

ROSARIO VERA PEÑALOZA A TEACHER WHO LEFT HER MARK IN THE HISTORY OF ARGENTINE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to rethink the life and work of Rosario Vera Peñaloza, a normal-school teacher who has undoubtedly been an exponent of the Argentine educational process throughout her life. To carry out this task we have resorted to her own work and other authors who studied her life².

Key words: *journal of Latin American Education History*, Argentina – New School –XX century –First Argentine Museum –Kindergartens -

INTRODUCTION

The biography is a genre which has been reconsidered in the Argentine historiography since the sixties of the XX century and in the last decades has noticeably progressed due to the amount of studies done. The stories of life include the description of the experiences and the most significant events in the life of the individual under study with the intention of knowing about feelings and the perspective of the surrounding world. This necessarily leads us not only to do research on the life and work of Rosario Vera Peñaloza but also to make known the relationships and experiences told by people who accompanied her along her life. In 1842 Domingo F. Sarmiento expressed his opinion about this topic, and we undoubtedly agree with him since his words reflect the purpose of this paper:

¹ Nos ocupamos de esta maestra en el artículo titulado “Rosario Vera Peñaloza: maestra de la patria “en Diana Soto Arango et. al., *Educadores latinoamericanos*, T. IV, *Siglos XX y XXI*. (Tunja: Ediciones Doce Calles S.L., 2011), 17.

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“ The biography of an individual who has had an important role in a given time and country is the summary of the contemporary history enriched by the customs ,national habits ,dominant ideas, the tendencies of civilization and the special mark that the intelligence of great people can leave in society... It is in their private lives, special character and in the doctrines of their education that we find explanations for their public actions, which are not merely historical narrative...”³

Based on these premises we set out to start our work in an attempt to provide a biographical-narrative approach to the life of this persevering teacher until the end of her life.

1. The Argentine education from the beginning of modernity to the first half of the XX century

The first National Census conducted in Argentina in 1869 revealed that the whole population reached 1.737.076 inhabitants, a million of which did not know how to read nor write. This fact made Domingo Faustino Sarmiento think about his dreams. During his exile and after visiting the most advanced towns of the world he envisaged introducing in his country a modern system intended to improve the public education in order to lower the illiteracy rate.

After the second half of the XIX century the ruling elite, based on the principles of liberalism, was convinced that Argentina would play an important role in the world. Sarmiento continued the work of Bartolomé Mitre who stated that “everything the republic can produce and provide (thanks to its natural resources, to its position in America and also to the civilising character of its inhabitants) will have the protection of the laws which, in turn, will be fully enforced”⁴. In this context, the science and the secular education will be key elements to enter modernity.

The school ! All the intelligent citizens should look at the school as a way to transform our ignorant people into citizens who know their rights and social obligations...”⁵

A progressive society should eliminate illiteracy since it is considered to be one of the social illnesses. Thus, It is no wonder that the education of women will be a topic for discussion. Sarmiento had previously written about the women’s right to education and took part in those debates. He was inspired by his continuous travels and by what he was able to observe particularly in the USA; a country that was going through a period in which women were claiming for their rights. On October 8, 1875 Sarmiento stated,

“Now, women can’t live on dressmaking, embroidery and other types of work anymore since these are not enough to subsist ”, That is why Sarmiento considered

³ Domingo F. Sarmiento, “De las biografías, El Mercurio 20/3/1842”, en *Polémica literaria*, (Buenos Aires: Cartago, 1955), 30.

⁴ “El Eco de Córdoba”, *periódico de Córdoba*, 27 de mayo de 1869, No. 1877.

⁵ *El Eco de Córdoba*, periódico de Córdoba, 23 de febrero de 1872, N° 2672.

it necessary to open Normal Schools for women. This way they could teach because they were cut out for it and because the State economized on salaries ; that is , women´s salaries were half the men´s since “their needs were less”⁶.

However, few women could read and write .On November 11, 1876, after the opening of the north stretch of the Central Railway from Córdoba to Tucumán, Sarmiento visited Córdoba and ,on that occasion, attended a conference at the University auditorium. After the conference he was asked to speak in front of a very heterogeneous audience where lots of women were present. He said, ” It won´t be long until girls with books in hand attend university classes”⁷. And they did so.

By means of these statements and the literature on women a female identity model was being built. This new model of identity was moving away little by little from the traditional model which imposed the idea of being a good wife and mother. At the same time the country was going through a process of changes which intensified itself with the passing of years; that is to say, the country was constitutionally organized, with internal and external borders without problems, open to mass immigration, to modernization and progress. The Positivism was accepted by different sectors of the intelligentsia considered to be Comtian, Spencerian or Darwinian.

The creation of Normal Schools was a positive and successful experience for women who wished to devote their lives to teaching and for the most daring women who aspired to enter universities; places whose entrance was banned for women at that time. Between 1870 and 1896, 38 Normal Schools were established in the country following the model of the Normal School of Paraná. A lot of these schools were run by 65normal-school teachers from the Unites States⁸.It was not easy to get on with these American teachers since they were foreigners and protestants. Córdoba was one of the provinces where catholicism spitefully fought against them. A newspaper from Córdoba published the following:

“The Nation is losing its religion and we do not have arguements to stand up for the holy rights of the consiousness. If we want to guarantee the future of the Republic we should keep the religious nature of the learning and fight against the secular school, whose idea is to instill hatredfor the catholic beliefs”⁹.

In 1884, within the framework of religious confrontation, The Congress of the Nation debated on and passed the law1420 of common, free and compulsory education

⁶ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, “Discursos parlamentarios” en *Obras completas*, T. XX, vol., III, Belín Sarmiento Editor, La Facultad, 1914.

⁷ María Cristina Vera de Flachs, *De Comadronas a Obstetras. La institucionalización del saber-* 1a ed. (Córdoba: Báez Ediciones, 2011).

⁸ Con la creación en 1870 de la Escuela Normal de Paraná y dos Escuelas Normales, en 1874 en Buenos Aires, se inauguró la formación de maestros en el país. De orientación espiritualista al comienzo estuvo inspirada en las ideas del filósofo alemán Karl Krause, llegó a transformarse en positivismo pedagógico *a posteriori* (con Carlos Octavio Bunge, José María Ramos Mejía, Víctor Mercante, Alfredo Ferreyra y José Ingenieros, como referentes). Luis Alberto Flores, *Rosario Vera Peñaloza. Su Vida y sus Pensamientos*.

⁹ *El Eco de Córdoba*, periódico cordobés, 29 de julio de 1874.

¹⁰.After ten years, the national rate of illiteracy had decreased to 53,5%;in 1914 to 35% and, in 1938, the illiteracy rate was of 12%. The progress was considerable and the efforts made provided schooling for most of the population between 6 and 13 years old from all social classes¹¹.

After the military coup in June 1943,there was a radical change in the ideas, although Juan Domingo Perón would soon express his concern for the setting of an educational policy. The national tendencies attempted to counteract the foreign influences, and since then , the nationalism, the Catholicism and the politics were present in the lives of men and women who witnessed the changes of the decade of the forties. The incentive to the early childhood school, the education of adult workers and the building of the factory schools were very positive aspects the ongoing changes. Within this context, Rosario Vera Peñaloza became qualified and worked from the last decade of the XIX century to 1950.

2. La Rioja: place of birth

Rosario Vera Peñaloza was born on 25 December 1873 in Atilés, Malanzán, a small town located in an area of flat ground in a province called La Rioja. Her parents were Don Eloy Vera and Mercedes Peñaloza, and Rosario was the fourth daughter.



House of Rosario Vera Peñaloza

¹⁰La discusión acerca de la ley 1420 sancionada durante la presidencia de Julio A. Roca produjo uno de los debates más intensos y de largo alcance en la historia de la educación argentina. Distintos puntos de vista en torno a la enseñanza religiosa, a la escuela mixta y al control del Estado sobre la educación dividieron a los hombres de la generación del '80. Los liberales impulsaron un programa secularizador, por el cual la Iglesia católica perdió parte de sus potestades en cuanto al registro civil, la educación y el matrimonio. En ese marco, la religión en las escuelas fue el nudo del debate. Finalmente, la ley aprobada no hizo mención al carácter laico de la educación pero la instrucción religiosa quedó en calidad de optativa, con autorización de los padres, y dictada fuera del horario escolar.

¹¹Bunge Alejandro E., en un libro de gran repercusión editado en 1940 titulado *Una Nueva Argentina* destacó el éxito de la lucha contra el analfabetismo. Capítulo XIX, “La Educación Argentina”, Buenos Aires, Hyspamérica, 1984, p. 445 y ss.

Rosario was descendant of a family from La Rioja that was linked to the civil and military history of that northern province and was orphaned at a very early age. During the first years of her life she was raised in this town by her aunt Jesusa Peñaloza de Ocampo. At an early age she was taken to San Juan, where she learnt how to write, and finished the primary school with the help of Mary Graham, one of the teachers called out by Sarmiento¹².

In 1884 Rosario went back to La Rioja, to her home town, entered the Normal School, and graduated in 1888 as a normal-school teacher. As mentioned before, the professionalization of the teaching and the consequent improvement of the education helped the low-income young people to have a job that allowed them to lead a decent life and to have the possibility of social mobility.

Her teaching work

“This is the way we work, it looks as if we are playing...”

Very soon, due to her interests and teaching vocation she moved to Paraná, where she got her degree in post-secondary education from the Normal School of Professors in 1894. The following year she was in the teaching profession and started to work as a normal-school teacher in the Model School run by Felisa Latallada and in the Normal School for Professors. She carried out her task guided by: “Noble ideals and moral standards; these are the values with which we, people from La Rioja, go out to the world; two values useful for the hardest struggle learnt in the land where we were born”¹³.

In parallel with her desire to work with children Rosario studied Kindergarten Teaching Training managed by Sara Chamberlain de Eccleston; although there is no evidence of her graduation.

Sara Chamberlain was born on 8 April 1840 in Lewisburg, Filadelfia, United States. She worked as a nurse in the army during the Civil War and there she met captain Charles Friederick Eccleston to whom she married on 24 October 1866 and had two children: John –was born in 1868 and Emily in 1869. When her husband died in 1875 she started training for the new field of teaching which emerged at that time: the kindergarten. She studied at

¹²Mary Olstine Graham descendiente de escoceses, nació en 1842 en St. Louis Missouri, Estados Unidos, donde se graduó como maestra normal especializada en Kindergarten en 1867. Contratada por Sarmiento llegó a Buenos Aires en 1879 y fue destinada a la Escuela Normal de Paraná. Poco después pasó a ejercer en la provincia de San Juan, donde se hizo cargo de la dirección de la Escuela Normal que había sido creada ese año. Tenía sólo 27 años, sin embargo eso no fue un obstáculo para que Sarmiento admirara su capacidad, lo que lo llevó a expresar que “había valido la pena esperar tanto”. “Miss Mary” causó asombro en San Juan con la puesta en práctica de su método de enseñanza, basado en la observación y la experiencia. Su objetivo era inducir a los alumnos a analizar y comprender más que a memorizar. En 1883 llegaron a la provincia cuatro nuevas maestras norteamericanas: Clara Gillies, que venía a ocupar la vice dirección; Sarah y Florence Atkinson y Sarah Harrison. Cuando, al cabo de seis años, Mary Graham cumplió su segundo contrato, regresó a Estados Unidos, pero el pueblo sanjuanino preocupado por la posibilidad de perderla, le hizo prometer que volvería. Así lo hizo e incluso regresó con su hermana Martha y su cuñado. En 1887 fue nombrada para organizar y dirigir la Escuela Normal de La Plata, tarea que terminó en 1888, falleciendo en esa ciudad el 10 de marzo de 1902.

¹³Mabel Brizuela, “La vida como magisterio” en *Número Homenaje a Rosario Vera Peñaloza*, (Córdoba: 1980). 3.

the Normal School of Ruth Burritts. In 1877 she met Domingo F. Sarmiento thanks to common friends: Elizabeth y Mary Peabody. The latter had suggested Sarmiento the need for creating the kindergarten “as foundations of primary education”. And , Sara was the person in charge of developing the idea successfully years later in Argentina .

At the end of XIX century many (female) professors had got their degree in Kindergarten Teaching training, and most of them returned to their provinces of originto open the first kindergartens¹⁴. One of them was Rosario



who, in 1898, went back to La Rioja. There, in 1900, she founded the kindergarten next to the Normal School. This one was the first kindergarten in the province and it was named after her. Besides, she worked as a Spanish teacher and as manual work teacher since she had certificate and knowledge of Physical Exercise, Drawing, Manual Work, Decorative Dressmaking, Engraving , Loom Weaving , Modeling , etc. From then on she was concerned not only about applying the techniques learnt in her training process but also about inspiring the two feelings that were present throughout her life: the love for her country and the perfection of the individual. Years later she remembered that moment with the following statement:

“...I come back to my beloved province, La Rioja, with profound love, the love that all natives of La Rioja feel deep inside their hearts for their province...”¹⁵.

Rosario Vera Peñaloza (1873-1950)

In 1906 Rosario decided to move to the city of Córdoba to take over the position of Vice Head Teacher of the Normal School of Córdoba and the following year she worked there as a Head Teacher and as a Mathematics and Pedagogy Teacher. Life in this city was so difficult for her that she was forced to resign due to political interests.

However, in 1911, in an attempt to make up for what had happened, the authorities of Córdoba appointed her as inspector of Physical Education and then as Head Teacher of the Alberdi Normal School, where she founded a kindergarten adjacent to it.

However once again she was asked to leave her position, and decided to move to Capital Federal, in the province of Buenos Aires. Afterwards, she remembered that event :
“The struggle has been hard, the path difficult. There has always been an obstacle that I had to overcome without losing faith, hope, dedication and dignity to honor my province La Rioja”¹⁶.

¹⁴ Rosario Vera Peñaloza, Custodia Zuloaga, Pía Didoméico y Rita Latallada de Victoria fueron las primeras maestras que fundaron jardines de infantes en diferentes puntos del país.

¹⁵ Instituto Social de la Universidad Nacional del Litoral, Biblioteca pedagógica, *Pensamiento Vivo de Rosario Vera Peñaloza*, (Universidad Nacional del Litoral: 1954).

¹⁶Instituto Social de la Universidad Nacional del Litoral.



Foto 2: Escuela Alberdi

Within this context between 1912 and 1917 Rosario was founder and Head Teacher of both “Roque Sáenz Peña” Normal School of Capital Federal and the Normal School N° 9 called “Domingo Faustino Sarmiento”. When she took charge of the first of the schools mentioned there were 227 female students registered at the school and 300 in the Course of Application. When she left her position, the school had 1.500 female students. During this period in June 1915, she made a comparative study of Froebelian y Montessorian school systems, recently adopted in one of the classrooms of the kindergarten adjacent to such school.

3. The Argentine School Model and its last years of activity

In 1917, under Hipólito Yrigoyen’s government, Rosario was dismissed from her job and it was Carlos María Biedma¹⁷ who valued her work and asked her to collaborate with the creation of the Argentine School Model, which opened on 10 April 1918 with a special emphasis on primary education. Rosario modestly stood in for professors who were absent and on several occasions for the arts teachers, always doing her job very well.

As a way to make amends for her dismissal in 1917, in 1924 another political leader from the Radicalism Marcelo T. de Alvear offered her the post of inspector of the secondary, special and normal-school teaching. She worked as such until 1926 when she had to retire due to health problems asking for the early retirement with the corresponding benefits.

¹⁷ Biedma nació el 1 de marzo de 1878. Fue alumno y luego profesor del Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, se doctoró en Derecho y Ciencias Sociales en la Universidad de Buenos Aires. Para su realización se inspiró en dos fuentes: la conducta religiosa y el amor a la patria, falleció el 9 de noviembre de 1946. Su idea está definida en el ideario de la Escuela: “Servir a la Nación en la tarea de educar con esmero, austeridad y valor a sus futuros ciudadanos”. Tras su fallecimiento sus hijos Carlos José y Juan Martín aseguraron la continuidad del proyecto educativo; hoy sus nietos asumen el mensaje fundacional como propio.

Rosario actively disseminated the cultrue and promoted great ideals .She did not give up her true vocation after her retirement, on the contrary, she started travelling around the country to advise employees, neighbours and teachers on educational and cultural problems. She drew up preschool and primary educational programmes for the schools and gave special advanced courses which had official recognition¹⁸.She also founded libraries and attended teaching conferences, a topic which will be dealt with next.

Her main objective was to promote the idea of popular teaching conceived by Sarmiento. In the meantime she joined the democratic teachers´movement- radicalized, socialists and anarchists who questioned the bureu ratization of the system and were interested in motivating ideas. Within this theoretical framework, the Popular Societies of Education were created , whose outstanding members , apart from Rosario, were Carlos Vergara , Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane and Alicia Moreau de Justo, among others¹⁹. The promoters of this popular movement in favour of the school and the culture included the “ inquiry of the teaching work “,in an attempt to make public schools come out of the isolation they lived in since parents and teachers only saw each other during the academic year to express complaints. The Societies of Popular Education grew in number and had a big impact upon society, so much so that there was a need to take immediate action and in 1909 the First Congress of these institutions was organized sponsored by the National Association of Teaching. Oustanding educators from all the country representing seventy two institutions attended the congress²⁰. More of these congresses were organized in 1915, 1921 y 1930.The Congress of 1930 was a milestone in history due to the topics dealt with at it. Topics such as the problem of illiteracy, the education for adult people, the welfare system, the situation of the Teaching Training were discussed. The discussion of these topics led the Chairman of the National Council of Education Juan B. Terán to close the session saying, “the Popular Societies of this session are the full expression of the educational consiousness of the country”²¹.

Rosario also participated in other meetings where she had the chance of expressing her teaching principles as in the *First Teaching Congress* held in the country in 1902. On that occasion she was in charge of the congressional committee on the revision of primary educational programmes. And since the first centenary of the May Revolution was being celebrated, the First International Female Congress was held in Buenos Aires from 11 to 16 May 1910. This congress, which was organized by the Argentine University Association ,was not entirely academic due to the overtones of the debates, the participation and adherence of the non-university, Argentine and foreign women connected with the world

¹⁸Por ejemplo en setiembre de 1935 dictó un curso en la Escuela Normal Alejandro Carbó de la ciudad de Córdoba titulada “Como podemos hacer patria”.

¹⁹Carlos Vergara (1859-1929). Pedagogo mendocino se inscribe dentro de la corriente democrático-radicalizada fue partidario de la Escuela Nueva. Elvira Rawson (1864-1954) fue la segunda mujer en recibirse de médica en Argentina y Alicia Moreau (1885-1986) también médica, fueron integrantes del partido Socialista y activas defensoras de los derechos humanos y pacifistas.

²⁰ Sandra Carli, rescató y analizó las Sociedades Populares de Educación en “Infancia y sociedad: la mediación de las asociaciones, centros y sociedades populares de educación” en Puigros Adriana, *Sociedad civil y Estado en los orígenes del sistema educativo argentino*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1991).

²¹ José J. Berrutti, *Las Sociedades Populares de Educación, en el centenario de la ley de educación común*, (Sociedad Popular de Avellaneda, 1934).

of education, union and politics. Among the organizers there were women who had had political affiliation for more than a decade and political activity in the Socialism as is the case of the first women doctors in Argentina – Cecilia Grierson, Julieta Lanteri, Elvira Rawson, Alicia Moreau de Justo, Petrona Eyle – the odontologist Sara Justo and the sisters Chertkoff, Justa Burgos Meyer, Carolina Muzzilli, Juana María Begino and Rosario (Vera Peñaloza). The congress had the following objectives:

1. Establish ties with women around the world ;
2. Help women from different social classes have a common current of thought which includes the female education and the evolution of ideas which strengthen women's character and uplift their thinking and will in the interests of the family to improve society and human race;
3. Eliminate prejudices trying to improve the social situation of many women by putting forward their thoughts and work to show the diverse female activities and establish the causes and effects which determine their influence at home, their situation as workers, professionals, etc., and the general and particular solutions to improve their situation.

To summarize, they set out to debate the women's situation and role, and to advocate for their social, political and civil rights. According to this, "The Congress appeared to be the other side of the modern Argentina", where most of the inhabitants were excluded from any access to politics and women were still considered legally inferior since they were still subject to male legal authority"²². On that occasion, Rosario made a presentation titled Concurrent Actions of the woman in the education of the population: measures that can be put into practice"²³.

In 1934 Rosario, together with other important educators, participated in the National Conference on illiteracy held in Buenos Aires in order to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of the law 1420. Those were difficult years since nationalism pervaded the content. However, in that conference, there were exponents of all the Argentine provinces and the topics discussed were the decisive factors of illiteracy and the programme to eliminate it, the action of the educators and the State, the means to ensure the compulsory nature of education, the illiteracy of adult people and the need to update the statistical data on the illiteracy²⁴.

4. The New School and the Kindergartens in Argentina

Towards the 1910s the positivism became less important and began to be replaced by spiritual and anti-positivist ideas. The Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó, Vaz Ferreira, the Mexican Vasconcelos, the Dominican Pedro Henríquez Ureña, the Peruvian Alejandro Destua and the Argentine Alejandro Korn, among others, were changing the way political

²² Para ampliar la participación de las mujeres socialistas cfr. Lozano F Gil et al, *Luchadoras. Historia de mujeres que hicieron historia*, (Buenos Aires: Ediciones I.P.S, 2006).

²³ Consejo Nacional de la Mujer, *Primer Congreso Patriótico de Señoras en América del Sud, 1910. Antecedentes, sesiones, trabajos, juicios de la prensa*, (Buenos Aires: Imprenta europea de M. A. Rosas. Ponencia de Rosario Vera Peñaloza), 128 a 139.

²⁴ Para quien se interese en el tema cfr. Argentina. Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, *Conferencia Nacional sobre Analfabetismo*, (Buenos Aires: octubre de 1934).

leaders thought since the political system in force started being questioned in all sectors. The end of the First World War brought about great changes in all fields, including the field of education. The concepts formulated at the end of the XIX century were applied first in the most advanced countries in the world which, in turn, were going through changes in different fields, above all in the biological field. All these changes led to the writing of new educational essays and in a reaction against the systems in force.

The pedagogy became a social science and the studies of the children's personality showed that the school did not fulfill its social purpose and that the children were exposed to teaching methods incompatible with their reality. Thus, new theories developed and, as expected, they were advocated in Argentina; although at the beginning people were distrustful of these new theories. The reform carried out by the American teacher John Dewey, known here as *New School*, was accepted by progressive educators. However, it took time as well as mental adaptation to introduce it since this reform meant the revolution of educational techniques as opposed to the traditional school which had a strict vertical system and a strict pupil's education.

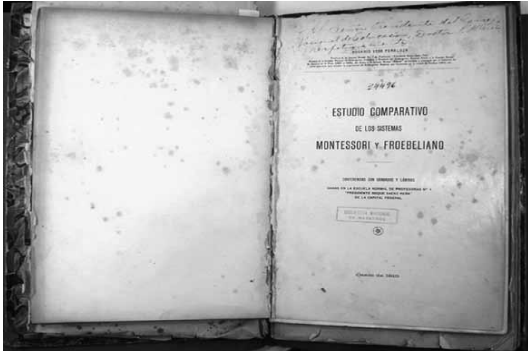
The *New School* was, in relation to teaching, a reaction against the positivism. The New School involved a child-centered perspective of teaching, did not focus on the teacher and the system but on the pupil, who was the specific consumer of education with more prominence and freedom. The methods based on experience, observation and direct perception were used by the new educational theories. Among the advocates of this current of thought we find José Rezzano and his wife Clotilde Guillén²⁵. They were helped by, Juan P. Ramos, Juan E. Cassani, Juan Mantovani, among others, who adhered to that renewal movement which considered the Italian educator Ernesto Codignola to be one of the most knowledgeable people of the anti-positivism. This group also set out to provide a better education training by means of a reform of the pedagogy and didactics programmes in accordance with the new educational line of thought.

Rosario Vera Peñaloza was one of the promoters of this line of thought and of the principles of Fröebel and Montessori. She studied their works in depth comparing and adapting their ideas to the Argentine reality.²⁶ She could complement the Montessorian strictness with the excessive Froebelian symbolism; among other things, she recommended observing the nature and making use of various and innumerable natural materials as cotton, straw, wool, stones, sand etc., with which teachers could work creatively with scientific bases. She thought that nothing had to be left to improvisation.

²⁵Rezzano desde la revista pedagógica *La Obra* adherida a la Liga Internacional de la Nueva Educación y, Guillén, desde la dirección de la Escuela Normal No. 5 de la Capital Federal. María Vera de Flachs Cristina, "El reto al analfabetismo. 1920-1980", en *La Educación en Córdoba. Siglo XX*, capítulo V, (Córdoba: Ediciones del Copista, 1998), 105 a 154.

²⁶Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel nació en Turingia el 21 de abril de 1772. En 1844 fundó un jardín de infantes que debió cerrar por falta de recursos. Escribió varias obras para dar a conocer su método sobre la naturaleza del niño, sus tendencias, inclinaciones y afecto. *La educación*, (Buenos Aires: 1886), "Breves apuntes sobre los jardines de infantes", 163.

The Education Law 1420, passed on 8 July 1884, after heated debates, was the cornerstone of the national educational system. In its article 11 the following statement was made: “Apart from the common schools mentioned, the following special schools of primary education will be established: one or more kindergartens in the cities where there are possibilities for building them...”²⁷.



However, until the first decade of the XX century little was done in the interests of the children, despite the efforts of Sara Eccleston who promoted this teaching level and founded the *Unión Froebeliana Argentina* (Argentine Froebelian Committee) in 1893. Through this committee she spread the Froebelian method which had lots of critics among the positivist educators²⁸. But, it was not until Perón's government that the preschool teaching was encouraged.

Foto 3. *Comparative study of the Montessori and Froebelian systems*, by Rosario Vera Peñaloza. 1915

5. Association for the spreading of the Kindergarten

Towards 1905 Leopoldo Lugones was inspector of Normal and Secondary Education and presented to the Nation an adverse report on kindergartens²⁹. Before that, he had consulted the Head Teachers of the Normal Schools about the mind and habits of the children who had attended the kindergartens and the answer was that “they had inferior mentality, they generally fell behind and were frustrated, without mentioning the cases of indiscipline”. This convinced the Minister of Public Education, Joaquín V. González, that the schools for children below 7 years old were inefficient and harmful for them and pointed out that were very expensive. These conclusions stopped this teaching level from growing, to the extent that many kindergartens had to be closed. One of the people who defended kindergartens was Rosario Vera Peñaloza. She and some of her colleagues, under their teacher Sara Chambelin de Eccleston's mandate, conceived and founded the *Association for the spreading of the kindergartens*, whose first president was Rita

²⁷ Republica Argentina, *Registro Nacional*, Año 1884.

²⁸ Se ocupó de este tema Sandra Carli “El campo de la niñez”, en *Historia de la Educación en la Argentina, T. III, Escuela, Democracia y Orden (1916-1943)* Adriana Puigros Dir., (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1993), 142 y 143.

²⁹ Leopoldo Lugones nació en Villa María de Río Seco, Córdoba, el 13 de junio de 1874. En su provincia inició estudios de periodismo. Viajó a Buenos Aires en 1896 donde se desempeñó como inspector de enseñanza y luego como director de la Biblioteca Nacional de Maestros. Trabajó como redactor del diario *La Nación*, por lo que viajó varias veces a Europa. Desde joven militó en el Partido Socialista y luego en el nacionalismo antiliberal, hecho que lo ubicó en el centro de las polémicas. Con sus obras enriqueció la prosa modernista. Se suicidó en febrero de 1939.

Latallada de Victoria, one of the kindergarten teachers graduated from The Normal School of Paraná. The *Unión Froebeliana Argentina* (Argentine Froebelian committee) which had been founded by Sara Chambelin de Eccleston set the precedent for “the Association for the spreading of the kindergartens”.

The constitution of the new association firstly aimed at changing the situation caused by the Lugones' adverse report and at introducing the Froebelian method in the country, since there were some critics of the method among the positivist educators. The text *The kindergarten in Argentina, Froebelian didactics* belonged to this association of teachers and it stated that the didactic planning and the regulations in force were shaped prior to the organization of the kindergarten teacher training. Society participated in the formulating of rules to help the training of the new kindergarten teachers. These teachers showed genuine vocation, oriented and created new kindergartens, and they achieved the official recognition of the courses done in the association. This promoted the foundation of the “Mitre” Institute, which at present is a well-known training school for kindergarten teachers in Argentina.

Meanwhile Eccleston translated *El niño y la naturaleza*, the manual of the Baroness Morenholtz Bulow, in which Fröebel established his teaching doctrines. The use of this text became compulsory for many years at the Normal Schools³⁰. Sara also moved to Mendoza where she participated in the creation of a kindergarten model dependent on the Normal School, whose Head Teacher was one of her students Custodia Zuloaga. At that time many more kindergartens were opened in Buenos Aires: the kindergarten in the Argentine Model School (1918), the Mitre kindergarten (1924) and Jockey Club kindergarten (1929). The socialism valiantly fought for the spreading of kindergartens in order to benefit the most neglected working class sectors.

In the decade of the 30s and as a consequence of the economic crisis several sectors of the working class were vulnerable, particularly the children. It was when the State progressively started to recognize the need to intervene in the regulation of the economy focusing on work and on more social policies formulated by the experts (*health workers, hygienist, social workers, etc.*) towards different areas such as education, among others. These measures corresponded to the world historical context of Welfare State. These policies did not help the creation of more kindergartens in the country but, at least, became part of the Argentine political agenda.

In 1932 Rosario cleverly pointed out that the so called “New Schools” were very diverse among them and that it was very difficult to have similarities and establish common principles. She gave a lecture titled “The Kindergartens and the New Schools” in which she argued with Montessori and Decroly, and stated that thanks to the Fröebelian Kindergartens the didactic bases were formed to renew the classroom work. In a part of the lecture Rosario stated that:

³⁰Bulow, B Marenholtz, *El niño y su naturaleza. Exposición de las doctrinas de Fröebel sobre enseñanza*, [traducido por Sara C. Eccleston] (Nueva York: D. Appleton y Cía, 1919).

“ In the creation of Fröebel, there is a logical basis and a scope lending stability to the system from which all the reforms are based; that is the reason why the new schools have resorted to Fröebelian practices consisting in the techniques of cutting out ,openwork, folding, modelling, sieving, braiding, knitting , etc., auxiliary work and all the school manual work , within an active school context. (...) These practices were not chosen by chance by this great teacher, they were the result of the observation of the tendencies and likes of the child. His students took the credit for this systematization that avoided the strictness of the old manual work and presented it in a way that promoted the initiatives of the child”³¹.

The creation of the Teaching Training Centre “Sara Ch. de Eccleston” in Capital Federal, The “Mitre” kindergarten, as a school of application, and the kindergarten of the Bernasconi Institute where Rosario left her mark ,in a way, were the prelude to an expansion policy which was adopted throughout the country and became more firmly established during the following decade. For example ,in 1946 , the Law 5096 known as Simini Law made the free kindergartens compulsory for children between three and five years old for the province of Buenos Aires³². This law was repealed in 1951 and was replaced by the Law 5650 which stating that the preschool level was voluntary and created the General Inspection of Kindergartens, which attributed considerable importance to such level. Simultaneously, the official Peronist speech based on the statement “the children are the only privileged” helped the system grow stronger, but that is another story.

6. Museological Complex of the “Félix Bernasconi” Institute

After the military coup of 1930 the educational trends in Argentina were modified and many institutions were subject to those political ups and downs. Within this context, Rosario was able to achieve the dreams she had since the beginning of her career. In 1931 and at the request of the National Council of Education, she could create the First Argentine Museum for the Primary School, which is still open in the Capital Federal, under the name of “Complejo Museológico” (Museological Complex) of the Félix Bernasconi Institute³³. Such Museum, according to Rosario was of national character. Her idea of creating a museum had been born from the ideas of Dr. Joaquín V. González, a native of La

³¹ Rosario Vera Peñaloza, “El Museo argentino para la Escuela primaria”, en *Boletín de la Dirección de Historia, letras y Ciencias*, año IV, Homenaje a Rosario Vera Peñaloza (Córdoba: Mayo de 1980), 14 a 18.

³² Conocida como ley Simini en tanto fue impulsada por el diputado Jorge Simini, otorgó al Jardín de Infantes la jerarquía y el valor pedagógico que no se le había reconocido aún en nuestro sistema educativo. Este hecho colocó a la Argentina entre los primeros países del mundo en la materia. En el proyecto, el diputado expresó conceptos por siempre vigentes: “El Estado se ha olvidado del tramo del niño de 3 a 6 años. Y más sorprende el olvido, cuánto que es precisamente en esta edad, llamada preescolar, cuando mejor puede bucearse el campo físico, psíquico, de modo perfecto y con tiempo para prevenir con éxito, deficiencias y males que, descuidados, darán seres adultos que mucho costarán a la sociedad, por su escasa ó ninguna contribución al bien social, cuando no por resultar valores morales que sean negativos a ella. Y, ¿qué se ha hecho por educar a nuestros pequeños? Muy poco de lo mucho de lo que corresponde hacer”.

³³ Félix F. Bernasconi, hijo de inmigrantes suizos nació en Buenos Aires en 1860. Dueño de una fortuna adquirió varias propiedades. En 1921 hizo construir un palacio en los altos de lo que fuera la ex quinta del perito Francisco P. Moreno. Al fallecer Bernasconi el edificio fue donado al Consejo Nacional de Educación con el único propósito de construir un “Palacio-Escuela” gratuito y obligatorio, para todos los niños humildes del Sur de la ciudad de Buenos Aires.

Rioja, who was quite criticized by his peers³⁴. She insisted on the importance of Argentine Geography as a basis for teaching. Consequently, the Argentine Geography would turn out to be the “turning point” which would connect “scientifically” to all the human knowledge to “stir up the Argentine feeling”. The “*Monitor de Educación Común*” published very complicated diagrams presented by Vera Peñaloza to show how Argentine Geography could be used to develop topics concerning the Natural Sciences, the man, history, his culture, his tools, that is to say, everything, including arithmetic³⁵.

Apart from her tireless and ad honorem work throughout 17 years and the big legacy, considerable importance was attached to the Museum which has in its different rooms samples and information about the geological ages, fossil remains, land characteristics, pottery, numismatics, provincial coats of arms and Argentine folklore. There was a general store and a local store called “La surtida”. There was also a zoology room, with invertebrate and vertebrate animals, habitats, aquatic community, health education room with different systems and information about senses of the human body and mineralogy. The idea behind was to help children understand the content of the sciences without resorting to the encyclopedic information which is already part of many school subjects, sometimes introduced without any connection among them. The premise was “Knowing the area they lived in children should know the world that surrounds them. At the same time, Rosario created the chair of Child Literature and the Folk Studies in which teachers learnt to use native elements in order to preserve the national culture in a country with a lot of immigration. After leaving her position as Head of the Museum, which was her own creation, Rosario continued her teaching work with more enthusiasm and dynamism than before.

7. Her last work and posthumous wishes

In 1949, few months before her death, in the Instituto Sanmartiniano de la Capital Federal (San Martín's Institute of Capital Federal) Rosario placed a map of South America done by her in relief highlighting the routes travelled by San Martín's liberation expeditions to Chile and Peru. Twice or three times a week she went to this institute and personally explained to the audience and school delegations the distance travelled by the armies, the places where the battles were fought, and San Martín's thinking.

Her literary and educational works are in a form of books and booklets and they were fruitful and useful, although her writings are not very much remembered. Among her books, we can mention: “Credo Patriótico”, “Vida del General San Martín”, adapted to children; “Seis rutas del paso de los Andes”, “La Enseñanza de la geometría”, “Enseñanza

³⁴Rosario Vera Peñaloza, “El museo argentino para la escuela primaria. Plan General del Museo Argentino para la Escuela Primaria. Doctrina, alcance y forma”, Rosario, 1929, en *El Monitor de Educación Común*, (diciembre de 1937), 99. Susana V García. “Museos y materiales de enseñanza en la Argentina 1890-1940” en *El museo en escena, Política y cultura en América Latina*. Américo Castillo (Comp.), (Buenos Aires: Barcelona, México, Paidós, 2008).

³⁵ Carlos Escude, *El fracaso del proyecto argentino*, (Buenos Aires: Ed. Tesis/Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, 1990).

práctica de las fracciones”, “Trabajo Manual”, “Vulgarización científica, los jardines de infantes” and “Lectura del mapa de relieve de la República Argentina”, etc.³⁶.

She loved teaching so much that on 28 May 1950, at the age of 77 and while she was giving a course in Chamental, La Rioja, she found her death. She had dedicated sixty one years to the child education. In honor of her, the day of her death was declared “The Day of the kindergartens”. She did not have any heirs nor possessions, only some personal things and her intellectual work. Her executors were the doctors Jorge and Ricardo Vera Vallejo and doña Martha Alcira Salotti to whom she loved as a daughter and who was entrusted with the revision, organization and publication of her work to serve the teaching, philosophical and literary purpose.³⁷ She renounced her copyright to benefit the Board of History and Arts of La Rioja; she had previously offered the Board her works so that they could publish them. And she stated that if the edition had any profits, they would be used to found a School called doña Jesusa Peñaloza de Ocampo, in honor of her aunt and the person who raised her in the town of Malanzán where she had spent her childhood. The idea behind this School was to teach with the material teachers had at hand and provide the children with the necessary teaching to help them find their vocation and demonstrate their latent aptitudes.

CONCLUSION

From her youth Rosario transmitted her knowledge and spread what she knew at the schools of La Rioja, Paraná, Córdoba and Capital Federal. Through her work and her own books it is clearly seen how she put every effort into kindergartens since she considered them as complete, useful, necessary, indispensable and irreplaceable educational institutes. Convinced of the benefits of kindergartens, she set out to open and promote them in the whole country. She was always concerned with their fate and spent all her life studying in depth the work of Fröebel and Montessori. She also read and analysed thoroughly the work of other teachers who belonged to the New School Movement, so we can deduce that her pedagogical ideas, somehow, have something in common with the ideas of Decroly, Montessori and Agazzi; although her opinions have a solid Fröebelian basis.

When the precursors of the New School considered nature as the scenario, the child as the protagonist, the interest as something exciting, the observation and experimentation as methods to acquire knowledge, the work as a creative action, the freedom as a discipline system and the responsibility as a means to become self governed, they did not think of the difficulties that all these premises would cause. However, when they disseminated these ideas, they trusted that the teachers would be able to overcome the obstacles. This was Rosario Vera Peñaloza’s concern, who, throughout her life, knew how to shape an exceptional pedagogy emphasizing “the love for her country and the perfection of the individual” based on the great ideas of Aristotle, Pestalozzi and Federico Fröebel.

³⁶Cfr. La bibliografía anexa.

³⁷Martha Salotti, su alumna y heredera, editó tras la muerte de Rosario doce trabajos científicos y el Instituto Sanmartiniano le confirió el Primer Premio por su “Credo Patriótico” y una condecoración por “Vida del General San Martín”, adaptada para los niños.

To summarize, her concern centered on four areas of reflection: the educational reform, the Pedagogy and Didactics, the kindergartens and the teaching training, leaving her mark on each of them.

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