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# The Pedagogical Press and the Public Debate about Schooling

**Abstract:** If public history provides a means to refer to the ways in which the past is presented outside academic circles, then what problems would consulting original sources like the pedagogical journals of another period posit for a public history of the magisterium? Would teachers be sensitive to such a reading of problems of the past? Would they recognize themselves in the practices of that past? Would a dialogue open between pedagogy and public history, beyond the academic milieu? If the challenge of constructing a Public History of Education seems great, can we also say that it is necessary because it concerns both teachers and the school memory. This approach leads me to present my explanation in the following terms. The first section of the essay illustrates the richness of pedagogical journals as sources of information for the history of education. After that, I characterize some of the pedagogical journals that circulated between 1904 and 1908, authored by people of the period who were familiar with, proposed, questioned, created, and worked to ensure that useful information circulated among teachers in order to bring to fruition a project of modernity in the schools. In the final section, I present three topics that could form part of an exposition –or a virtual pedagogical museum– in Mexico. Here, my objective is to reflect on three issues that impact the present: the gender of the profession, the evaluation of textbooks prior to the imposition of the free textbook program in Mexico, and the practice of physical activities in schools.

**Keywords:** pedagogical journals, primary sources, school memory, virtual pedagogical museum, mexico

## Introduction

I met Frank Simon in the decade of the 2000s, an event significant for me because I had previously read his article in which he examined subjects seldom addressed in Mexico: the statistical development and pedagogical evolution of

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preschool education in Belgian schools.<sup>1</sup> My first impression has not changed. Aside from being a good friend and a magnificent singer,<sup>2</sup> Frank has also become a leading figure in the field of the history of education in Mexico. His most recent publications in Spanish on the formation of Belgian teachers and the textbooks that circulated in the Congo present new ideas and elements for comparing societies in which he emphasizes the importance of the indigenous element, language, culture, and local history.<sup>3</sup> Another topic that interests Frank is studying pedagogical journals from the 1970s when De Vroede proposed a project designed to record pedagogical life in Belgium in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. His research experience showed that pedagogical journals, especially those that circulated in primary schools, were a valuable source of information because they presented a reflection of the epoch in the form of diaries prepared by teachers for teachers that contained true guidelines for both the theory and practice of education and teaching. Their value for research in the history of education has led Frank, along with Marc Depaepe, to consider them the “mother lode” of all historical pedagogical sources, as he confirmed in a recent interview: “my biggest source of inspiration were these educational journals. What you can read in these journals that is fantastic! That is the whole educational world”<sup>4</sup>

This affirmation confirms the richness that this source contains because virtually everything that happened in the pedagogical life of the country captured the attention of teachers who formed part of the educational administration, or of the authors of textbooks, speakers at national and international

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1 I first confirmed that he was a serious historian and, since then, we have endeavored to listen to each other's advances when we meet at congresses. I recall, especially, one in Canada (*Colloque International, Le manuel scolaire, d'ici et d'ailleurs, d'hier a demain*, Montreal, April 2006), and another in Geneva (ISCHE 34, Geneve 2012), perhaps because the latter was one of the last occasions when Luz Elena Galván was with us. Marc Depaepe and Frank Simon, “Les écoles gardiennes en Belgique: Histoire et Historiographie,” *Histoire de l'éducation*, no. 82 (1999): 73–99.

2 In 2007, Simon and Depaepe intoned a difficult Belgian song on a bus carrying the members of the *Red PATRE-MANES* coordinated by Gabriela Ossenbach. His talent as a singer, added to his experience as a soccer player, and his undeniable virtue as a historian make Frank a true personage.

3 Honoré Vinck, Frank Simon, and Marc Depaepe, “Gustaaf Hulstaert (1900–1990), autor de manuales escolares en el Congo: pionero paradójico y controversial,” in *Más allá del texto: Autores, redes de saber y formación de lectores*, ed. Luz Elena Galván Lafarga et.al. (Mexico: El Colegio de San Luis, 2016), 433.

4 Sjaak Braster and María del Mar Pozo Andrés, “Frank Simon: A personal story about everyday educational realities,” *Historia y Memoria de la Educación* 8 (2018): 756.

congresses, members of pedagogical academies, and teachers of diverse subjects in primary and n generic? schools.

This idea provides the basis for my contribution to this homage to our friend Frank Simon, where I take up his proposal to consider pedagogical journals as a “mirror of the epoch”; an approach that can be applied fruitfully in countries like Mexico which lack broad knowledge of what the schools from yesteryear were like, and the nature of their teachers and of educational projects.<sup>5</sup> Reading and analyzing these original sources can be helpful in bringing society as a whole closer to the problems of the school in the past and those that are still manifest in the present.

If public history provides a means to refer to the ways in which the past is presented outside academic circles, then what problems would consulting original sources like the pedagogical journals of another period posit for a public history of the magisterium? Would teachers be sensitive to such a reading of problems of the past? Would they recognize themselves in the practices of that past? Would a dialogue open between pedagogy and public history, beyond the academic milieu? If the challenge of constructing a Public History of Education seems great, can we also say that it is necessary because it concerns both teachers and the school memory?<sup>6</sup> This approach leads me to present my explanation in the following terms. The first section of the essay illustrates the richness of pedagogical journals as sources of information for the history of education. After that, I characterize some of the pedagogical journals that circulated between 1904 and 1908, authored by people of the period who were familiar with, proposed, questioned, created, and worked to ensure that useful information circulated among teachers in order to bring to fruition a project of modernity in the schools. In the final section, I present three topics that could form part of an exposition –or a virtual pedagogical museum – in Mexico. Here, my objective is to reflect on three issues that impact the present: the gender of the profession, the evaluation of textbooks prior to the imposition of the free textbook program in Mexico, and the practice of physical activities in schools.

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5 Since its creation in 1921, Mexico's *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP) has never shown interest in protecting or giving meaning to the patrimony of the history of education. There are no records of the establishment of museums, and the most recent exhibition on aspects of schooling was *Formando el cuerpo de una nación. El deporte en el México posrevolucionario (1920–1940)*, March–June 2012, at the *Museo Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo*, which lasted only a short time, had little promotion, and was staged in a room with no tradition of presenting similar themes.

6 “we are of the conviction that history, as knowledge, belongs to everyone [. . .] and is of concern to the living”, *Public History of Education: riflessioni, testimonianze, esperienze*, ed. Bandini Gianfranco and Stefano Oliveiro (Italy: Firenze University Press, 2019), XII.

## The Value of Pedagogical Journals for Proposals Related to Public History

As Frank Simon indicates in his works, the components of an educational model can be discerned in the contents of pedagogical journals, and may prove to be of interest for the wider society as witnesses of what was once the daily school routine. While these sources published official documents (circulars, programs, rulings, statistics), they include unofficial texts, as well, ones that reveal the working conditions of teachers, their influence on the elaboration of textbooks, and the dissemination of articles that served the community, many of them on topics of hygiene and health. In short, these journals are a space that represents an educational experience for the teaching and learning of the history of education, one that can arouse memories, experiences, feelings, and emotions.<sup>7</sup> They further constitute a space that permits a dialogue with the present, “[. . .] not only an attempt to revive and relive a tradition, but a manner [. . .] a way to confront the educational problems that our epoch poses from the perspective that historicity offers”.<sup>8</sup>

Such a dialogue could be activated through virtual pedagogical museums devoted to the study, conservation, exhibition, and dissemination of the cultural patrimony of the school that, once uploaded to a network, could have enormous potential for research on didactics and the history of education. The network of a pedagogical museum would provide various levels of study: a space for thinking and reflection, cultural production, human relations, and socialization, a vehicle for constructing its own identity, a pedagogical mediator, an environment for learning, and a resource for calling attention to diversity.<sup>9</sup>

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7 Pablo Álvarez Domínguez, “El Museo Didáctico Virtual de Patrimonio Histórico-Educativo Andaluz como recurso para la enseñanza de la Historia de la Educación,” in *El largo camino hacia una educación inclusiva: la educación especial y social del siglo XIX*, ed. María Reyes Berruero Albeniz and Susana Conejero López (Pamplona-Iruñea: Sociedad de Historia de la Educación, 2009), 591–592.

8 Agustín Escolano, “El sujeto en el nuevo paradigma historiográfico de la cultura de la escuela,” in *La Escuela y sus escenarios*, coord. Manuel Beas et al. (Sanlúcar de Barrameda: Ayuntamiento de El Puerto de Santa María. Serie Encuentros de Primavera, 2007), 7.

Carmen Álvarez and Marta García Eguren (2013). “La utilidad de las TIC para la promoción de aprendizajes en un museo pedagógico en internet: diseño, desarrollo y evaluación” *Revista Teoría de la Educación: Educación y Cultura en la Sociedad de la Información* 14 (2) (2013): 196, doi: [http://campus.usal.es/~revistas\\_trabajo/index.php/revistatesi/article/view/10220/10629](http://campus.usal.es/~revistas_trabajo/index.php/revistatesi/article/view/10220/10629).

9 Alvarez and Garcia, *Un museo*, 96.

But how can we preserve, research, interpret, study, disseminate, use, and consume the past today using the Internet and new technologies? This proposal has not captured the interest of historians of education in Mexico.<sup>10</sup> While no clear path has been traced in this regard, Cauvin (2020) proposes creating spaces to debate public history and relate them to local, national, and thematic practices. Using the metaphor of a tree, he proposes encompassing four aspects: creating and conserving sources, analyzing and interpreting sources, disseminating interpretations, and developing multiple public uses of those interpretations via radio, television, exhibitions, podcasts, specialized journals, and comics, among other means.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, prioritizing the analysis and interpretation of sources and disseminating the richness of pedagogical journals from the perspective of three spaces of interest – which I develop in the third part of this essay – will bring us closer to contacting people interested in the topic of the school and to transforming them into actors in the process instead of treating them as a passive public. My proposal is to analyze the contents of these journal records those teachers made on a daily basis and place it in a broader context. Working to construct spaces can contribute to developing interest in analyzing, interpreting, and disseminating history and in “the democratization of knowledge while, at the same time, maintaining a critical and methodological interpretation of the past”.<sup>12</sup>

These spaces of analysis and dissemination could contribute to creating exhibitions or even a virtual pedagogical museum that would conserve these experiences of other times. Mexico has not participated in “museum fever”;<sup>13</sup> indeed, it constitutes a woeful exception because while countries in Europe have witnessed the inauguration of museums of pedagogy, schooling, and education to display the wealth of their educational-historical patrimony, in Mexico no such initiative exists even as a future project.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, it is important

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**10** See the map that shows the number of participants from 26 countries at the World Conference on the History of Public Education, 2018, in Sao Paulo, Brazil. No Mexicans attended. Thomas Cauvin, “Campo nuevo, Prácticas viejas: Promesas y desafíos de la Historia Pública,” *Hispania Nova. Revista de Historia Contemporánea* 1 (Extraordinario 2020): 10, <https://doi.org/10.20318/hn.2020.5365>.

**11** Cauvin, “Campo nuevo,” 14.

**12** *Ibid.*, 38.

**13** Antonio Viñao cited in Paulí Dávila and Luis María Naya, eds., *Espacios y Patrimonio Histórico-Educativo* (Spain: EREIN Universidad del País Vasco, Museo de la Educación, 2016), 20.

**14** With the arrival of a new government in Mexico in 2019, a decentralization of power was planned that would cause some ministries to leave Mexico City and move to another country entity. One of these was the Ministry of Public Education that would leave the majestic building it has occupied since 1921 in the historic downtown and in which place the Museum of

to demonstrate that there is information in pedagogical journals that could be of interest to diverse publics.

This is the premise which guides the construction, or recreation, of the diverse spaces that will offer an interpretation of educational-historical reality. Pedagogical journals provide the information required to recreate these spaces, which will make direct reference to both tangible and intangible aspects that speak of lived experiences, but also of social representations that build an imaginary; spaces where the lives of children, teachers, parents, authorities, and communities in general play out, where relations among them are established, and where the experiences of those lives are produced and, once over, leave behind a patrimonial trail.<sup>15</sup>

## Pedagogical Journals in Mexico: A Useful Source for Reflecting in Groups

Today, we have no data on the volume of the circulation of pedagogical journals in Mexico, but we know that they were organized by teachers working in primary schools in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In that epoch, there were approximately, 11 000 schools and 23 000 teachers, and great interest in disseminating those publications to transmit the modernizing project of Mexican schools. An innovative project adopted by General Porfirio Díaz (1877–1911) was modeled on developments in France, based on a modern, cosmopolitan, urban nation and the perception of a homogeneous, westernized construction oriented towards international markets. In relation to education, that project presented the image of a liberal, positivist country that placed priority on free, secular, obligatory education designed to procure the harmonious development of children's physical, moral, intellectual, and esthetic faculties. The educational authorities of the time agreed to adopt an objective method in the learning process.

To ensure that this educational project reached every school in Mexico, several pedagogical journals were published, a clear reflection of the implementation of an innovative educational project in which practices crisscrossed and

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Muralism would be built to commemorate the 200 years of the Independence of Mexico. This decision confirms two issues: the missed opportunity to build the first Pedagogical Museum in Mexico and the lack of interest from the State to take advantage of this space and bring the history of education closer to a wider audience.

<sup>15</sup> An interesting reflection proposed during the *VII Jornadas Científicas de la SEPHE* and *V Simposio Iberoamericano*. Dávila and Naya, *Espacios y Patrimonio*, 19–25.

sociability networks were made visible. Their protagonists were actors and authors that recorded facts and pondered the meaning of building, and contributing to, the circulation of a series of ideas by writing and translating articles that would shape the educational project of the time. The items published included speeches and practices that condensed and enriched the educational paradigm of the period, though they also reveal tensions, contradictions, postures, and ruptures.<sup>16</sup>

Pedagogical journals began to appear in Mexico in the decade of 1870, first by private authors (1870–1890), later as products of resolutions taken by the Congress of Public Instruction (1889–1890), and then through the initiative of primary school teachers in Mexico City (1900–1921).<sup>17</sup> Their writers were leaders that formed intellectual networks both national and international and whose stature gave those journals prestige. *Enseñanza Normal*, for example, was edited by the *Dirección General de Enseñanza Normal* in Mexico City and printed in the *Escuela Normal de Profesores* there. Its director was a teacher named Alberto Correa. In those journals, teachers and students at Normal Schools in Mexico City contributed articles whose main goal was to unify the criteria applied in schools across the nation. Issues appeared on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> day of each month, usually with around 16 pages, at a cost of 10 cents. They circulated between 1904 and 1910 in primary schools in the capital and some Normal Schools around the country. Content varied but included sections devoted to school legislation, bibliographic novelties, announcements for parents, information on grants and donations to schools, articles on diverse topics of scholarly importance, and ads by Mexican and foreign publishers that sold books and pedagogical materials.

Another teacher, Gregorio Torres Quintero, directed *La Enseñanza Primaria*, which debuted in 1904. Its content addressed the same general topics: methods for teaching children to read, the methodology of intuitive teaching, household economy, gymnastics, singing, and other themes included in the new knowledge incorporated into primary school curricula. Those journals gradually led to the construction of discourses that targeted not only teachers in Mexico, but also students at Normal Schools who were training to take up this profession. These discourses addressed innovation and proposed an educational model designed to form young cosmopolitan, urban, Mexican citizens.<sup>18</sup>

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16 Liliana Weinberg, “Redes intelectuales y redes textuales: las revistas del Reformismo Universitario,” in *Revista de Historia de América* 158 (2020): 191–193.

17 Irma Leticia Moreno Gutiérrez, “Una historia del pensamiento pedagógico en México (1870–1910).” (PhD diss., ISCEEM, 2005).

18 For the Minister of Public Education in Mexico, Justo Sierra, the word innovate in primary schools “served to foment in children special aptitudes and faculties to develop their natural

## The School Space: The Gender of the Profession

In recent years, historiography on the pedagogical press in Mexico has examined the presence of female writers and editors as historical subjects that contributed to the construction of new spaces that defined their own identity and their relation to what was largely a masculine universe. This approach has been an instrument of female visibility and a means of claiming their place.<sup>19</sup> The practice of the so-called pedagogical missions revealed the feminine side of the profession. From 1904 onwards, travel to foreign countries increased, as teachers both male and female were commissioned to study the institutions, methods, publications, and features of pedagogical innovations that were being put into practice in Europe and the United States. The aforementioned Alberto Correa, editor of *La Enseñanza Normal*, encouraged this practice by inviting the best teachers to disseminate what they learned in reports, books, conferences and, above all, articles published in pedagogical journals.<sup>20</sup> Those pedagogical explorations fueled production on foreign schools that stimulated reflection based on comparative experiences. Trips were limited to a group of specialists and experts that went to foreign countries to gather a repertory of examples and then propose school policies or reforms at home based on their findings; a series of *idealized representations* in the process of adopting educational reform.<sup>21</sup>

Women teachers in Mexico recorded their experiences in reports that showed small details which proved useful for reforms and led to changes in the educational system. The trip by the teacher Rosaura Zapata is an example of what Matasi (2012) defines as the first globalization, as women teachers in the U.S. shared their knowledge of the methods of Froebel and Maria Montessori, which coincided in the notion that physical activity is essential to learning to read and write.

Between 1904 and 1908, pedagogical journals published numerous reports, articles, poems, and advances of books that women teachers in Mexico wrote based on their experiences abroad. Their presence in this space became

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dexterity [. . .] forming through moral education the volition and character of the children”, the equivalent of “forming men”, *Boletín de Instrucción Pública* III (1902): 801 and XII (1907): 99.

<sup>19</sup> Lilia Granillo Vázquez, “La escritura de la historia como gestión de la identidad, perspectiva de género”, in *La escritura de la historia de las mujeres en América Latina, El retorno de las diosas*, ed. Sara Beatriz Guardia (Perú: Centro de Estudios de la Mujer en la Historia de América Latina, 2005), 89.

<sup>20</sup> “the pedagogical missionary must open horizons [. . .] seek causes and effects, analyze, deduce, know that the prescription for countries full of life can be applied to our anemia”, *La Enseñanza Normal*, 164 (1906): 89.

<sup>21</sup> Damiano Matasci, “Jalons pour une histoire de la circulation internationale du “modele scolaire” suisse a la fin du XIXeme siecle,” *Itineraria* 32 (2012): 189.

so important that it was captured in the photographs that illustrated their articles where, over time, images showing them only marginally and statically were followed by new ones that portrayed them as true protagonists of the accompanying texts. Their reports on trips overseas and teaching – especially at the kindergarten level – included exceptional photos of women teachers in action, images that registered the presence of female inspectors like Clementina Ostos at a Normal School, the medical inspector Columba Rivera, and Esther Huidobro, Vice-Principal of the *Escuela de Párvulos*, an annex of the Teachers' College, with teachers like Juan León, Principal of the *Escuela Práctica Anexo*. That photo also shows two American teachers: Emma L. Johuston, principal of the Normal Training School for Teachers in Brooklyn, New York, and Dr. Thomas M. Balliet, Dean of the School of Pedagogy at New York University.

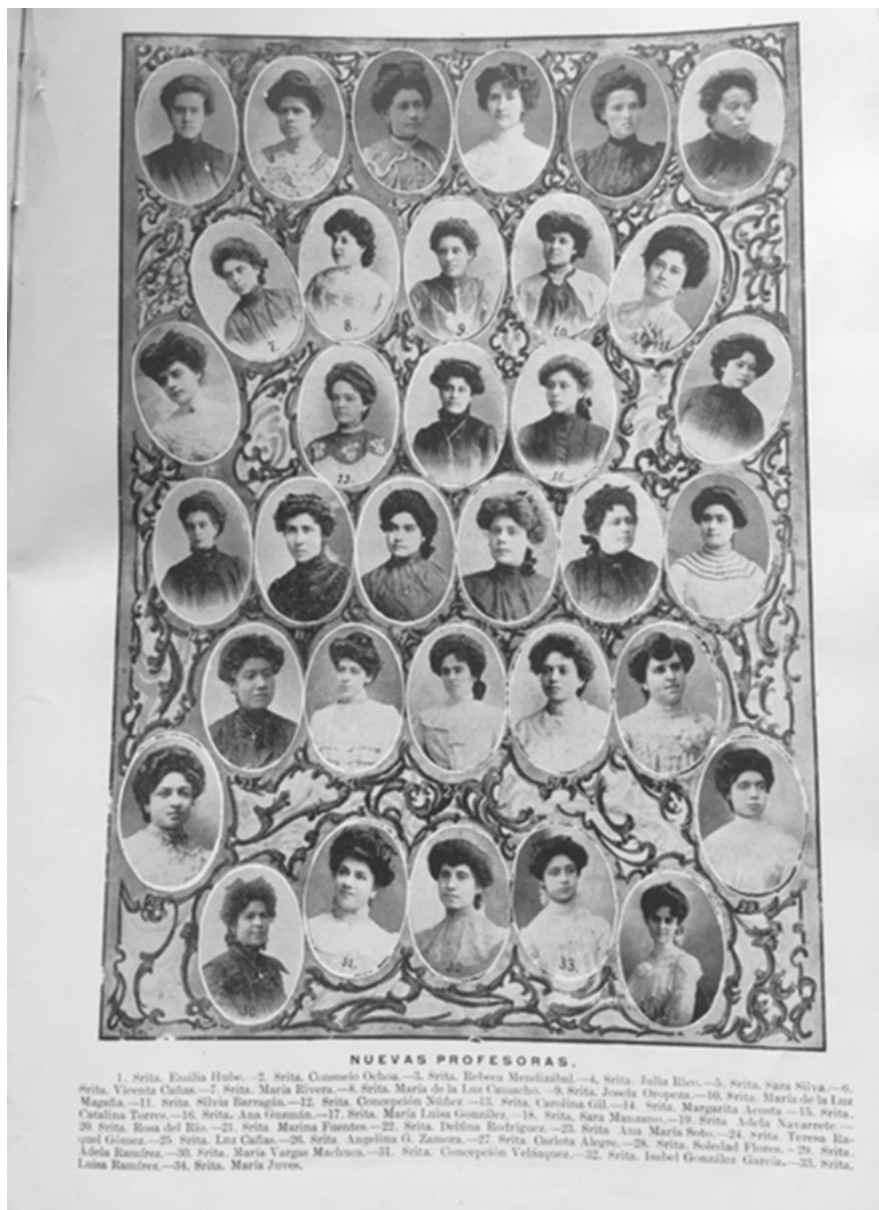
These images, Figures 1 and 2, reinforce the notion that the U.S. model of education was in a process of consolidation in Mexico, and that women teachers occupied an important space within the guild. At least, this is what one perceives in the reflections by Leopoldo Kiel, a teacher who, in his report on the teaching of manual labor in the Exposition in St. Louis Missouri (1904), questioned two features of American public schools: mixed education and feminization:<sup>22</sup> “For some time now, I have been concerned about [. . .] the idea that Americans have thought that their women were superior. I could not comprehend that before, but today I understand, they are”<sup>23</sup>

In their articles, women teachers presented information of a different order. First, their texts made it possible to recognize the deficiencies and particularities of the Mexican system where, despite “good books on pedagogy [. . .] and public instruction in the hands of committed pedagogues”, traveling teachers

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22 During the international exhibitions that took place in the U.S. there was contact with methods, plans, programs, and projects for attending to poor children, school architecture, and a series of educational proposals implemented in Germany, Switzerland, England, Belgium, Japan, and other nations. In the U.S., four universal expositions were held (Philadelphia 1876, New Orleans 1884, Chicago 1893, and St. Louis 1904). Advances in primary school instruction in the U.S. impressed the Mexican visitors. In his report on the event in Philadelphia, Inspector Ferdinand Buisson declared: “it is not the work of a few philanthropists or religious societies [but] a public service for which states, communes, and villages include in their ordinary budgets a sum that no other country in the world could conceive of assigning to education”. Cited in Matasci, “Jalons pour une histoire,” 48.

23 *La Enseñanza Normal* (1904):45.



**Figure 1:** Certified women teachers. Source: *La Enseñanza Normal* (1904): 97.



**Figure 2:** Travelers to the United States. Source: *La Enseñanza Normal* (1904): 129.

focused on highlighting a series of long-ignored details that could be useful for reforming the level of studies.<sup>24</sup>

A teacher named Laura Méndez de Cuenca was one of the first travelers to observe such differences in Mexico's school system:

The German kindergarten is, in my opinion, ideal, the most delicate, the most loving; proper for producing thinkers, artists, poets, mothers, and wives. The American system is not involved in the home or the arts, Mexico's to date has been routine, false, poorly-adapted to our needs, a cornerstone of that romanticism that undermines our youth, and of that sentimentalism that devours us.<sup>25</sup>

Her report also highlighted the fact that the school environment in the U.S. had rules that were usually followed because there was no confusion as to each actor's role and place. Neither teachers nor caretakers lived inside the school's installations, nor were there any assistants, and Principals assumed all responsibility for the school because they were not forced to give classes.<sup>26</sup> The contributions of female Mexican teachers were apparent in the pedagogical renovation of the country. As was the case of earlier travelers, these women were also active, professional teachers who performed the functions of mediating the reception of new

<sup>24</sup> Laura Méndez de Cuenca observed: "it is said that comparisons are detestable, but for me it is impossible to make judgments about things without falling into detestable comparisons", *La Escuela Mexicana* (1905): 207 and 240.

<sup>25</sup> *La Escuela Mexicana* (1905): 96.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

pedagogical trends, and then introducing, adapting, and disseminating them in Mexican schools. They formed a solid group that sought an imaginative way to conciliate theory and practice by directing the first kindergartens in the country.<sup>27</sup>

In 1907, the Academy of Teachers solicited the reading of the reports of those teachers and their publication in monographs as ways to help teachers clarify diverse issues. This practice soon led to the enactment of a law in 1908 that granted scholarships to teachers to participate in pedagogical missions overseas. Upon their return, they were expected to put what they had learned into practice in the framework of studying the school – as pedagogues – to ascertain how society and school influenced the country.<sup>28</sup>

## The Textual Space: Textbooks and their Evaluation

One of the most widely-discussed topics in those pedagogical journals were textbooks. This is important because those debates were abruptly suspended in 1959 when the National Commission for Free Textbooks (*Comisión Nacional de Textos Gratuitos*) was founded in Mexico to distribute, free of charge, books that students required for their studies. With this measure, the Mexican State usurped the functions of author, editor, printer, and distributor, and entered the publishing market as a huge competitor to the traditional European houses of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as *Casa Herreno Hermanos* and the *Librería Bouret*, which later became *Libro Francés Unido* (SELFA, 1921). That initiative imposed the edition and use of one sole textbook for each subject. Those textbooks were given to all students in urban and rural areas, while the circulation of other schoolbooks published since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was restricted. This affected teachers because they were used to selecting the books they deemed most appropriate for their classes, worsened by the fact that access to contents from unofficial sources was restricted.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a study plan had been defined for primary schools in which each subject required a program, a method and, above all, a book. Much of the published material came from France, Spain, and the U.S. Some

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27 Rebecca Rogers and Françoise Thébaud, “Éditorial,” *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés* [En ligne], 28 | 2008, mis en ligne le 15 décembre 2008, consulté le 27 janvier 2020, <http://journals.openedition.org/clio/7563>.

28 *La Escuela Mexicana* (1904): 3.

of those school manuals were translated and adapted to Spanish, others were used to inspire Mexican teachers to write books with content more closely-related to what Mexico's educational elite expected of citizens. At the Second Congress of Public Instruction (1889), educational authorities and teachers met and agreed that school manuals should be short, clear, precise, and economic, according to the programs elaborated by didactic authors who were experts in the field and its readers.<sup>29</sup>

In general, teaching literacy proceeded with the simultaneous use of normal words, calligraphic exercises with lower- and upper-case letters, recitation, and describing images. In subsequent years, graded readings were included that covered a broad range of school knowledge of the time: moral and civic instruction, and lessons on various topics, such as geography and history. Authors were in charge of writing school manuals, while the publishing houses promoted them through sales to state governors or directly to Normal Schools. Commissions were formed to evaluate the pedagogical merit and errors of the works before they were accepted for use in schools. Once approved, school-books were edited and circulated for up to three years. After 1889, various titles were published for teaching literacy in the first grade of primary school. Pedagogical journals published reports that evaluated those materials, guided not only by pedagogical arguments but also by the privileges that their authors enjoyed. Examples of the works assessed include a textbook by Claudio Matte that circulated widely in Mexico between 1884 and 1926, and the two most popular textbooks of the period, one by Enrique Conrado Rebsamen, the other by Gregorio Torres Quintero.

After 1887, control of the contents of manuals for primary schools was overseen by the Normal School, which submitted its judgements to the Board of Public Instruction for approval and dissemination. Due to the increased production and commercialization of textbooks in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an agreement was reached to delegate this task to the Academy of Teachers in each state. Those groups would elaborate catalogues to help principals and teachers orient their decisions.<sup>30</sup> Each state would choose the textbook it considered the best fit for its interests. Veracruz preferred the one by Enrique Rebsamen, but in Nuevo León a special edition of Claudio Matte's book was edited, while Colima

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<sup>29</sup> Lucía Martínez Moctezuma Lucía, "El modelo francés en los textos escolares mexicanos de finales del siglo XIX," in *Manuales escolares en España, Portugal y América Latina (Siglos XIX y XX)*, ed. Jean-Louis Guereña et.al. (Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 2005), 414.

<sup>30</sup> Archivo Histórico de la Benemérita Escuela Normal Veracruzana Enrique C. Rebsamen. Sección Gobierno, Serie Programas, 1890–1903. Box 258.

selected the textbook by Gregorio Torres Quintero. The arguments presented to select these texts were varied because, as we will see, the process involved a variety of postures, both pedagogical and political in nature.

The evaluation that supported using Matte's text in Nuevo León won the day because of the excellent results it achieved in practice due to certain properties; namely, it was short, simple, and practical, and facilitated children's progress through the school grades based on examples that made use of objects from the family environment. In 1907, there was an attempt to replace Matte's text with the one by Torres Quintero, but a counterargument held that while it had allegedly been tested in a school there were no reports to support that it had actually been applied.<sup>31</sup>

When Professor Rebsamen died in 1904, many textbooks were submitted to evaluation for the purpose of modifying them. His prestige was associated with the Normal School of Veracruz, where all the pedagogical innovations of the modern epoch had emerged. Many assessment processes judged books by comparing them to the texts by Rebsamen; in fact, this approach went unrivaled until the publication of the text by his disciple, Gregorio Torres Quintero. The controversy that this spurred went beyond the bounds of evaluations and, as shown in this photo (figure 3) that accompanied the report of a visit by Normal students to the primary school in Xochimilco, where special treatment is apparent as the children show the readers the textbook they used to learn to read: the one by Rebsamen.

Torres Quintero's method was not published until after Professor Rebsamen's death. The Academy of Pedagogy of Veracruz issued its judgment in 1907. Its comparison of the two texts concluded that neither one was perfect, but that both showed noteworthy advances. The evaluating committee recognized that there were no completely original methods, neither those used in Mexican schools nor independent proposals. What Rebsamen had done was collect, adapt, and disseminate principles known in Germany but unknown in Mexico. Torres Quintero did the same, though his work also showed the influence of American teachers. This practice continued through the 1930s, as teachers in rural areas enjoyed the freedom to choose the method they would use to teach their students literacy. In Oaxaca, the teacher Florencio Cruz recalled that during the Cultural Missions some teachers used the methods they already knew – Rebsamen or Torres Quintero – because they were afraid of failing or because they considered them well-adapted to the environment in which they

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31 Norma Ramos Escobar, *La niñez en la educación pública Nuevoleonesa, 1891–1940* (Monterrey: Fondo Editorial de Nuevo León, UANL, 2015), 93–95.



**Figure 3:** The textbook used in a rural school. Source: *La Enseñanza Normal* (1907): 35.

taught, while others elaborated their own materials based on their observations of students' needs. In the regions where indigenous languages predominated, Torres Quintero's method was preferred because it did not require materials and was considered "ideal", since it adopted a simple approach that began with letters, then went on to forming syllables and, finally, words. This was especially useful in marginalized or indigenous communities where, according to Professor Guillermo Ramírez, good results were obtained in a span of just two months.<sup>32</sup>

Although the broad dissemination of Matte's, Rebsamen's, and Torres Quintero's methods had the advantage of having been written by authors who occupied administrative positions, it is also true that they were attractive to teachers. One particularly important feature that all three shared was a method that proposed handling the teaching of reading and writing as two aspects of the same activity. Publishers also played an important role by integrating a new element in teaching literacy: the intuitive procedure included in teaching with things, where students began by observing objects or images, then describing and comparing them. Books designed to teach reading and writing opted for a phonetic approach that associated images with sounds, an innovative feature that publishers worked

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<sup>32</sup> Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Los Maestros y la Cultura Nacional, 1920–1952* (México: Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares-Dirección General de Culturas Populares, 1987), 3: 21, 42, 44; 5: 170, 208.

diligently to incorporate into their textbooks. For the first time, readers were brought into contact with objects in their family environment through a teaching strategy that facilitated learning not only literacy, but also other subjects. This reflected the fact that the Congresses of Public Instruction of 1890 and 1891 had agreed that reading must function as a way to learn about other fields, such as geography and history.

The interests of the publishing houses that specialized in schoolbooks was also apparent in their desire to form a team of didactic writers who could well have been considered rivals. Rebsamen and Torres Quintero authored the *Librería de la Vda. de Bouret*, but triggered disputes by sending the text to different organisms entrusted with evaluating proposed schoolbooks. The texts by Matte, Rebsamen, and Torres Quintero circulated in different states – Nuevo León, Veracruz, and Colima – and from those spaces sought to capture the interest of teachers not only in other areas of Mexico, but in countries in Central and South America. Beyond the controversy that diverse entities sought to stir up among these different texts, it is important to recall what Rebsamen wrote in his *Guide*: “There must be no uniformity because that would take away the teacher’s freedom and initiative, which would be more detrimental than useful.” In 1926, Rebsamen’s and Torres Quintero’s methods were re-edited by the Ministry of Public Education, but in the decade of 1930, rural teachers could still exercise their freedom and demonstrated that children who spoke indigenous languages learned more easily and quickly using the Onomatopoeic Method that did not require special didactic material. Their freedom, however, was curtailed – as we mentioned earlier – with the introduction of free textbooks in 1959.

## The Ludic Space: Teaching Physical Education

From the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mexico received news on developments in physical education in Sweden, France, Belgium, and Germany, and on sports more generally from England. Those novelties circulated in pedagogical journals of the epoch that stressed the need to teach physical education and good hygiene practices for “corporal education” in Mexican schools. Regulations specified that in order to offer these classes, schools had to have simple, hygienic installations on one floor, a courtyard destined for physical exercise, and three or four rooms large enough for physical education classes. This requirement, however, was rarely observed because most primary schools in the country lacked space and had insufficient budgets because they depended on municipal funding that often barely covered teachers’ salaries and the cost of

rent. As a result, physical education classes were given almost exclusively in urban schools, accompanied by discourses on the formation of citizens who were “healthy in mind and body” and so would be able to develop their physical, moral, and intellectual abilities.

The teaching of physical education and military drills was gender-based and children who were sick or suffered from some abnormality were exempt. Only male students received physical education with the required equipment and graduated to military drills combined with practicing “free games,” all with the aim of procuring the progressive, harmonious development of strength by exercising every part of the body.<sup>33</sup> The study plans for these subjects were disseminated in pedagogical journals. Since no schools existed to train teachers in these disciplines, one suggestion was to complement their training with texts like the *Cartilla de Ejercicios Militares* edited by the Ministry of War and the Navy. Other texts, like those by Delfina C. Rodríguez, were written for girls and stressed the topic of exercise as a synonym of health and happiness. Girls’ physical activity, however, was limited to recess, when they were allowed to run, skip rope, sing, talk, and even scream, using all the muscles in the female body.<sup>34</sup>

The training regimens presented in the programs and texts debated between two teaching styles: German physical education with apparatuses and Swedish gymnastics. The former sought to train athletes and soldiers through practice in the gym supervised by specialized teachers that employed schemes based on the repetition of movements and the acquisition of skills and abilities in their teaching. The Swedish proposal, in contrast, focused on knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the body, including circulation and respiration, thus prioritizing health over vigor. Its advantage over the German method was that it could be practiced in schools with large groups that simultaneously performed series of movements.<sup>35</sup> In addition, this teaching was related to artistic development, so it was accompanied by songs and tambourines used to mark the rhythm.

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33 Carlos A. Carrillo, *Artículos Pedagógicos* (Mexico: Instituto Federal de Capacitación del Magisterio, 1964), 345.

34 Delfina C. Rodríguez, *La Perla de la Casa* (México: Librería de la Vda de C. Bouret, 1910), 153–156.

35 Swedish gymnastics had the advantage that it was available to the whole world because it did not require apparatuses to exercise the muscles and other functions of the organism (respiration, circulation, nutrition, and nervous transmission). In physical education classes, this form of gymnastics was used to perfect citizens of the school and regenerate peoples. L.G.Kumlien and Emile André, *La gimnasia sueca. Manual de Gimnasia Racional al alcance de todos y para todas las edades* (Mexico: Librería de la Vda de C. Bouret, 1904), 5–8.

One important change in training that occurred between 1904 and 1910 consisted in paying greater attention to harmony, though without losing sight of the uniformity, precision, and scaled nature of the drills being taught. Knowledge of the physical characteristics of the child's body facilitated planning activities; for example, exercises using the head for students under 16 were to be minimized and of low-impact. Sessions were held daily for children in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years and were not scheduled before classes on drawing or writing because they altered the pulse. They were also programmed for a half-hour before eating or two hours afterwards. Body position was always primordial: 'head up and chest out' was the posture that people believed provided a sense of bravery, while expanding the chest improved respiration. During class, students were reminded to keep their heads and chins up, their chest out, and their arms extended in a natural posture with their feet at an acute angle and, above all, their little fingers touching the seams of their pants.<sup>36</sup>

Discipline continued to be rigorous, but now under the argument that physical development was beneficial for health. To achieve this, teachers and principals were in charge of checking that children's attitudes were always physically correct. Another aspect of discipline was the distribution of time: each hour of exercise required a rest period of ten minutes that was used to ventilate the classrooms and attend to cases of fatigue. For the first time, the topic of overloading the children with work was addressed, the so-called *surmenage intelectual*.<sup>37</sup> This practice imposed a series of innovations regarding physical development. In the absence of schools for special education, pedagogical conferences for teachers, fiestas, school excursions, and the publication of textbooks oriented towards training teachers and students were practiced. School trips allowed students to take classes outdoors to nourish their perception, spirit of association, and discipline. An important figure who influenced this area was the Spaniard Pedro de Alcántara García, who defined *instructive or school trips* as the accompaniment of the teacher in the field, factories, monuments, museums, or establishments of any kind where students received explanations. These outings allowed children to *escape from the school*; at least, that was what teachers reported in pedagogical journals, pointing out how children exercised their muscles in *gymnastic games* and developed their senses with intuitive lessons on the objects around them.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Kumlien and André, *La gimnasia sueca*, 70–72.

<sup>37</sup> *La Enseñanza Primaria* (1908): 82.

<sup>38</sup> *La Escuela Mexicana* (1910): 341; *La Enseñanza Normal* (1906): 87.

This European model of physical development came to involve an interaction between two proposals; that is, Swedish gymnastics and military training. In Mexico, physical education was made mandatory in 1898, and schools were required to hold exercises of infantry military tactics for students with perfect order and discipline. Classes on military tactics were given on Saturdays beginning in 1901 using rifles made of wood, a clarion, and war drums. Budget restrictions forced some schools to replace wooden rifles with sticks, which the students used while learning to make formations, master different steps – lateral, backwards, quick marching, etc. – open and close ranks, and form columns of honor.<sup>39</sup>

Although these pedagogical journals promoted physical activity throughout the country, it is clear that such practices were limited to urban areas and the male gender. This fact can be observed in both the school curriculum, where physical education classes were replaced by sewing classes for girls, and in the photographs that accompany articles that clearly manifest the lack of materials of spaces adequately conditioned for practicing physical education in schools (figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Physical education class in a rural school. Source: *La Enseñanza Normal* (1907): 328.

<sup>39</sup> Milada Bazant, *Historia de la educación durante el Porfiriato* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2002), 180–184.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the topic of the use of Mexican pedagogical journals in educational research. The first important task consisted in localizing these materials, since no suitable mechanism for their conservation exists in a country like Mexico, which lacks specialized libraries or repositories of this kind. My approach continued with the analysis and interpretation of this source, in which I highlighted three issues that may be of interest for education in Mexico today: the strategies that women teachers adopted to make their work visible in a profession that, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, was so clearly male-dominated; the opportunity that teachers enjoyed to choose the textbook they considered most adequate for the environment in which they taught; and the practice of a knowledge that is still being questioned today when results regarding health at the international level are obtained. A series of problems that could arise from the definition of an educational model that pertains to a particular period might also serve as a basis for constituting a space for dialogue with the present; one capable of conserving, revealing, and disseminating the school patrimony. As we have seen, Cauvin (2020) argues for creating these spaces in order to debate public history and relate them to local or national practices. Adopting the metaphor of the tree, it is necessary to create, then conserve, the source, interpret it, disseminate it, and support its public use that, in this case, would center on constructing a virtual pedagogical – or school – museum.

In the analysis and interpretation of these issues, Frank Simon's proposal acquires relevance in terms of evaluating the pedagogical press as a key source of information, not only for researchers, but also for other readers interested in knowing the project of education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> in Mexico. Together with other documents from that period – textbooks and their evaluations, yearbooks, and reports by teachers both male and female – these pedagogical journals must be valued as sources both textual and iconographic that allow one to observe, in close-up, the school and its actors, and appreciate the value of the foreign component in the construction, circulation, and integration of new ideas into debates on education in Mexico. One can also follow a series of problems in these collections because the journals were designed to disseminate agreements on education taken at congresses, expositions, and academic meetings, as well as discourses and representations by teachers of their pedagogical mission, and the translation, adaptation, and elaboration of books for use in primary schools where diverse subjects were taught to form the 'new citizen'. As Simon acutely points out, we have no definitive source of information for research, nor any one, terminal interpretation or explanation, simply because no such thing has ever existed. Analyzing the content of these

pedagogical journals, and evaluating other types of sources, will better equip researchers to distance themselves from the narrations of the original actors; texts and photographic images with respect to which it does not matter if one takes sides as an iconophobe or iconophile, as long as the results of the research conducted are valid.<sup>40</sup>

The content of these pedagogical journals recreates spaces that include not only references to lived experiences but also social representations that construct an imaginary in which the lives of the actors in the school transpire, and relations are established through which experiences of their own lives are produced, leaving behind a patrimonial trail.<sup>41</sup> These discourses, both textual and iconographic, which reveal “the authentic normality through the normativity of the source”, could form the basis for constructing a museum, organizing an exposition, taping a series of podcasts, writing vignettes, or perhaps even applying a broad survey that would help us better understand the historical memory of instruments like the free, official textbooks that began to be distributed in Mexico in 1959. A task that is still pending.

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<sup>40</sup> Simon, “Qui Ascendit cum,” 47–50.

<sup>41</sup> Dávila and Naya, “VII Jornadas Científicas,” 19–21.

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