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## Teacher training: History, legal and political bases and educational practices today

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### Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a research study carried out with those who educate educators (teachers). One of the themes addressed are the social representations (SR) that teachers have of the application of the legal bases that have sustained teacher training in Argentina throughout history and which continue to underlie this training in the present day. We look at both the changes and continuities and their link to current educational practice. The methodology used was qualitative (documentary analysis, lexicometric analysis, hierarchical evocations). We established Nodes, categories and subcategories of analysis that reveal which aspects make up the core of teachers' SR and which are peripheral. Our findings – which do not coincide with the devalued images of teachers presented by the media, clouded by frequent claims by society – could orient transformations from the political, decision-making sector that would seek to improve practices and recover, precisely, the legal bases and their evolution up to the present day.

Keywords: Educate educators; teacher training; social representations; legal bases.

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## **1. Introduction**

Teacher training in Argentina has gone through many changes throughout the country's educational history. Since the creation of Normal Schools in 1871 in Parana, the way of viewing the training of those who carry out the task of formal education has fluctuated between projects of normal training schools, training to perform remunerated work, training to be State employees and intellectual training to become agents of social transformation.

The present work looks at the changes and continuities observed in the processes that make up Teacher Training in Argentina, for educators of educators at the Preschool, Primary School and Secondary School levels. These changes have responded, on many occasions, to transformations in the economic, political and social order of the country. Others concern the legal bases upon which the system stands.

The questions that guided our research were: What events defined, from a historical point of view, the beginnings of Teacher Training in Argentina? What changes have occurred since the appearance of Normal Schools up to the creation of National Institutes of Teacher Training (INFD)? What are the legal and political bases that underlie these changes in teacher training? On a closer level, we ask what the social (that is, shared) representations that teachers have of their teaching practice are as relates to changes produced over time and during moments of inflection and rupture, among others.

In addition, it is frequently said that teachers today are different from those of the past, that they deal with greater levels of social conflict; novice teachers are more affected by this situation, far from the model that prevailed during the dawning of the National State, but who seem to have internalized the standards from previous models (Alliaud, 2007; Davini, 2010). This issue is not only present at the national level; it is also the object of discussion in other contexts, such as in France; this context has inspired various national changes.

It is not necessary to point out that the debate on teacher training is today extremely relevant; nor is it necessary to reiterate that various essays have been written on the topic. Nevertheless, there are very few research studies that analyze the documentary level (Resolutions, Decrees) and that seek to generate an understanding – from that sustained by the actors themselves – of what the perceived situation is, what their main concerns are and what place training in different types of competencies has occupied over time, as today these competencies are pillars of teacher training.

As such, we decided to work with educators of educators *in situ*. We estimate that this interaction with the daily life of a school will provide us with a perspective of teacher experience both at the knowledge level and at the level of daily demands, demands that seem to increase day by day in a society that requires teachers to take on roles for which they have not always been prepared.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology utilized was qualitative (documentary analysis, lexicometric analysis, hierarchical evocations). We established Nodes, categories and subcategories of analysis that reveal which aspects make up the core of teachers' SR and which are peripheral.

We present findings gleaned from the quantitative-descriptive analysis: Sociodemographic factors and those inherent to teacher training.

Subsequently, we refer to some qualitative findings gleaned from the techniques utilized. The application of these techniques was possible due to the inclusion of items in the survey in such a way as to permit us to access teachers' social representations, both their core and their peripheral aspects.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1. Quantitative-Descriptive**

From a sociodemographic point of view, we worked with a population which was majority female, young and married and in which the mean age was between the range of 41 to 45 years old.

From the academic point of view, the majority had obtained an undergraduate degree in 4 to 5 years at a university institution. These individuals have better workplace positioning than graduates of Teacher Training Institutes who completed their studies at the tertiary, non-university level.

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Also, at the level of workplace perspective, we observe that the highest percentage of teachers has between 6 and 10 years of work experience in education.

Regarding initial teacher training, almost 70% maintain that their education programs were primarily theoretical, while just over half (53%) maintain that there was a relationship established between theory and practice.

Lastly, as regards aspects related more to current teacher training, it is not pedagogy, didactics, curriculum or the principal educational theories which challenge teacher training; rather, it is policies according to resolutions issued by the Federal Education Commission (CFE) which present challenges. These resolutions present the teacher as an “agent of the State” and seek to “strengthen and make hierarchical the ethical, political and pedagogical authority of schools and teachers” (CFE Resolution 201/13).

### **3.2. Qualitative**

We present our findings according to the techniques utilized: lexicometric analysis and hierarchical evocations. Results from the documentary analysis are not presented in order to maintain brevity.

#### **3.2.1. Lexicometric Analysis**

##### **3.2.1.1. Teacher Function**

The question asked was: What do you think is the Function of a Teacher? Three categories emerged: to teach, to follow a vocation and to work for the State.

The category *to teach* had the highest percentage of responses (65.9%). *To follow a vocation* is a distant second (22.7%) and lastly, *to work for the State* (11.38%). As we can see, teachers relate their mission, basically, to transmitting knowledge and forming part of the teaching-learning process.

A link with *vocation* makes sense as those who choose to be teachers know that they will not receive high salaries or great social prestige. Their mission is to serve.

And thirdly, as a *State Employee*, they carry out a paid task.

##### **3.2.1.2. Teacher Training today**

The question asked was: What aspects should current teacher training strengthen and improve? Three categories emerged: Teaching techniques (47.16%), Continuing education (32.09%) and redefining teacher roles (teacher and society) (20.75%).

Here again, the “didactic” aspects seem to make up the majority of teachers’ concerns, in light of high rates of academic failure (repetition and drop outs) and growing societal demands of teachers. This finding relates to our prior finding, that what is most important to teachers is to teach. They also demand permanent, “continuing education” for life; something essential and systematized in many countries with high educational quality. Although Argentina has proposed a series of permanent, Continuing Education Plans, they seem not to be perceived by teachers as systematic processes of education. In terms of “redefining teacher roles (the relationship between teachers and society)”, professionalization is given priority.

#### **3.2.2. Analysis according to hierarchical evocations**

We worked with 8 key nodes which demonstrate the social representations that educators of educators have and which form part of the core of being a Teacher and those which are secondary or peripheral. The nodes include: Initial Teacher Training, Continuing Teacher Education, Teacher Training

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at Normal Schools, First Modifications in Teacher Training, Transformation of Teacher Training, the Teacher of Common Education Law 1420 (first law to regulate teacher training), the Teacher of the Federal Law of Education and the Teacher of the National Law of Education.

We now proceed to synthesize the most important elements of each node.

Many categories frequently emerged in the core. Among them, Pedagogical, Political and Social Education. Nevertheless, in terms of Teacher Transformation, Social Education is relegated to the periphery, being a secondary aspect. This is congruent if we think that “the social” does not depend, at least not directly or exclusively, on teacher function.

As regards the “Pedagogical” category, it is located in the core of the Initial Education, Education in the First Modifications and Teacher Transformation nodes; however, when representations are addressed in relation to Law 1420, this category becomes peripheral. That is to say, the pedagogical level is overshadowed by other aspects such as Moral and Political Education, very relevant in the present day.

For its part, the “Academic” category is part of the core of the Federal Law of Education and the National Law of Education nodes; nevertheless, in the rest of the nodes it is always secondary. If we remember that this category concerns “education in the field, refinement and continuing education”, we see that teacher interest in these aspects is low, a fact which invites us to think about the causes that could underlie this conformism in terms of knowledge and transformation.

An important deficit could be suggested by the presence of Management Education in the periphery of the Continuing Education Node. This indicates that Management still does not occupy an important place in curriculum design, though it is well known that many teachers will eventually hold management positions. Nor is this category part of the core of Permanent Education, as it is always located in the periphery.

In this sense, a reality emerges: the majority of principals have reached their position due to years of experience and not because of their knowledge base, levels of continuing education and/or studies related to management.

These findings demonstrate that representations are dynamic and help us to uncover some important aspects: no category is always core or periphery, except for Teacher Researcher, appearing on two occasions in the periphery, occupying an insignificant position. This provides evidence of the little value given to research by teachers, a rift that is also observed in other countries. This irrelevance also emerges when analyzing laws that, without a doubt, reveal policies or political leanings.

#### **4. Conclusion**

We established various objectives for our research: to capture the degree of knowledge that teachers themselves have of historical instances and their central focus; to understand how teachers understand the core of their mission, function and role in society; to identify, by way of an analysis of the Legal Bases that underlie teacher training, key events that influenced the implementation of each Law and Resolution; to comprehend the shared representations that the teachers interviewed have of the evolution of Teacher Training in Argentina, including Initial and Continuing Education. Finally, we seek to transfer our findings to the political-educational decision making sector for the future implementation of instances which contribute to the improvement of teacher training, as we understand that without educators trained in the wide range of competencies that our society requires, improving the global education system will be extremely difficult.

In addition, when initiating our research study, we started with a hypothesis. We believed that teachers were aware of important aspects of the historical and legal changes to Teacher Training. However, our findings show that teachers are strictly unaware of many resolutions that regulate their daily work. We also took as a hypothesis that there would continue to exist a gap between theory and practice despite the efforts carried out historically and, fundamentally, with the creation of the INFD. We were able to corroborate this hypothesis. Finally, in their shared representations of Mission,

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Function and Training, teachers give priority to disciplinary and policy aspects, with other aspects remaining at the margins. This constitutes a reductionist perspective that could be found over the last few years (period during which the teachers interviewed received their training).

As a conclusion, we can say that: a) the historical processes through which teacher training programs in Argentina have passed have included moments of great definition, such as the passing of Law 1420 and the prior creation of the Normal School of Parana. It is precisely these moments which seem to have remained fixed in the representations of teacher educators today: when they discuss what is expected of teachers in today's world, reference is made to the beginnings of teacher training. b) The regulatory framework established, above all from the so-called education transformation and teacher training transformation, has driven structural changes and modifications. Nevertheless, we also observe that these changes and modifications have mostly remained at the level of discourse and proposal. The gap between theory and practice continues in effect. Our findings, though not exhaustive, are a call to attention for those responsible for today's education system.

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