, summer courses were held that lasted a month, one in January and the other in February, in which a total of 80 teacher-students participated. In turn, in 1959 and 1960, regular nine-month courses were given. Angione, in a bridging interview in 2010, explained that the subjects of the regular course were: Social Problems and Fundamental Education dictated by Weyler Moreno; Agronomy and Didactics by the Director Homero Grillo; Production and use of Audiovisual media dictated by Angione. Other teachers completed the curriculum with the dictation of subjects such as: Home Education; Crafts Workshop; Estetic Education; Physical education; and Health Education. Regarding the summer courses, the teacher stated that "emphasis was placed on both didactic and pedagogical - theoretical aspects, because the teacher had to be trained in that short time in a number of aspects that had to do with a reality, the knowledge of the economic, social, and cultural reality of the rural environment, to which they owed and were dedicating their work" (Angione, 2010)¹⁵.

In relation to the type of rural teacher they intended to train at the RNI, in a manuscript written by Homero Grillo while he was its director, on the occasion of preparing an audition for the teacher-students, as he called his students, he defined how it should be work of the rural teacher according to his conception:

We have seen how their work, being comprehensive, faces problems of culture, recreation, health, coexistence, economy. Today we will refer specifically to this last aspect: the influence of the school on the economic life of the area.

The welfare of the neighbors or the problems caused by economic imbalances, come to the school through the child, favoring or hindering the work that it must do.

The anguish and deprivation suffered in homes hit hard on the sensibility of a teacher who, like the rural one, can quite accurately appreciate the deficits suffered by his students.

This circumstance should create in the peasant teacher an awareness that it is up to him to collaborate with other institutions in the search for paths that make possible the solution of existing problems in the area.

The position occupied by the teacher (...); the fact of being, generally, the school the only state institution directly linked to the environment, commits and elevates the educator in a certain way to be a bit of a pioneer facing problems (Grillo, n.d.)¹⁶.

¹⁵ Conti, Mariela (2010). Interview with Ana María Angione, Canelones (unpublished).

¹⁶ Based on the content of the text, we estimate that it was written between 1959 and 1960 (Personal archive of Homero Grillo. Agustín Ferreiro Center (CAF), Canelones).

Grillo in this manuscript recovered a central aspect of the Rural Schools Program (1949), the concept of "Productive School", which held that the school will be productive if it carries out:

useful work that can create material benefits for students. This educational work will tend to balance the productive capacity of the environment with the intelligent understanding of its problems and the necessary technical initiation for its use for the benefit of peasant well-being" (Soler Roca, 1987:53).

This conception of the rural school implied specific teacher training. As we have explained here, in Uruguay the initial training of the teacher was common, there were no Rural Normal Schools, as there were in other countries of the region¹⁷. In this sense, although the RNI was a MeFER proposal, once this experience was over, some of the referents of this movement made a self-criticism about the teacher training project. This was the case of teacher and journalist Julio Castro, who was a professor at the Normal Institutes of Montevideo during the 1940s and who later, already retired, continued to participate in MeFER, visiting, for example, the RNI¹⁸. In 1964 Castro published an article in the MARCHA weekly entitled "Educación primaria: presente y futuro" ["Primary education: present and future"]; in it he dedicated a special section to the training of teachers. There Castro stated that although normal education in his country has a "long tradition" and had achieved a "considerable level", there is room for improvement.

It has dominated in it (normal education) -it is logical, moreover, given the extraction of the students- the formation of the city. Both in Montevideo and in the countryside, the normal institutes live and act in the citizen way. When students graduate and have to work in the fields, they encounter difficulties that the parent institution did not prevent them from.

¹⁷ "In some Latin American countries, teachers for rural areas are trained in rural normal schools with curricula of shorter duration than those of urban normal schools. Thus, a distinction is produced from the very origin of the training, generally to the detriment of the professional level achieved by so-called "rural" teachers, whose career prospects are limited, since they have a title that does not qualify them to occupy positions of hierarchy in the educational administration. This was not the case in Uruguay. In the 1950s, teachers who worked as teachers in rural schools had received their title of first grade teacher. Exceptions were few; some very remote schools were attended for a short time by student teachers. Teaching improvement for rural teachers was conceived, then, as a true post-graduate specialization, subsequent to the possession of the title of teacher" (Angione, 1987:119).

¹⁸ In the interview with Ana María Angione, the teacher commented that Julio Castro was her teacher at the María Stagnero de Munar Institute for Young Ladies in Montevideo. During the time she was studying, Socio-Pedagogical Missions were being carried out, several of which Julio Castro was an accompanying teacher. In the interview, she lamented not having been able to participate in them since her family did not authorize it "Unfortunately I could not attend, because well, my family did not allow me because I was a woman, because they went to very distant places, which for them it was like going to the end of the world." In turn, Angione recounted a visit by Castro to the INR when she was a teacher there: "Everyone, students and teachers, we all participated. So we formed a wheel that allowed us to feel very united and also very involved in the changes that the rural environment needed that Julio Castro always said, "we have to change, we have to change, it cannot be that there is a macrocephaly in Montevideo and that the rural environment is depopulated. We have to populate the rural environment." We are still trying to achieve, at this point in time, and in life, trying to keep people from leaving the countryside and what we wanted was that" (Angione, 2010).

An attempt has been made to correct this through the organization of a Rural Normal Institute -today in ruins after the official raid- to teach rural specialization courses for postgraduates.

The mere inventory of these organisms proves the existence of a conceptual error. To believe that teaching in rural areas is a specialized function within the teaching activity

The rural teacher must have -so that, in our opinion, his preparation is correct- a normal rural training, not a later specialization. This will give him techniques, but not integration into peasant life, which is what is sought. (Castro, 2013: 50)

According to Castro, the teachers who were going to practice in rural areas had to complete their normal studies in said environment, since more than a specialty, rurality had to do with "claiming for the countryside a style of life of its own, with the consequent respect for their forms and values" (Castro, 2013: 50 and 51). By then, Castro had toured several Latin American countries, and, in particular, had strengthened ties with Mexico, a country he visited on several occasions and in which he worked as Deputy Director of Content at CREFAL between 1951 and 1953 (Reisin, 2019 and 2021). During these trips he learned about the experiences of the Rural Normal Schools there, the type of practical training and work with the community that students received in these boarding schools. This knowledge may have informed his criticism of the way in which teacher training for rural teachers was conceived and structured in his country, not as initial training but as a post-graduate specialization.

At the same time, in this note, he also pointed out that in the curriculum for teacher training, there was a "hypertrophy of information regarding educational theories and practices that have emerged in other parts of the globe to respond to other levels of culture and other social needs" (Castro, [1964] 2013: 51). Possibly he is referring to the decontextualized teaching of theories and methods of European and North American New School Movement. Regarding the teaching of sociology and economics, he pointed out that it was due to an "intellectual colonialism that undervalues the knowledge of national facts and the modest but real modalities of the world in which we live" (Castro, 2013: 51). . This training generated, according to Castro, that the graduates are very attached to the book, and that more than training, they have acquired information.

Final thoughts

The experiences analyzed in this text have the intention of emphasize the value of the capacity of agency that was shown by the teaching professionals as they were able to problematize both their own training and their teaching work. This problematization caused the creation of various strategies to address the training of rural teachers, which accounts for a teaching profession dedicated to bring about change and social transformation, which not only demanded solutions defined by the State but also teachers that created them and urged the authorities to implement them.

The Divulcation Center of School Practices was designed to guide teachers who were in practice. In addition, it was a periodic publication that served to exchange among teachers, school practices that they carry out, in many cases, alone, since they worked in unitary rural schools. Here, the role assumed by the inspectors, who toured the schools with a function of pedagogical guidance and had regional knowledge of the practices developed in various institutions, gained special relevance. It is no coincidence that the person who created this project was the Regional Inspector Agustín Ferreiro.

Through the Socio-Pedagogical Missions, they sought that the normalist students have a first contact with the rural environment where they may work when they graduate. It is relevant to highlight here that the expansion of the missionary movement at the national level was what prompted the creation of Departmental Normal Institutes in the rural areas of the country.

Lastly, RNI was a big bet since it implied that rural teachers who were working in schools temporarily abandon their jobs to go to train in a boarding school for nine months, if they participated in the regular course, or that they train during the summer vacations, if they opted for the course. Those jobs had to be replaced by other teachers, which meant that the State paid both salaries. It took seven years for the RNI to function according to the guidelines that the MeFER considered pertinent and when it was refunctionalized in 1958, it lasted only two years.

Finally, it is important to highlight in these conclusions that both the Socio-Pedagogical Missions and the RNI keep their connections with experiences developed in Mexican rural education (1920-1940). As we mentioned, the Socio-Pedagogical Missions have their antecedents in the Cultural Missions and, in the RNI, two teachers trained in Fundamental Education at CREFAL, Mexico worked. Although it was not the intention of this paper to delve into the connections between Uruguay and Mexico, it is necessary to mention that the configuration of ruralist pedagogy in Uruguay was part of a transnational historical process.

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