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Images of Teaching: Neoliberalism, Teacher Education and Gender

Imágenes de la docencia: neoliberalismo, formación docente y género.

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a study done with a group of 178 Master's Degree students in the city of Buenos Aires. The principle objectives of the project were: a) to explore the dynamics of gender in teacher-training institutes; b) to investigate the pedagogical images and the imagination of future teachers; and c) to explore what senses the future teachers give to the concepts of *vocation of authority*.

Key words: Images, pedagogical imagination, teacher training, gender.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación realizada con un grupo de 178 estudiantes de magisterio de la ciudad de Buenos Aires. Los objetivos principales de este proyecto fueron: a) explorar las dinámicas de género en los institutos de formación docente; b) investigar las imágenes y la imaginación pedagógica de futuros y futuras docentes y c) explorar qué sentidos le otorgan los futuros y futuras docentes a los conceptos de *vocación* y de *autoridad*.

Palabras clave: Imágenes, imaginación pedagógica, formación docente, género.

First images. Simple and magical solutions I

You women are the reason for the crisis of the Argentine State! Do you not see the number of homeless children, drug addicts and the elderly living in the streets? This is because you the women go out to work, and therefore produce the crisis of the state. Now the state must take care of homeless children and the elderly. Do you not see what you are doing, what you are causing? (Cavallo, 1995, p. 15)

Without analyzing the many issues contained in this nostalgic and discriminatory view, it is undoubtable that the opinion of the former economy minister of Argentina. Domingo Cavallo¹ was based on a concrete and verifiable item: women hold at least half the jobs. To Cavallo and those who share their ideas on the role and social position of women, this fact is doubly important because it identifies the cause of the labor crisis while offering a simple and almost magical solution: if women would occupy themselves with domestic chores, unemployment and social problems would disappear at the same time.

Simple and magical solutions II

Two years later, a variation on the ideas of Cavallo occupied the center of the educational policy debate. In early 1997, several newspapers reported that teacher-training institutions were facing a decline in enrollment, and the alleged lack of teachers could create an educational crisis. The causes of the crisis: low wages and a career crisis (Birgin, 1999, Progré, 2004). Shortly thereafter, in May of 1997, twenty-five teachers from public schools, began a hunger strike outside the National Congress. For the strikers, the protests were necessary to draw attention to critical situations of the national education system such as the precarious state of many educational institutions for lack of maintenance, low wages and appalling conditions of teaching and learning. Journalists, experts, government officials and even other teachers strongly criticized the strikers (especially the women strikers) for neglecting their “responsibilities” as teachers, betraying the students—their children. The striking teachers answered that they loved all the children in Argentina and that the protest was in defense of the rights of juvenile Argentine students and of the public education system. Numerous letters, editorials, articles and opinion pieces in newspapers, magazines and television programs immediately identified that the hunger strike was a clear signal

of how the teachers had lost their “true calling”. Reading these notes indicated that the participation of women in the strike, was much more irritating than that of men, and confirmed how important it was for women teachers to recover their lost vocation so as to resolve the serious crisis in education. As former Minister Cavallo had said before, changes in the conduct of women teachers would offer a simple and almost magical solution.

In their simplicity these two anecdotes combine important conceptual problems and multiple entry points from which to reflect on teacher training: What was the impact of structural adjustment policies on the teaching profession? How did gender regimes affect the teaching profession? What were the contemporary images circulating about the teaching profession? In an attempt to address these questions, this article presents the results of research on images of teaching conducted with a group of 178 student teachers from the city of Buenos Aires. In this project the main objective was to explore the gender dynamics developed in teacher-training institutes in conjunction with the images and the pedagogical imagination of the future teachers and in parallel, what meanings did they give to the concepts of *vocation* and *authority*.

This paper is organized as follows. In order to provide a frame of reference within which to analyze the gender dynamics in teacher-training institutions, the first section of this article briefly discusses the impact of neoliberal discourses on educational reforms in Latin America. The second section discusses the gender dynamics in teacher education in Argentina. Sections three and four present a summary of the results and conclusions of a series of discussion workshops conducted with student teachers from the city of Buenos Aires.

Neoliberal discourse and educational reform in Latin America

In the period from the early 80's until the early years of the twenty-first century, most Latin American governments undertook numerous and profound political and administrative restructuring of the state apparatus. These restructuration programs required drastic economic and social reforms, and the public education system was one of the most important areas of conflict (Fischman, Ball, and Gvirtz, 2003; Gentili and Suárez, 2004; Reimers, 2000). Many of these reforms were confined to systematic processes of privatization of public enterprises and services, associated in the past with the models of the welfare state and economic development through substitution imports. The privatization of businesses and services, and the transformation (via their deletion or loss of regulatory power) of public institutions related to the Keynesian welfare state model were perceived and promoted by the governing elites as the key that would give immediate answers to the historical problems of economic growth, political and social crises, and new challenges associated with the consolidation of what many analysts now call the neoliberal model of globalization (Ball, Fischman and Gvirtz, 2003; Fischman, McLaren, Sünker and Lanksher, 2005; Stromquist, 2003).

In Latin America the promoters of the neoliberal models equated the concept of “globalization” with “modernization”, which meant accepting the unrestricted expansion of transnational capital, the supranational character of the productive decision making and reduction or direct elimination of trade barriers and access to information and cultural consumption. It is important to note that while *globalization* is one of the concepts discussed in terms of its meaning and its results (Rhoten, 2000, Stiglitz, 2002 and 2003), that does not prohibit us from pointing out that the eighties’ neoliberal notion—that which promised that rapid integration into the “global market” would solve the region’s pressing problems, it does not have much support. The report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, its acronym in English) concluded that in Latin America most of the structural-adjustment processes implemented during the 80s and 90s, followed faulty concepts of the *goals* and *means*.

It is often argued (correctly) that investing in people increases their productivity. It is then argued (incorrectly), that human development simply means the development of human resources—increasing human capital. This formulation confuses ends and means. People are not simply tools to produce goods, and the purpose of development is not merely to produce more value, added regardless of use. What must be avoided at all costs is seeing the human being as a mere means of production and material prosperity, considering the latter as the end of the causal analysis—a strange inversion of ends and means—(UNDP, 1995, p. 15).

In Latin America, the sectors that promoted and were benefited by this confusion of *ends* and *means*, promoted a discourse in which social policy—from housing and economic development to health and education—were subordinated to the logic of structural competitiveness and an increasing internationalization of capital. Such policies needed to ignore, arrogantly, the enormous amount of information denouncing the growing pathological formula of social inequity which neoconservative and neoliberal proposals had inflicted on countries around the world (Fischman and Stromquist, 2000; Fischman, 1998; Kabeer, 1994, McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2000; Sammoff, 1995).

Neoconservative and neoliberal discourses combined multiple theoretical and ideological arguments that mainly attacked those programs aimed at developing the notion of what was public, such as the public school (Torres, 2001). It is critical to emphasize that the neoliberal discourse in education was presented with a mantle of inevitability, quasi-religious, presented as technical efficiency and objectivity. In this sense, we are faced with what Pierre Bourdieu designated as the “gospel” of neo-liberalism, which is:

A powerful economic theory whose strictly symbolic force, combined with the effect of theory, redoubles the strength of the economic reality it is supposed to express. It ratifies the spontaneous philosophy of the people who direct the great multinational organizations and of the agents of high finance—especially pension-fund managers. Re-transmitted all over the world by national and international politicians, public employees and most of the world’s most distinguished journalists—all more or less equally ignorant of the underlying mathematical theology—it was “becoming a kind of universal belief, a new ecumenical gospel.

This gospel, or rather, the common term known everywhere by the name of liberalism, comes out of an ill-defined collection of words—"globalization", "flexibility", "deregulation", etc.—which through their liberal and even libertarian, connotations helped to give the appearance of a message of freedom and liberation to a conservative ideology that sees itself as opposed to every ideology" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 126).

These ideological forces identified by Bourdieu function in a context in which large sectors of society continue to assist in dismantling the social political and economic infrastructures which were social and supportive conquests for the working classes (and for what we now can only call "the class that would like to be working"), and also for and ethnic and social minorities.² Defenders and supporters of free-market fundamentalism and neoliberal globalization have catapulted into an abyss such notions as *equality* and *justice*, while restricting the notion of *democracy*, turning it into a consumer product and translating it into the "authorized" language of the techno-capitalist culture; of the bureaucratic developmentalism of the technology of advancement; of the corruption of information and of tele-democracy (García Canlini, 1995; De Sousa, 1997).

The contemporary scheme of quasi-unfettered global markets, minimal controls on international financial transactions and decentralization of the production of goods and services has strengthened the power of transnational corporations, as well as the role of international regulatory agencies.³ Among these agencies are the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) not only because of economic weight, but also because they had a direct impact on structural reforms in Latin America. It is important to emphasize that both the WB and the IMF exerted a significant influence on the reforms of the public education sector through the imposition of "*conditionalities*" associated with the provision of financial resources. There is no doubt that highly-indebted countries needed funding to carry out structural changes; however, many of the reforms actually implemented were resisted locally, and could only be implemented thanks to the impetus and pressures from international organizations and their local partners. (Carnoy and Moura Castro, 1996; Coraggio and Torres, 1999; Torres, 2001).⁴

The most significant changes in educational systems were geared primarily to producing financial savings, and were particularly seen in the passing of laws that allowed the organizational and curriculum restructuring of national education systems, the increasing participation of the private sector (with and without profit goals, especially at the upper level), in the offer of services and the implementation of various programs to measure educational quality. While these reforms were developed within the narrow limits imposed by the financial priorities of nation's states (to reduce or detain the expansion of public expenditure on education), at the same time, they proposed to transform the objectives, the epistemological foundations, the methods and the procedures of the school systems (Avalos, 1987; Braslavsky, 1993, Brunner and Puryear, 1995, Ball, Fischman and Gvirtz, 2003; Gentili, 1994, Tedesco, 1991).

One of the most striking elements that constitutes the focal point of this work is that in the particular case of Argentina, it was very difficult to separate criticism of the (public) school inefficiency from other negative evaluation, which had the feminization of teaching as a unifying element.

Teacher-training and gender

Closely related to the severe economic constraints discussed above, during the 90's, teachers' working conditions were deeply affected. Factors such as the fact that wage increases were at a standstill; an increase in the number of work hours and/or students; instability; curriculum changes and increased demands; and a perceptible change in the Argentine society's expectations concerning teachers were creating a situation of great distress among education professionals. A survey of 1700 teachers, conducted by the Ministry of Education of the Government of the Municipality of the City of Buenos Aires showed that, contrary to the popular belief that women choose teaching because of the shorter working hours, 60% of women teachers were working double shifts (with different student groups). Seventy percent would have preferred to teach a full school day with the same group of students, rather than half-day sessions with different groups, in order to give more attention to the pedagogical labor instead of social tasks not directly related to education, such as general health care, vaccination, provision of food, and the like. These tasks were consuming as much as 50% of the daily hours for many teachers working in schools in poor neighborhoods. On the other hand, 17% of all teachers were divorced or widowed, with children to support, and more than two jobs to meet their living costs. Indeed, only 36% were tenured, and 30% had college degrees, a condition not recognized in terms of adequate financial remuneration or promotions.

All these factors impacted heavily on the enrollment of students in teacher-training institutions. Enrollment decreased by 30% between 1992 and 1997 (Birgin, 1999). The changes in the social representation and in the responsibilities involved in being a teacher may have influenced this trend. Thus, a teacher describing her* daily working conditions—not too dissimilar from those of many/most of her colleagues, observes that:

“I call the roll, I collect the money students contribute to the *school cooperative* (contributions to school maintenance), I check the children's heads for lice, I fill out the daily record, I monitor those coming in or going out, I plan classes, I prepare a snack, I listen to the problems of the children and sometimes of their parents, I meet with the director, I stand in the yard and keep the kids from climbing the walls. There is no time to teach the content I had planned (Mirta, thirty-two years old).”

* Translator's note: Before the feminist movement arose, in situations including both genders it was customary to use the masculine pronoun. Today, however, pronouns of both genders are used to avoid what is now seen as sexist language. To avoid the awkwardness of a continual repetition of such forms as “s/he”, “his/her”, in this paper we shall sometimes use the feminine pronoun, and sometimes the masculine.

No doubt many of the tasks described by this teacher are similar to traditionally “domestic” tasks. As Acker notes (1996):

“In the same way that we forget that the home is the housewife’s workplace, the image of the work of teaching as a natural training also encourages us to forget as well that the classroom is a workplace” (p.115).

Teacher Mirta’s testimony indicates that she did not have a “natural inclination” to care for children, but was doing what she considered urgent, rather than what she considered educationally important. This duality has a long history in the case of Argentina.

From the beginning of the public school systems, teachers have exercised important symbolic and legitimating functions in modern states, primarily through the transmission of the *official knowledge* (Apple, 1993) reflected in the curriculum, and the strengthening of nationalist and patriotic rituals. In spite of the weight of those functions during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, teachers from Argentina were not considered (and did not consider themselves) as mere public employees—government bureaucrats solely responsible for the transmission of curriculum content and the organization of festivities and ritualized speeches. In fact, it seems that the titles “teacher” or “professor” had connotations going beyond the professional. Being a teacher meant that in addition to mastering the *arts and sciences of teaching*, the person had a *calling* to be a teacher or a teacher. This person was a teacher because he had to respond to his “*calling*” in social contexts considered where the transmission of knowledge and the nation’s collective values was almost a “sacred mission” (Morgade, 1992a; Puiggrós, 1986, 1987).

More than a century after the consolidation of public education systems, it was still striking that the vast majority of women working as teachers in primary schools were commonly called “second mothers”, “aunts”, “ladies” “misses”, “girls” or “sisters.” In Argentina the figure of teachers as second mothers continues to be important (Fischman, 1997). That image is associated with a deeply-rooted tradition of the schools in Argentina; it is traditional to address women teachers by using the diminutive of their first names (e.g. Teacher Rosita, Martita, etc.). Conversely, men working in primary schools were called “Professor”, “Teacher” or “Mr. X”—the name is de *rigueur*, contrary to the frequent use of the first name for women. In no case was the diminutive used for a man.

Several studies (Freire, 1993, Morgade, 1997; Stromquist, 1997; Yannoulas, 1996) have pointed out that these ways of addressing teachers were (and are) simple, naive expressions. The lack of recognition of the specific characteristics of women who work in schools (such as professional status, marital status, age, gender, and its replacement with stereotyped romantic names) associated with the realm of the home/domestic, encourages a kind of “domestication” and social infantilization of the women teachers.

For men, the use of other titles also hides the peculiarities of those who teach. In this case it emphasizes the relationship of masculinity with discipline and order, which, however is accompanied by a look of suspicion in relation to sexuality (Messner, 1997). The curious thing is that while women teachers are infantilized and domesticated and in that sense are asexual, as teachers; the men teachers are hyper-sexualized, causing them all to be viewed as potential sexual predators, gay or straight (Fischman, 2000). As noted above, men do not only generate anxiety in schools, by also pacify, since they are seen as transmitters of order, practicality and discipline, and responsible for these. This combination of fear and security seems to be closely related to the dynamics of gender, and hence, to the different ways of organizing curriculums for teaching men and women. This does not mean ignoring the existence of patriarchal structures, but does recognize the complexity of gender relations in schools, and helps explain the disproportionate presence of men in leadership positions. Instead of assuming that men are naturally inclined to lead, or pointing out that sexist structures explain everything, it is important to recognize that many male teachers are subtly, but strongly “encouraged” to leave the classroom and direct contact with children/girls, and to become authority figures a little more distant (directors, principals or supervisors) (Connell, 1995, 1996; Fischman, 2000). These differential ways of seeing and addressing teachers (encouraging some to take positions of authority while others are required to give love and affection) are manifestations of gender regimes prevailing in the society. But they also indicate the existence of other processes related to the teachers’ training and their professional and social status.

Nobody is surprised at the statement that “teaching is a female profession”. However, the gender variable has only recently become a common axis of analysis in studies of the teaching profession (Cortina and San Roman, in press) Indeed, numerous investigations in the United States do not give importance to, or rule out the fact that over 80% of primary school teachers are women, while only 10.6% of secretaries of education and 43.1% of principals in primary schools are women (Acker, 1992 and 1996). Similarly, in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, men constitute 10.8% of primary school teachers, but make up 31.6% of all directors, and 57.2% of district supervisors (Morgade, 1997).

The disproportionate presence of men in the upper levels of the bureaucratic school hierarchy reflects, in part, the traditional assumption that men are better suited to occupy management and authority positions, but it is also due to the preferential treatment given them by long-established rules and educational practices. In Argentina, during this century, a norm called the “3 X 1” established that for every three women teachers figuring in the ranking to have access to positions of directors or district supervisors, there should be one man (Fischman, 1997; Morgade , 1992a, Morgade, 1992b). In short, the public school system was expanded following a patriarchal pyramid model, with women’s work at the base and men’s work at the top. These percentages and trends show the existence of distinct patterns regarding the teaching profession and professionalism as related to the concepts of masculinity and femininity in Argentine schools. However, to

understand clearly the complex dynamics of gender in schools we must go beyond the statistics of distribution, representation and promotion (Acker, 1992, 1996).

One of the most-debated documents on the reform of teacher-training the United States, *What Matters most: Teaching for America's future* states, affirms that “for 2006, North America will offer each student what should be his or hers by birthright: access to an education provided by a competent, dedicated and qualified professional [author's free translation]** “(National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996, p. 5). No doubt this is a desirable goal, but in view of the previous discussion on the impact of gender dynamics in schools, it is essential to review the notions and ideological and pedagogical assumptions of what constitutes a dedicated professional, particularly because, as Sandra Acker notes:

It would not be necessary to state the obvious if it were not for the prevailing perception that teaching is a “sacred calling”, and individual teachers are those who “care deeply for children.” The association of these images with women is important in the shaping of teachers' occupational culture and the viewpoints of scholars who analyze teacher training (1996, p. 102).

Acker's words allow us to reflect on the risks associated with a continued and unquestioning belief in some of the customary platitudes, treated as facts, and certainly taken for granted—regarding concepts like *commitment* and *authority*—abounding in teacher-training centers. These assumptions become part of the complex mechanisms sustaining structures of discrimination; As a result, they contribute to the impoverishment of the professional status of teachers in general, with significant effects on teaching assignments. Finding space for reflection in order to understand and analyze what future teachers understand by *calling*, or what the relationship is between authority and gender, are urgent challenges, and put our imagination to the test, not only as educators but also as citizens. The next section offers some of the reflections of a group of 178 (149 women and 29 men), elementary and high-school student teachers in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

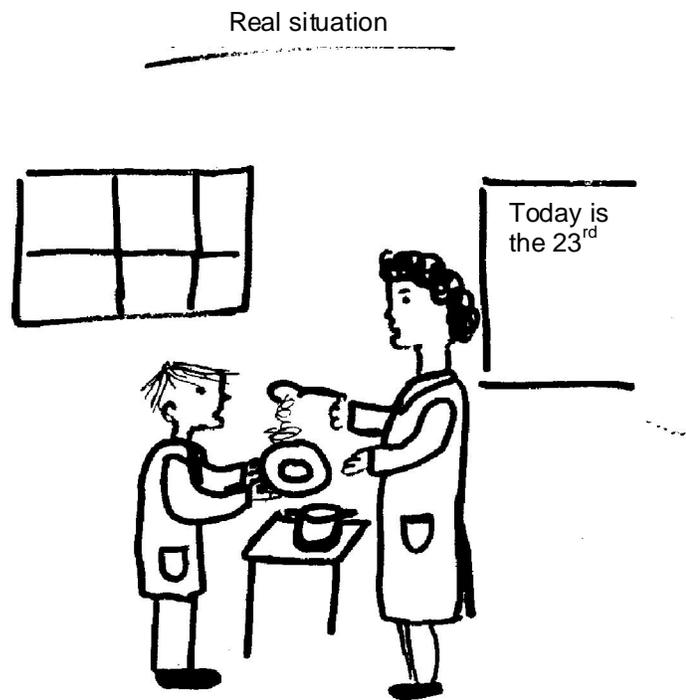
Imagining teachers⁵

With the dual objective of obtaining data for this research and also of creating spaces where students could reflect on the profession, six workshops were held in teacher-training institutes in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina (March-June, 1996, and July–September, 1997).⁶ Of the activities carried out in workshops, one that generated more debate, proving particularly effective in working with the students, was making drawings about “real” or “ideal” educational situations, and then analyzing them. Students were organized into small groups for discussion about the main characteristics of real and ideal schools. Next, individually or in pairs,

** Note from the translator of the English version of this article: According to the above endnote, the texts cited, originally written in English, were freely translated into Spanish by the author of this study for use in the Spanish-language text. As the original works were unavailable to the translator of the English version, it was necessary to employ the technique of back-translation, for which we offer our most humble apologies.

students drew the situations they had chosen, and explained in writing the elements they could not represent graphically. Once the students had looked at all the pictures, they discussed and selected one or two examples they considered representative of the whole group's ideas. Finally, after the samples had been selected, there was a discussion of the images and the texts that accompanied them.

For the 178 students who participated in this study, there were two predominant trends. First, most of the participants (69.2%) represented the reality of the Argentine classroom as problematic areas, overwhelmed by hunger; the economic poverty of students and teachers; the dramatic lack of maintenance of buildings and classrooms; the threat of violence and crime; the lack of student interest in the knowledge offered by the school; and teachers who did not know the content they were supposed to teach or who confused student learning with passive obedience (see Figures 1-3). Second, 'real' teachers were unquestionably women (90% of the sample).



In the majority of the needy zones the students go to school to eat.

Figure I. Hunger



Figure 2. Firearm

The original image of Figure 2 is in color. The teacher and the student on the right are blond. The student with the gun and the second student on the right have dark hair. The two other students have brown hair. The only word on the image is “gun.” On the back of the drawing, the student offered the following explanation:

“I wanted to represent the violence that exists in the public and private schools of our country. Also, poverty in city schools...that the country has “no money” to buy the proper materials for the schools of the state (i.e., chairs, chalk, etc.)”.

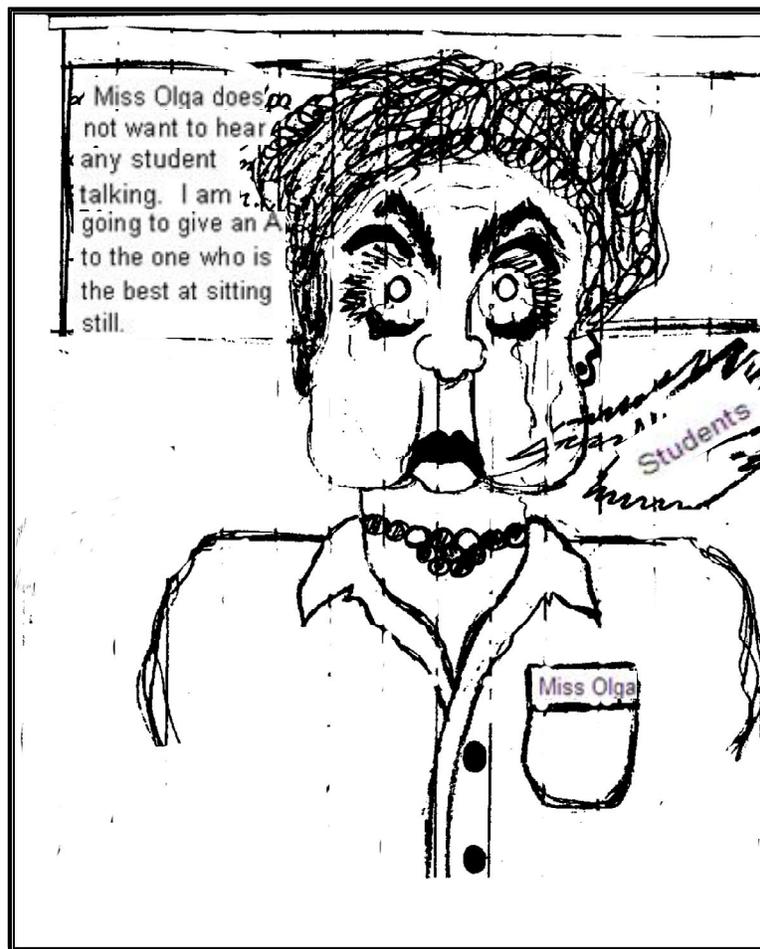


Figure 3. The Old Witch

This drawing was produced by a student 19 years of age. The original is in color. The explanation states:

Miss Olga [the teacher's name in the drawing] is like many of my own teachers, and like many others I see every day in schools. She needs silence, praises silence—all she cares about is silence. Students! [On the board] Miss Olga does not want to hear any student talking. I am going to give an A to the one who is the best at sitting still.

One element it is important to emphasize is that during the development of these activities, students showed a great capacity for analysis and criticism. This capacity for analysis contradicted the view, expressed frequently in the mass media and among the faculty teachers, that future teachers' lack training or have a low capacity for critical thinking. Overall, the drawings and reflections of student teachers in Buenos Aires suggest a *realistic* look at schools as places invaded by forces *foreign* to pedagogic work. Among the extrapedagogical forces most named and drawn, and somehow the most feared, were money, violence, politics, food

and television. Even the official policies and curriculum are seen as intrusive in the deteriorated areas teaching and learning to teach in Argentina. When the students represented *the school reality*, they were using (unknowingly) a Foucault-type analysis: the classrooms are areas where power circulates, conflict is a constant, love is absent, and knowledge is irrelevant while it is separated from the power circuit.⁷

This critical capacity seemed to decrease, and the dichotomies between the domestic and the professional are accentuated when the students represent ideal situations. In most of these cases, there are romanticized images of school life, where everything is right and everything has its place. The Froebelian-type “mother teachers”, are full of smiles and ready to embrace and accept children in areas that are neater and better equipped than any average classroom in Argentina.

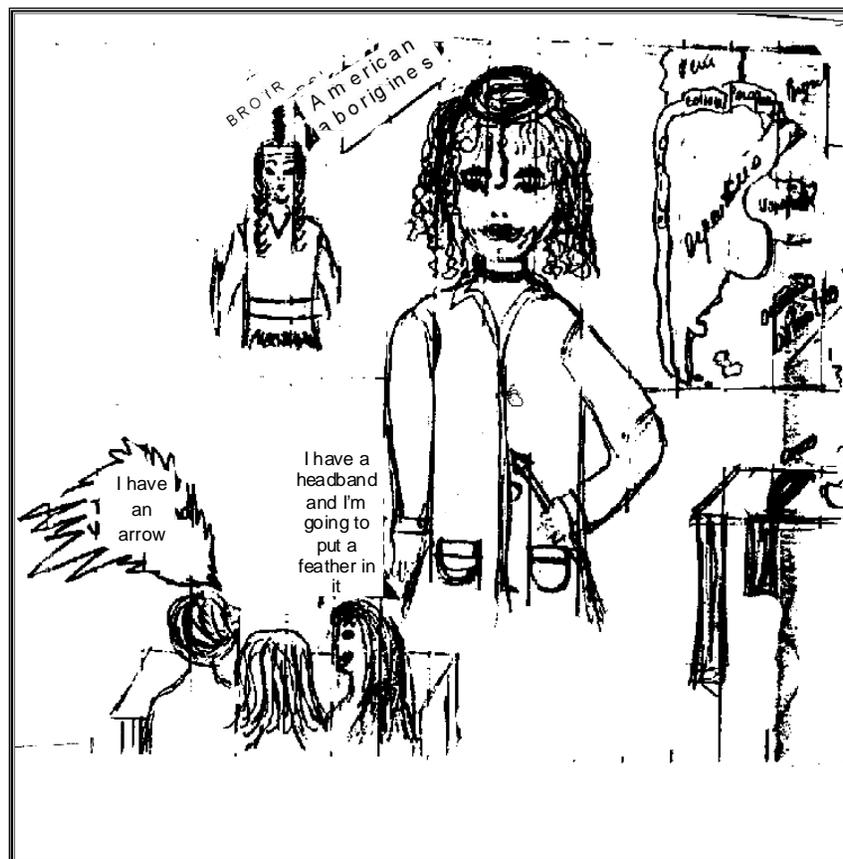


Figure 4. Multiculturalism

The explanation of Figure 4 says:

I became a teacher because I want to teach in indigenous populations. I want to help them because of all the damage that so-called “civilization” has brought them. Meanwhile, I will teach city children about the amazing indigenous cultures.

The words on the board say, "OUR BROTHERS! American aborigines".

The student on the left says: "I have an arrow."

The student on the right says: "I have a headband and I'm going to put a feather in it."

Notably, the representations of the "ideal teacher", although mostly women, contain a high number of men (30%). I refer to this difference as a surprise because at least 25% of the female students in this sample chose to represent the ideal teaching by drawing *men teachers*. When I questioned some of the students about this particular option, the most frequent answers were: "We need more men", or "Men are going to maintain discipline." The drawings of women showed romantic images of dedicated women, while drawings of men emphasize authority and control (see Figures 4 and 5).

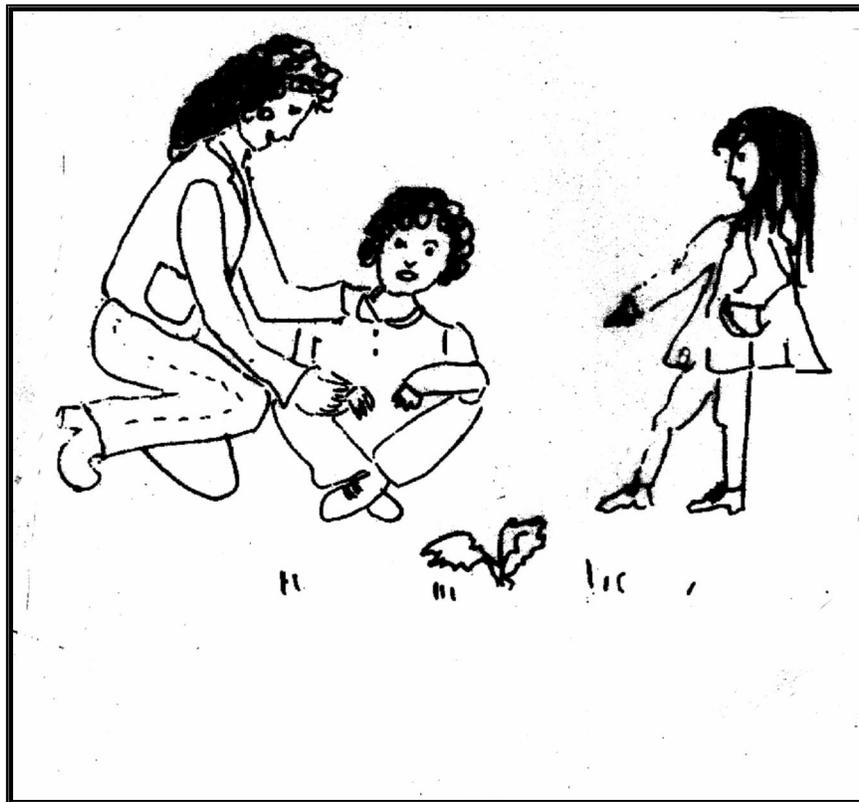


Figure 5. Teacher with a calling

The image in Figure 5 was produced by a 29-year-old female student. Her explanation states: "Teaching is, above all, caring for our students. Having patience and caring is the key in a large classroom."

Usually, most students presented the *ideal* teacher as a nice person, smiling and well-dressed, who does not have to face any of the difficulties *real* teachers do. Most of the ideal situations showed the seats placed in a circle in the classroom, and emphasized communication as the key to transforming teaching.⁸

However, this affectionate commitment so linked with teaching is not only free of pressure from supervisors, parents, violence and economic constraints, but is also located in places that have no connection with the world. This isolation functions not only as an attempt to simplify the frequently-complex web of relationships which always inhabits the spaces of classrooms and schools, but could also be understood as a channel of expression for the desire to share the power circulating in their institutions. We must emphasize that in these groups of students there is no conclusive definition as to what type of power distribution they were demanding. Obviously they want better schools, more material and brighter students, but it also seems that they want to be monarchs of completely-isolated “educational paradises”. In this way, students can criticize, while at the same time, reinforcing the existing, dominant power-knowledge circuits.

A change was seen in these trends when the picture given here as Figure 6 was shown.



Figure 6. The “ideal” teacher

The explanation given for the drawing in Figure 6 was:

“From my point of view, this should be the “ideal” teacher. Because if they keep selling us a culture based on appearances and discrimination against those who are not so ‘well-equipped physically,’ this is the only model of teacher that will attract the attention of children.”

At first this image caused much laughter and many comments, but the laughter soon gave rise to a lively discussion, full of controversy and reflection, worthy of further analysis. The drawing was done by Pepe, the only male in the group, who was in his second year of teaching. He was 19 years old, and worked 8 hours a day selling office products and doing various tasks, besides teaching four or five hours a day. He wanted to be a teacher because he “liked the spontaneity and freshness of young children.”

The discussion about this picture was complex and difficult. Some of the students changed their minds; at first they supported Pepe’s written explanation, and then they challenged it. At the start of the discussion, many students concentrated on Pepe’s justification of the drawing and the “rational” way in which they agreed with it, and Pepe (it is important to remember that he was the only man in the group) became—again—the astute critical eye of the class.

“He is right,” said Claudia (short and very thin). “Television and commercialism are ruining everything. I remember how people laughed at me when I said I wanted to be a teacher.” And in spite of the laughter this comment provoked, she said, “They said I was so thin I could only teach in kindergarten because the second graders were stronger than I was”, which produced more laughter and jokes.

Other students followed Claudia’s comments, seeing an opportunity to express their dislike of society’s “idolizing”—in the words of one participant—the “anorexic-Barbie model of beauty”, while others looked for room to express sharp criticism of the education authorities for having “standardized”—not so long ago—physical standards as a requirement for admission to the B.A. program in education.⁹

After several minutes of general agreement with these words, Ana, a student who had remained silent, challenged—in a low, quiet voice—Pepe’s choice of the word “Mom” on the board. She said she did not like it because it sounded like “*Mi mami me mima*”^{***}, a stereotyped phrase used to teach first-grade reading with phonics. This seemingly innocent critique operated as a signal for a change in the whole group, who now began to concentrate on the drawing itself. Immediately one of the students described the picture as follows: “It looks like a stupid...a stupid prostitute. It’s a miracle he spelled ‘Mom’ right.” Another student politely criticized Pepe because, “The way I see it, the problem is that you’re only thinking about men. I cannot imagine any little girl who would like that ‘Lolita’ [traditionally erotic

*** Literally “My mom pampers and spoils me,” this sentence would be the Spanish equivalent of “See Spot run.”

name based on the novel by Nabokov]. What's more, I don't think many little boys would find her attractive either."

When the students changed their posture (from accepting Pepe's explanation to expressing disapproval of his drawing), Pepe first reacted defensively, as if he were not used to receiving criticism. At first he dismissed the comments; then he tried to explain that he had not been thinking about the drawing, and finally he began to realize that his criticism of society and the mass media, through his original drawing of the ideal teacher, was also problematic. In his own words:

"I...well, yes, I think I'm sexist too. It's hard. I was not thinking straight, and yes, it's true. Who's going to pay attention to her as a teacher? I guess I'm not sure that this kind of teacher is only found on television.

Claudia interrupted Pepe and said, "Yes, but on a porn channel!" And the explosion of laughter helped to dissipate the tension.

Re-thinking the pictures in teacher training

As in any identification process, the images about teaching explored here are complex, and were not formed in a single moment, nor were they shaped simply by previous perceptions and stereotypes. As in other complex processes, there are multiple levels of discursive reconstruction and cognitive and emotional conflict involved.

The metaphors and images these students have created seem to emerge from their memories and also from their contradictions, anxieties and fears. There is no doubt that they indicate an extreme dualism. Teachers are either good and decent, or they are absolutely horrifying. In many cases the drawings were, in their aesthetics and their characters, like soap operas. Many of the portraits of the ideal-teacher figures reflect romantic, heroic defenders of enlightenment, or powerful, idealized mothers, able to guide students through the mysterious world of the school. We can speculate that many of the images represent affectionate memories of teachers who cared about the students and helped them develop a feeling or sense of excitement about learning and teaching.

It seems that when doubts, fears and anxieties overcame the more common persona of the loving, caring teacher, then teachers were portrayed as seductive, authoritarian or witchlike. However, as noted before, through these *negative images*, the teachers seem appear to be even more dominant, controlling everything, and being recognized by others as powerful figures. Even in the case of Pepe's representation of the ideal teacher, we find a figure who appears self-confident, voluptuous, straight-backed, looking us straight in the eye, "and able to write."

The threatening aspect of this clearly-sexualized teacher was quickly pointed by the students, who interpreted Pepe's drawing as representing a "prostitute." This

brings up many questions. First, what was it that made the students perceive the teacher in the drawing as a prostitute? Why was this perception so unanimous? Why did it provoke changes of opinion, and so much discussion and debate? Similarly, why did the female students vehemently object to the presence of this “evil woman” in school? What made this image so different from the others drawn by the rest of the group, which portrayed an image of a non-sexual female model, dedicated and gracious? (See Figures 1-5). Was it simply the obvious fact that it was drawn by a man, or is there more to it?

If the dominant metaphor for this group was the teacher as a good mother, Pepe’s drawing constituted a challenge. This challenge pointed out other possible models of teaching. On the one hand was the recognition of the undeniable sexuality of whatever person, and on the other, the need to restore laughter and irony in schools, features largely absent in the drawings. If that were the case, it is possible that Pepe, from his masculine point of view, was reproducing the view of the hegemonic media, as pointed out by some of his classmates. However, there are other hypotheses. Commenting on the absence of “bad girls” in feminist pedagogy, Carmen Luke proposes two hypotheses:

First, the moral discomfort of feminism in making a public claim to individual power and authority has produced a concept of the feminist teacher characterized by a series of failures, including a lack of authority [of the bad girl] and sexual identity. (...) Second, because her role as teacher is seen in feminism as that of the “good woman”—of self-sacrificing dedication and nurture toward her students, her identity is desexualized and repackaged as maternal (1996, p. 299).

Portraying a female teacher as a seductress or witch or a good mother has little to do with the provisions and performance of women, and much more to do with the myths that have been created (mostly by men) through literary, pictorial and scientific productions. Chodorow states that “men create legends, beliefs and poems that protect them from fear by externalizing and objectifying women” (1989, p. 189).

Whatever the real or mythological origin of the “seductress”, these images are used by some men, like Pepe, as one of the key devices that enable them to express the desire for a standard male heterosexual behavior (Lord, 1994). However, in a context where the fear of male teachers’ sexuality (primarily as gay and in a lesser measure as sexual predators) is expressed openly, it is possible to speculate that Pepe hyper-sexualized his ideal teacher as a way to express his own masculinity.

Rethinking hope, imagining other teacher-training

During the 90’s the word *crisis* was liberally used to try to explain what was happening in schools, the crisis in public education; the crisis of school violence and indiscipline; the school funding crisis; the *crisis* in the teaching profession.

Many of these crises were presented from perspectives mainly nostalgic, with bitter comments that teachers today are not the way they used to be.

There is no doubt that schools are not the way they used to be. But this necessary first step—recognizing that schools have changed—does not require a romantic appreciation of a mythical past that never existed. The current *crises* in education have historical antecedents, lines of continuity and rupture, which reveal the reason why for many teachers, the school spaces apparently familiar and known suddenly turned strange and complex.

It is in this context of simultaneous familiarity and strangeness that is necessary to understand how this group of future teachers depict the teaching profession. In principle, the elements that characterize teaching in Argentina have to do with tangible and urgent problems: hunger, poverty, overcrowding of classrooms, low budgets, lack of incentives for learning and teaching, deterioration of working conditions for teachers and learning environments for students, minimal relevance of the curriculum, discriminatory practices, violence, boredom and indifference.

No doubt these images emphasize areas of school conflict, deeply influenced by gender dynamics. Representations of teacher/macho, witch/teacher, mother/teacher and bad girl condense social prejudices, experiences, ideological positions and expectations for the future. At the same time they express fears and fantasies; reveal contradictions between different ways of seeing, speaking and critiquing; and perhaps resisting and challenging ideologies and repressive structures.

The students who produced these pictures did not offer a unique version, unified, without contradictions, of the schools of tomorrow. That would be impossible for them or for any other group. Still, the students offered a critical evaluation of the crisis, and a vision of hope—hope that is not free from contradictions, and that is crisscrossed by the heavy burdens of oppression and discrimination in the education systems. The hopes of these students can only be understood if nostalgic and dualistic perspectives are discarded. Simply put, these images are neither too *optimistic* nor too *pessimistic*, but are both critical and hopeful, both ironic and stereotypical. These images resist being simplified, since they are based on the understanding that without conceptual sophistication or theoretical pretensions, is able to capture with great precision the fact that for many people, school experiences were ambivalent and are, at best, symbolically associated with aspirations of social ascent and democratic practices, and at worst, were unsatisfactory and repressive.

The “real world” of these students is saturated with the promises, contradictions and possibilities opening up in capitalist systems of political democracy crisscrossed by the frantic logic of neoliberal discourses, the limitations of patriarchal gender regimes, racial and ethnocentric classification systems, and local systems of privilege. Until now schools have ridden out the cross-currents of these waters with marginal success at best. To create school spaces that speak

about other utopian democratic and heterotopic imperatives, it is important to understand that if we as societies want the schools to emphasize democratic practices, then we have to defend them from the practices of commercialization, protecting school environments from the logic of the market. Paulo Freire wrote about it:

An economy unable to develop programs consistent with human needs, and which with indifference coexists with the hunger of millions of people who are denied everything, does not deserve my respect as an educator. Above all, it does not deserve my respect as a human being. And it is not acceptable to say "things are the way they are because they cannot be different." They cannot be different because if they were, they would conflict with the interests of the ruling class. This cannot be, however, the core determinant of economic practice. I cannot become a fatalist to satisfy the interests of the ruling class. I cannot invent a "scientific" explanation to cover a lie (1997, p. 36).

Imagining schools as utopian/heterotopic spaces is impossible without recognizing the crucial role played by teachers in any educational change. Teacher-training in this aspect is perhaps the key to beginning practices aimed at opening new spaces of democratic practice in complex and global contexts.

Understanding education in a global context of increasing violence and poverty requires a considerable amount of hope and even more if we try to develop proposals alternative to the current process of intensification of teachers' work. Paulo Freire reminds us that we cannot hope to generate hope out of the past; we must fix our eyes on the future, because it is tomorrow that holds the promise for the visions of today and for a new world. He writes:

Without a vision of the future, hope is impossible. The past does not generate hope except when one remembers the daring moments of rebellious flight. The past, understood as the immobilization what was, generates evocation, and what is worse, a nostalgia that annuls the tomorrow. Almost always, the specific situations of oppression reduce the historical time of the oppressed to an eternal present of hopelessness and resignation. The oppressed grandson repeats the suffering of his grandparents. (1997, p. 45).

Hope cannot remain a mystical or metaphysical abstraction. Hope must become practical, and despair, impractical, and for that it is necessary to remember the worthwhile warning of Raymond Williams and "speak of hope as long as it does not mean suppressing the nature of the danger" (quoted in Apple, 2000, p. xv).

In other words, hope in this era of constant educational crisis means that teachers and students can find time and space to imagine, reflect and act, and thereby create the conditions that would confirm that another school not only is necessary, but also that it is possible. Without such acts of imagination, the possibilities of reflecting in order to affirm ourselves collectively and individually, and to act so as to confront the external contradictions and the internal tensions which pervade teaching, are further reduced. The creation of spaces to imagine another school, for hope and the strategic art of the possible, cannot be achieved from a criticism

without commitment or with nostalgic and redemptive postures; it depends on all of us to make room for those extraordinary times in which imagination, reflection and collective action can demonstrate that history is always in the making.

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¹ Domingo Cavallo is the former Minister of Economy of Argentina (1990-1995 and 2000-2001). A graduate of Harvard University, he has often been regarded as a talented economist, both in local and international circles. Thus, the voice and opinions of the ex-minister were routinely a subject of national debate, and the influence of his opinions cannot be underestimated. Cavallo gained major political influence after having introduced economic measures that succeeded in halting a four-digit yearly inflation, reducing inflation to 5%. However, the fall in inflation was accompanied by a dramatic increase in unemployment, which was officially registered as affecting 18.5% of the population, and affecting mostly young people and women of poverty-level sectors. It is in this context that the perspective of ex-Minister Cavallo should be considered.

² It is important to recognize and critique the neoliberal and neoconservative attacks, but that should not suggest that the traditional welfare-state structures were always successful in promoting egalitarian societies. However it would be a mistake not to consider the complex and contradictory stories of individual and collective disputes that have contributed to and benefited from the redistributive policies developed under the model of the welfare state. Ignoring the fact that even full of contradictions, public schools as agencies of the welfare state much improved—relatively—the possibilities of advancement for the most socially and economically oppressed; Not only is it a concept of little honesty, but it also produces inept historical reasoning.

³ Since the mid 70's, multinationals have grown faster than the global economy. In 1976, the 50 largest industrial corporations in the world sold \$54 billion and received proceeds of \$25 billion. In 1990, sales figures for the top 50 companies rose to \$210 billion and earnings reached \$70 billion. In real terms, while the U.S. economy was growing at an annual rate of 2.8% (the average for European countries was 2.9%), the annual sales growth of multinational corporations was 3.5% during the period 1975 - 1990 (Brown and Lauder, 1997, p. 173).

⁴ In exchange for the funds, these global institutions evaluate and provide guidelines for carrying out the education reform nationwide. It is not the aim of this work make a detailed critique of educational-reform programs promoted especially by the WB, but it is important to highlight the serious problems caused by these mechanisms. For a more detailed critique of these procedures, see Ball, Fischman and Gvirtz (2003); Coraggio and Torres (1999); Gentili and McCowan, (2003), Held (1995); Samoff, 1995).

⁵ The pictures and part of the analysis that follow were originally published in Fischman (2000). They were first published in Spanish in the REDIE publication in that language, which see at <http://redie.uabc.mx/vol7no2/contenido-fischman.html>. The analysis was substantially revised after their original publication in English. In this article, the translation follows the Spanish text.

⁶ A total of 178 students, 149 females and 29 males, participated in these workshops. In this section I will address the students and when necessary I will use the neutral term, students. For more information about this methodology and the data-reduction process, see Fischman (1997 and 2000).

⁷ It is interesting to contrast this analysis with data obtained in a similar study done with students from the United States (Fischman, 2005). While in Argentina, students produced a negative concluding evaluation, U.S. students (two schools located in public universities multiracial suburban) produced mixed results. Also, American students tended to pay more attention to knowledge-related aspects, such as libraries, computers, science materials and textbooks. Finally, while the word *commitment* (tender loving care) was often used by the American students, it was never expressed graphically as physical contact as it was in Argentina. This feature is a clear indication of the urgent need to rethink and contextualize the concept of commitment since it is evident that it is conceptualized and acted out very differently in these two countries.

⁸ For a fuller discussion of the placement of seats in a circle as a “liberation technology” see Fischman (1997, 2000) and Ellsworth (1997).

⁹ These requirements concerned not only physical appearance. A dear colleague who teaches at a prestigious Canadian university told me how he was almost not allowed to enroll in the degree program in education because of the way he pronounced the letter "S". His lisp, he was told, was a bad influence because "young children would learn to lisp." He had to appear before a group of examiners and repeat meaningless sentences ten times to prove he could control his lisp. During the fieldwork, similar stories appeared again and again, some related to physical appearance (especially the stereotypical identification of sexuality), the standards of weight and height, style of pronunciation and style of dress.