

Educational academics and intellectuals in the democratic reconstruction of Argentina

Discussions around a modern scientific program¹

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Introduction

The civic-military dictatorship that governed Argentina between 1976 and 1983 was drastic interruption in the institutional order and impacted heavily on the academic and intellectual field (Suasnábar, 2009). During those years of fear, the academic space of education in Argentina failed to overcome isolation, to achieve greater autonomy, to strengthen scientific capacities, to reconfigure and to democratize the university (Isola, 2013a). Little could be done in a climate of political persecution and intellectual censorship. In the democratic transition, within a context of institutional reopening, it was possible to re-discuss ideas: a series of debates refreshed the discussion on the role of the producers of knowledge in education, showing their tensions and possibilities. In that context, marked by a highly politicized socio-cultural environment, the role of the intellectual and academic field of Buenos Aires – and especially the professors of the University of Buenos Aires – was particularly relevant².

1. This text is based on a research financed by The National Scientific and Technical Research Council (Conicet).
2. The National University of La Plata represented an important example of other debates and that federal rich tradition, whose pedagogical interventions have been analyzed by various authors (Suasnábar, 2004; Garatte, 2012). One of the most internationalized and central pedagogues of Argentina pedagogy of mid-twentieth century was Ricardo Nassif (1924-1984). Professor of Philosophy and Educational Sciences, Director of Educational Sciences of the National University of La Plata, Unesco expert and

This work is located within this context and aims to describe the position of academics and intellectuals in educational discussions linked to the imminent return to democracy and to the reorganization of the university. This paper considers two axes: the configuration of a modern professional space and the creation of a layer of experts in the state³.

To understand the objective of this paper it is necessary to comprehend the academic space of the Educational Sciences as the scope of a bid for power (Bourdieu, 2000). For its ability to describe and regulate the language on the different pedagogical processes, the academic field of education, a space occupied by the producers of educational discourses, is an area with control over the production, the distribution and the circulation of the pedagogical authoritative word. There, the contest is to establish the dominant or hegemonic discourse on the education. During these struggles, institutions and individuals striving for the center positions and prestige in the space of symbolic complex exchange where research centers, publishers, unions, NGOs and international organizations are always involved, among many other actors. The ability to formulate and control the discourse that is produced and reproduced by agents becomes a tool to build a scientific authority and its consequent prestige.

To appreciate the professional differentiation that occurs within the broad educational space more clearly, two sub-areas or fields can be considered: one called the Academic Field of Education⁴ (or Intellectual Field) devoted to the discursive production, crossed by the struggles for the development of the hegemonic discourse; and another one characterized by spreading and teaching the official pedagogical discourse – the Pedagogical Field of Education. As to the first space, the educational academics can fulfill two functions: the first one is linked to the autonomous criticism, research and university teaching (Diaz, 1995); the second one is characterized by the exercise of technical and advisory functions of the State, closer to the policy decisions.

The state-political field mediates these two sub-fields where the discourse produced by the academic or intellectual field of Education is re-contextualized. The

member of the National Academy of Education of Argentina, Nassif made numerous efforts to establish ties between generations of intellectuals of Educational Sciences (Nassif, 1961).

3. In this study we consider the State considered as a “set of bureaucratic and administrative fields [...] where agents and groups of governmental or non-governmental actors struggle in person or by the intercession of others for this particular form of power that is the power to conduct a particular area of practice [...] by laws, regulations, administrative measures (subsidies, authorizations etc.), in short, everything that corresponds to a policy” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1995, p. 74).
4. The denomination *Ciencias de la Educación* has prevailed above *Pedagogy* in Argentina as in Spain. Some other names have globally been *Sciences de l'éducation* in France, *Pädagogik* in Germany or Educational Research in English-speaking countries.

academic discourse implies certain autonomy from politics, but also a proximity to the decision making that exposes it to the onslaught of political intervention. In its breadth, the intellectual field of Education includes not only the classical academic or intellectual, but also education specialists involved in public life trying to make sense of the educational events and are devoted to produce knowledge in various fields, such as ministries and departments of education, public universities, private schools etc.

If the historical fact of coming out from a seven-year dictatorial process that devastated the state institutions is added, the complexity of these relationships between actors (intellectuals, universities, research centers, State etc.) involves other dimensions. This paper describes how academics interpreted their intellectual function within the framework of the institutional political process, what guidelines they established for their future professional program and what tensions and constraints appeared on this stages.

An intellectual program: the creation of a specialized educational layer in the State

The political and institutional events didn't allow the development of a scientific space: the lack of autonomy and repression prevented the gathering of the intellectual word. In Argentina, the transition to democracy encountered the academic and intellectual field of Educational Sciences isolated after years of silencing critical voices to the dictatorial regime and the deterioration of the scientific research at national universities (Suasnábar, 2009; Isola, 2013a). In the last dictatorial period, academics linked to the course of Educational Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires sought to go back to the discussion of the intellectual role in the social reality from the State and to restore the functions of the university as a central space of both academic and professional practice.

In 1983, four months before the inauguration of President Alfonsín, the Association of Graduates of Educational Sciences (AGCE)⁵ organized the conference "Agreements in Education"⁶. On those days, members, academics and politicians

5. For the period 1982-1984 the Association's Board was composed by Enrique José Valls (Chairman), Delia García Zavarelli (Vice Chariman), Flora María Hillert (Secretary General), Carmen Varesa (Pro-Secretary), Osvaldo Espinosa (Treasurer), María del Carmen Cava (Pro-Treasurer), Cecilia Braslavsky, Ariel Librandi, Martha Frenkel, Angela Martínez, Laura Steinberg, Lilita Elfband (Vocals).

6. The event took place on 20 and 21 August, 1983. The members of the Organizing Committee were Enrique Valls (President), Flora Hillert (Secretary), Cecilia Braslavsky and Graciela Riquelme (Executive Secretaries). Other academics participated like Gilda L. Romero Brest, Berta Braslavsky, Hector Felix Bravo, Silvia L. Brusilovsky, Alicia W. Comilloni, Arturo A. Dieguez, Susana L. Fernandez, Susana Lopez, Angela Martínez, Herminia Mérega, Paviglianitti Norma, Alicia Vals, Susana Vior and David

gathered in order to present their views. Teachers' Trade unions, professionals and research centers were also part of the reunion. The main topics considered were: the education of children, youth and adults; teachers and government educational system; vocational training; the democratization of culture; the ethic commitment and the education for political participation. The result of this meeting "that marked the start of a new style of school political debate" (Braslavsky and Riquelme, 1984, p. 7)⁷ was closely linked to the pedagogical discussion to be held nationwide shortly afterwards by the National Educational Conference organized by the State (Isola, 2013b).

The AGCE, "a both academic and professional association that brings together professionals from the education area" considered that they had a key role "in the exchange of experiences and opinions of educational experts, politicians, educators, parents, students and all sectors of the community" (*Idem, ibidem*). This Association was positioned as the articulation space that could function as a node, which would bring together all the actors intervening in education. "The urgency of the problems to be solved did not admit or support procrastination, marginalization or isolation in the debate; its seriousness requires urgent thought. Achieving the balance between these two requirements is not easy" (Braslavsky and Riquelme, 1984, p. 8)⁸.

Wiñar. Also, there were representatives of some political parties (Intransigent Party, the Radical Civic Union, Christian Democracy, Communist Party, Justicialista Party, Federal Party, Popular Socialist Party, Socialist Confederation Argentina and the Integration and Development Movement).

7. For some academics the question of the purpose of the educational policy was essential. Berta P. de Braslavsky — who until then had been Professor at UNLP (1973-1975), Professor at the UBA (1964-1966), Unesco Consultant, Curriculum Adviser of the Municipality of the City of Buenos Aires and Professor of "Special Education", UBA (1984) — gave a presentation in which she questioned the low level of autonomy enjoyed by the Educational Sciences, while emphasizing the need for educational experimentation as "the main regulator of pedagogical practice without disregarding teleology" (P. Braslavsky, 1984, p. 23).

8. It is important to account for the positions the academics involved in this public discussion had then and would later have. Braslavsky (1952-2005) had studied Educational Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires and had done her doctorate at the University of Leipzig (Germany) during Argentina's military dictatorship. She later served as a regular professor at the University of Buenos Aires, and the Latin American Social Sciences Faculty (Flacso) and participated in academic activities in countries in different continents. She was devoted to curriculum development and activities related to the construction of state capacities (especially in Africa and Latin America). She was Director of the International Bureau of Education from June 2000 through May 2005. She died in June 2005. Graciela Riquelme became a doctor in Educational Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires. Currently she is a researcher at Conicet, Professor of the Department of Educational Sciences (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Buenos Aires) in the chair: Economics of Education and Education and Labor Market. She directs the "Education, Economy and Labour Program" at the Institute of Research in Educational Sciences at that university. She has been a visiting researcher at the School of Education (Stanford University), in the Institute of Education (University of London) and in the Centre of Higher Education and Work (University of Kassel).

On the one hand, they stressed the framework in which the dictatorship had left the system and, on the other, the lack of discussion that suffered the broad field of Education plunged into an isolation that was urgent to reverse. Therefore, the main objective of the meeting was “to advance, depending on the diagnostic evaluation of major educational problems, to the discussion of alternative solutions in the short and medium term, looking for those that are consensual without forcing them” (Braslavsky and Riquelme, 1984, p. 8).

Interventions stressed that an analysis about the state of the educational system was still pending, so it was necessary – and even urgent – to produce a diagnosis report to establish what was the picture presented by the education nationwide. Only then, it could be possible to make a plan and think about the ways to reform the system.

The development of a scientific space does not exist in an emptiness, it depends on the planning and professionalization of other spaces, organizations and roles – like the instrumental development of management tools, the progress in streamlining technical state bureaucracy, the differentiation of functions within the state etc. It also depends on the existence and accumulation of data, statistical reports, a legal system, planning and State assessment, added to which the relationship between “bid” and “demand” of expert knowledge that operate as an impetus for strengthening the research and production of specialized knowledge. The progress of a scientific space is then linked to various incentives such as the availability of material resources and political stability that affect the sustainability of the agendas of knowledge production. All these axes were then pending in Argentina.

In the mentioned Conference, the paper by Gilda Romero Brest titled “Towards an ethical commitment: look of education for democracy” became particularly relevant. Gilda Romero Brest had a career with significant professional credentials: Director of the Educational Sciences Department of the UBA, member of the Advisory Board of the Conicet (National Council of Scientific and Technical Research), Director of Cice (Center for Research in Educational Sciences seconded to the Institute Torcuato Di Tella), President of the Argentinian Association of Comparative Education, President of the Association of informal Higher Education, member of the Academy of Education of the United States and the World Association for the Advancement of Educational Research (Ghent, Belgium), among other positions. Gilda Romero Brest was a central character in the beginning of the graduate course in the UBA in the fifties and had acted as a relevant professionalizing link due to her connections with the University of Columbia and her access to foreign funding. Close to the renowned intellectual Gino Germani, she became one of the most important leaders of a group of educational researchers who considered that

it was necessary to modernize the sociological research approaches that were very close to the American functionalism. In her speech, she stated:

In my, incidentally, long life I have not been a witness of similar political situations, of such determined attitude in any professional group to undertake collective consideration of the critical problems of the sector and progress in the formulation of actions, strategies and national policies to overcome the situation and promote the desired change. This meeting is certainly a clear attempt to occupy the spaces of political responsibility that every citizen should have on matters of general interest and professionals about the specific issues of their scope (Romero Brest, 1984, p. 10).

She outlined a professional program that showed the role some scholars wanted to have in relation to public policy decision-making in the educational sector. They positioned themselves not only as producers of knowledge but also as the experts that were needed to improve the state management. All of this was influenced by the political atmosphere of the new democratic period, which would then emphasize the need to modernize the state.

“My proposal is to invite you to consider problems and lines of action regarding the professional sector from the raised position of the political task: take, for example, the position of statesmen, who not only look the reality with wider and deeper perspective but also articulate inter-sectorial global actions with the proposed designs, shapes and ways to build a desirable long-term collective future” (*Idem, ibidem*).

Romero Brest positioned herself as the interpreter of an incipient professional group. She proposed her colleagues to think, configure and design policies for the educational sector, from their role as statesmen, and to be, somehow, the technical and intellectual elite that thought with an ethical commitment what tools were needed to solve the needs that the country had in such adverse conditions. This meant reassuming the founding modern outlines established at the beginning of the Educational Sciences university course at UBA (Isola, 2014). A group of academics and intellectuals showed their interest in being part of the State with their specialized knowledge in education. This meant establishing links between the academic and scientific space and the educational policies.

Any scientific space and any discipline can be considered as “a relatively stable and delimited field” defined “by the possession of a collective capital of methods and specialized concepts whose domain is the tacit right of admission in the field” (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 116). A discipline such as Educational Sciences is defined not only by their intrinsic properties but also by its features linked to its position in a hierarchical space and shared with other disciplines (sociology, anthropology, philosophy etc.). These

features, while outlining a specificity and giving a specific identity to this scope of discourses, operate as differentiated principles of classification from other discourse spaces. In the domain and the influence of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Educational Sciences have been crossed by two vectors: first, topics or reference fields have become sub-disciplines of the Educational Sciences – that explains the plural. Second, at the same time, the primary disciplines have undergone a re-contextualization within the scientific-pedagogical knowledge. This involves the strain of an inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional dynamic relationship, in which training, activity management and the various individual biographies set certain professional identities (Dubar and Tripier, 1998).

The educational academic field has a number of features that are associated not only with teaching involving the ideas of welfare, justice, equality etc. but also with the sector's specific policies. In this sense, any scientific work on education assumes a certain ruling view of what should be expected of the educational system and educational state policies. That's why such interventions have an impact on the ethos of this social space with assessments, rules and expectations influencing the educational action as a result of the systematic intellectual reflection. Romero Brest's premise was the core of this identity and political and intellectual commitment of the Educational Sciences (Schurmans, 1998). It was the announcement of an academic-intellectual enterprise with political intervention that aimed at the establishment of an expert layer in the state that would rethink, plan and manage the future of the educational system.

The revised proposals that involved the strengthening of the state space were originated during the worst situation of the educational bureaucracy after years of dictatorship. Weak institutional records of the Ministry of Education and the state widely deteriorated blocked any attempt to develop structured discourses about education. The statistical data was incomplete and the lack of continuity of the state staff blocked an ordered register.

Academics gave examples of this situation:

More than ten years after the passage of teacher training from the secondary level to the tertiary level there is no model of evaluation, or at least a published one. We do not know what happens from a quantitative point of view. At the Ministry of Education there is only data of the number of graduates from national teacher training courses. [...] This situation is similar to the fragmentation and the process of disintegration in all the educational system (Vior, 1984, p. 53)⁹.

9. Until then she was Professor of Educational Sciences (University of Buenos Aires), Head and Pro-

The picture was clear: there was a segmentation that ran through the educational system showing a partition and an absence of statistical data that was needed to make informed decisions. This was linked to the low professionalism and governmental autonomy by the state bureaucracy that had neither established nor valued a systematic collection of information. What happened with data was also the result of poor planning, the core of all state modernization project.

“If a political level does not seriously consider that a planning like this is necessary, that it is a must to address the global development in general and in education in particular, the results that can be expected are necessarily lean” (Mérega, 1984, p. 71)¹⁰.

This description required the establishment of a professionalized system of research and programming that should set precise objectives of the public policy during the restoration of democracy and the means to carry them out. This involved, firstly, the complaint about the instability of the bureaucracy, but it also expressed the need of those who were specialized in understanding educational systems were in charge of managing them. In this context one of the highlights of the Argentine institutional failures could be seen: the impossibility for long planning.

It is easily observable that the state planning offices are subject to frequent changes of authorities like almost all ministerial structures. The changes of ministers in management positions consequently bring about new objectives, goals and programs, as each staff member generally brings in different approaches. When something that was considered adequate is done, a new political swing makes new staff pose problem priorities and solutions differently. In this way, time over time the huge dispersion of efforts never has a culmination or the actions taken are rarely evaluated to measure their results with some objectivity (Mérega, 1984, p. 74).

The academics and intellectuals who participated in the meeting of the Association of Graduates of Educational Sciences mentioned above denounced the existence of a short-term logic that prevented deep political thinking. At the same time, a hint of constant suspicion was placed about the possibility of carrying out transformations that would make the field of Educational Sciences more autonomous

fessor in Secondary and Higher Education, and researcher at Flacso. She chaired the Association of Graduates of Educational Sciences, was a member of the Editing Committee of the *Revista Argentina de Educación*, Professor of Educational Policy, Head of the Masters on Policy and Management Education and Dean of the Department of Education at the National University of Luján (1984/1991).

10. Until then Herminia Mérega had been Professor of Educational Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires of the chair “School Organization and Administration”. Then she became Unesco consultant and Director of Educational Planning for the Province of Buenos Aires. She also served as editor of the Editorial Santillana, one of the most important one in Argentina.

of the political and institutional changes. The dispersion of the effects showed the inability of the state and its agents in shaping management structures with stability and a functional coherence. According to these academics, institutional instability was one of the factors that had caused the education's decline of those years.

“This instability was creating almost imperceptibly short-times approaches, frequently causing short-term actions. Without minimum stability, it is very difficult to carry out any plan. And without long-term plans it is hazardous that successive short-term plans become successful” (*Idem, ibidem*).

The bureaucratic instability and discontinued programming were part of the unfavorable state in which the educational field was at the time. As expressed by Romero Brest, if it was necessary for the educational professionals to think about policies as statesmen, this would once and again come across with the state system and university institutional discontinuities steeped in the eternal return to a foundational beginning.

In this context, on the one hand, it was necessary to renew the curriculum of the Educational Sciences degree¹¹ of the University of Buenos Aires because the dictatorship had managed to discredit the scientific training. This latter situation had decreased the level of undergraduate education, which had a negative impact on the professional identity. On the other hand, the importance of public policy intervention was emphasized. This exposed the need to insert the academic knowledge in the state management and to open a professional market around the transformation of a system showing issues that deserved urgent attention from various managerial, planning and administration areas. Finally, in a classical intellectual pose, it was pointed out that the academic space of education must have civic responsibility during the democratic, social and institutional time of renewal that required new ways of thinking. This showed the intellectual and political status that these professionals demanded for themselves.

Participation, commitment and intellectual responsibility during the return to democracy: the case of the *Revista Argentina de Educación*

After democracy was reinstated, the radical party agreed with a group of academics and intellectuals, independents and members of the radical party to participate in the development of the major issues on the political agenda. One example was

11. During the 1980s the training and graduate profile of the Educational Sciences were discussed. That discussion would continue during the 1990s questioning the identity of graduates and its community in Argentina (Davini *et al.*, 1994).

the renowned Emerald Group (Grupo Esmeralda) consisting of José Aricó, Juan Carlos Portantiero and Emilio de Ípola (all exiled to Mexico during the dictatorship).

Beatriz Sarlo's word, a known essayist and literary critic and head of the prestigious intellectual magazine *Punto de Vista* (1978-2008), was suggestive in this regard:

Today some leftist intellectuals ask ourselves again about a classic problem in the history of Argentine intellectuals. In view of two factors: the Radical Party's scheme that incorporates qualified people in their ranks and apparently expands its traditional base of middle class, and the presidential policy initiatives, some of which seem to tune areas of our concern, what else could we say? What is our contribution to the reconstruction of Argentina (Sarlo, 1986, p. 5).

Unlike what had happened a few years before, intellectuals were invited to think about politics. They had a place as intellectuals. That was part of the cultural euphoria of the so-called "democratic spring" within a social-democrat matrix, which ended years of intellectual concealment. In this context of rescheduling of the public agenda and political action, the intellectuals of education showed their satisfaction with their access to positions of political decision.

The *Revista Argentina de Educación*¹², the most important one at the time published by the Association of Graduates of Educational Sciences emphasized the achievement of that professional enterprise: "For the first time, and without any precedent, there are many professionals in key positions of leadership and advice at all levels of education. This creates a new responsibility: to overcome the artificial dissociation between the political-administrative and educational-scientific conceptions. In order to do this, it is necessary to solve many complex problems" (*Revista Argentina Education*, 1984a).

The insertion of an academic layer in the state management was not innovating. The National Development Council (Conade) had been an example of this insertion in the previous decades. The novelty lay in that this involvement was not an isolated experience but a broader fact involving different sectors of the educational system and government within a state administration that sought to modernize itself. For the intellectuals of the *Revista Argentina de Educación* public participation was not only part of the times, but it was also appreciated as key in the professional sense that considered the intervention in the reconstruction process substantial.

12. The first editorial board of the *Revista Argentina de Educación*, whose first edition was issued in April 1982, was made up of: Director: Enrique Valls; Secretaries: Maria Cristina Carranza Vesco, Flora Hillert; Editing Board: Silvia Brusilovsky, Alberto Gironella, Edith Litwin, Lidia Ruiz Fernandez, Juan Carlos Tedesco and Susana Vior (*Revista Argentina de Educación*, 1984a).

“Collaborating with this project for the nation is our commitment. Our task is to systematize and communicate experiences that had been prevented from circulating freely in the previous years, to analyze them in the light of scientific ideas and theories that we now have access to, and to generate strategies and techniques that enable democratic institutions to fulfill their commitment” (*Revista Argentina Education*, 1984a).

The compromise was intellectual: *scientific ideas and theories*. The language of this group was now focused on putting into play the muted science: it was the time of the specialized academic knowledge. In this process of modernization the institutional issue was one of the main themes in education for two reasons. First, the recent dictatorial past in which universities had been intervened; and secondly, because the academics and intellectuals had failed to form a stable institutional framework that gathered actors engaged in the production of knowledge in education.

About the latter, after years of intervened universities, the precariousness of the educational system required a reconsideration of not only the various university curricula in which Romero Brest had an important role; it also required the access to and the discussion of theories and modern techniques, many of which had been censored during the dictatorship. Some academics pointed out:

We, the university professionals, have the responsibility of critically assimilating the theories that trained generations of teachers to provide the new answers needed today. [...] We believe that educational action should be based on a theoretical body that while integrating the contributions of all the human sciences and the data resulting from specific research generate the principles that guide it. This theoretical body is the role of Pedagogy and Didactics (*Revista Argentina Education*, 1984b).

According to the editors of the Journal, it was essential to try to reconsider two different paradigms (Blanco, 2010). There was a more philosophical and traditional one and another modern one from an empirical sociology. The latter had been part of the great modernizing changes that had occurred in the UBA in the late 1950s whose characteristics were increased overseas links and financing, expansion of enrollment, boost of the knowledge production and consolidation of a university publishing market. In the framework of a society returning to hope for democratic values, most of the professors of the pedagogical field should understand the citizens' concerns, give them a theoretical and political framework, and provide adequate teaching-academic response.

“In this link between knowledge and the political-social phenomena we can find the identity of our professional work. This ensures that compared to other

disciplines and based on approaches lacking value orientations, pedagogy regains its commitment to interpret reality and to guide and define the 'ought to be.'" (*Revista Argentina Education*, 1984b).

This statement summarized the intellectual enterprise that they faced: through the production of knowledge and with a social-political view of the reality, they should understand and guide the educational values. This renewed the constitutive tension of Pedagogy as a science linked to social demands, the socio-political changes and the pursuit of scientific rules (Hofstetter and Schneuwly, 1998). The intellectual modernization in this sector at that particular time in history was to become the lawful word for enunciation of the educational discourse with state authority.

A project without feasible conditions

The end of the deep crisis of the civilian-military dictatorship brought about a certain enthusiasm and intellectual leadership in this academic and intellectual space that unfortunately quickly vanished due to short-termism, the intermittence of the debate, the progressive weakness of the first democratic government and, above all, due to a poor structuring of the Educational field.

It is, therefore, necessary to remark some key issues. A structured and cohesive social group did not lead this intellectual operation. On the contrary, it was the expression of a disjointed group of academics and intellectuals showing its intention to regulate the official pedagogical discourse occupying a central symbolic place. They did not even have a general association that gathered all the researchers.

The representation of AGCE was biased because it did not voice all of them. The creation of a professional association should involve the intention to organize the power of a specific space through the synergy of individual capital to an institutional and articulated capital. This does not represent the sum of the parts only but a qualitative transformation in a headspace, laid by the various networks that these individual capitals bring to it. At the same time, they enhance their ability to become relevant in a specific academic market. As long as a professional bond is conceived and it takes shape into a specific association, it can be assumed that that particular field of knowledge begins to play a more cohesive power with the abilities to be a stronger voice in the different spheres of the state and with the possibility of being better positioned in the market (González Leandri, 1999).

This kind of academic association gathering did not exist. This explains some of the difficulties: there were no conditions for the creation of a specialized and stable state layer with resources to face the numerous conflicts arisen by the management of the educational system. This showed the urgent need to form a community – as

is the case of the National Association of Post-Graduate and Educational Research in Brazil – that could bring together academics and intellectuals who joined their voices to achieve closer ties and strengthen the educational space going beyond the prevailing isolation. Some of the researchers did not feel bound to any institutional core: the fragmentation and lack of coordination was deep. The academic-intellectual educational field in 1984 did not have a collective articulating community (almost thirty years after the creation of the Educational Sciences graduate course in the University of Buenos Aires). Unlike what happened in Brazil, there were not established post-graduate programs that functioned as binders of the researchers and their activities. The lack of a community feeling and the institutional weakness encouraged personal arbitrariness. Because of this, the actions within this space were more dependent on capital and personal prestige than on the installed institutional strength.

In this scenario of institutional instability, Juan Carlos Tedesco¹³ noted: “While the planning utopias have been overcome, what is amazing is that in the Argentine case several decades of hegemony of planning thought does not let even a minimal structure capable of establishing the basic lines of coordination on higher education [...]. There is no minimum coordination and planning body that sets rules and basic guidelines that exceed the ‘market laws’” (Tedesco, 1985, p. 34).

Within a space of very small dimensions where all academics and intellectuals knew each other and with very low state funding for the production of knowledge there was no collective research agenda and, commonly, each researcher should seek private funding on their own. At that time, international foundations were not significant. A few years before that time, many academics had considered that accepting their help was siding with imperialism and its theoretical currents (Varsavsky, 1969). Thus, the professionalization process that had begun in the late 1950s was still truncated in terms of institutional potential.

This period showed a community that suffered a major intellectual isolation (Bravo, 1982), with excessive broad areas of employment, where the entrance to this professional space there did not have regulations and hierarchies were not clearly codified (Tenti Fanfani, 1988). Indeed, there were not doctorate programs and there was only one Masters Degree in the Latin American Social Sciences Faculty based in Buenos Aires.

The Institute of Educational Sciences (ICE) of the University of Buenos Aires, the most important one within public universities not only by the number of researchers

13. Professor Tedesco was coordinator of the Educational Area (Flasco) from 1982-1992, then he led the International Institute for Educational Planning Unesco-Regional Headquarters Buenos Aires, and became the National Minister of Education (2007-2009).

but also by the comparative volume of production, performed a not encouraging diagnostic about scientific activities in the university headquarters. They stated:

Research and/or experiences at the university level arise in most cases as answers to individual motivations and are carried out with only the voluntary effort of some university chairs as a whole or a sector. Something similar happens in the areas of academic management and planning, in both the Chancellor's Coordinating Office and the faculties, departments and institutes. This situation makes the usually few researches being conducted show common features such as: a) they are not institutionally generated, they do not follow program guidelines and priorities in a way that they can be included in more organic plans in the subject; b) they do not have specific funding out of the regular allocations for teachers and technicians and the institutional procedures referred to above; c) consequently, due to their limited institutional insertion, the results of the investigations are not systematized or spread, they are often repeated experiences without communication with each other (ICE, 1986a, p. 36).

The main institute of the Department of Educational Sciences (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Buenos Aires) performed an analysis showing not only the great dissatisfaction that existed at this center regarding one of its most important functions: research. It also provided access to a categorical characterization: the rise of research from personal (non-institutional) motivations executed by volunteers and informal processes (not coded) that do not have an institutional framework (not guaranteed) or without a defined financing (unplanned investment).

The voluntary researchers' effort could not become an institutional reference. This encouraged intermittent, fragmented and uncoordinated intellectual debates whose dynamics would last over time.

Conclusions

This paper has considered the intellectual and academic interventions in the educational space linked to the reconfiguration of its professional scope during the reconstruction of the Argentine democratic order. Some of them expressed the need to influence educational policy positions forming a scientific state layer with symbolic power over the reproduction of educational discourses: the teachers' discourses. To recover reformist and modern elements of the early graduate course of Educational Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires, this group of professionals intervened marking some affiliation with the project of professionalization that had not succeeded but would face, in the years reviewed here, serious material difficulties

(infrastructure, salaries, working conditions, financing etc.) in order to consolidate a modern academic profession.

The impact of these debates, interventions and meetings that existed in those years within the academic space of Educational Sciences in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires revealed three sets of issues and tensions.

The first set was linked to research problems: insufficient information about the system, poor state planning, instability of educational bureaucracy that obstructed links between researchers and the State and the lack of budget and incentives (range of postgraduate courses, scholarship programs, funding of international stays, publications etc.) to produce specialized knowledge. The delay in the establishment of state bureaucratic layers with specialized instruction to strengthen the government expertise did not allow the development of a process of state modernization. This still affects the Argentinian educational bureaucracy. This also became visible in the neglect of the systematic knowledge production from the State. In this sense, since the Argentine developmentism period, the institutional memory had been poor not only in terms of compiling public statistics but also as to the relevance given to the preceding managements and the maintenance of the set structures. This cyclic reopening prevented the creation of a state tradition of educational knowledge, which still continues today (Isola, 2014).

The second set of tensions was related to the importance of discussing the identity, meaning and the internal structure of the profession, which also led to the review of their academic training processes (graduate and post-graduate) and their curricula.

Finally, a third set of tensions refers to the proposal of an intellectual program that would allow specialists to access positions of political power within the framework of a social-democratic government. This was discouraged not only by the political and institutional dynamics that the Radical Party government faced (inflation, budget reduction, general strikes, military uprisings etc.), but also and especially by the structural weaknesses that the Argentine academic field had after the years of dictatorship.

The development of a scientific space relies on a certain context. Attempts to organize a specialized intellectual layer in the State as outcome of a stable and coordinated academic field, based on scientific criteria, quality journals and its consolidation in graduate and post-graduate courses met the meager conditions of feasibility (political, institutional and financial) (Isola, 2014).

The academic and intellectual field of the Educational Sciences in the Argentina of the 1980s was a dismantled plural researchers space – an archipelago – rather than a related set of voices in a common scientific field. In the years to follow, the dynamics of improvisation persisted in both the academic and intellectual field

encouraged by the lack of common rules. The institutional deficits and the absence of planning allowed the “legitimacy of the informality”. These changing dynamics yielded the possibility to establish a unified field.

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Abstract

Educational academics and intellectuals in the democratic reconstruction of Argentina: discussions around a modern scientific program

In 1983, at the very end of the dictatorial period in Argentina, the reconstitution of the spaces in which knowledge was produced in education reopened interrupted debates on both modernization and the future of national education. The intention of consolidating a series of consensual processes aimed to strengthen the educational discourse and the state capacities. Through the analysis of documents and interventions produced by intellectuals, the positions of the educational academics in Argentina, in their struggle to re-establish a state expert layer, are discussed by exposing both the tensions and possibilities that they implied. The conclusions let us consider

three major tensions: (i) the technical-bureaucratic and statistical weakness of the education system, (ii) the lack of cohesion of this professional space and (iii) the difficulty to establish a modern and scientific program that could reach the ways in which state decisions were made.

Keywords: Academics; Education; Argentina; Intellectuals; Democracy.

Resumo

Acadêmicos e intelectuais da educação na reconstrução da democracia na Argentina: debates em torno a um programa científico moderno

No final da ditadura na Argentina, em 1983, a reconstituição dos espaços de produção de conhecimento em educação mereceu uma série de debates sobre a modernização interrompida e o futuro da educação nacional. Estava em disputa a intenção de consolidar consensos que fortalecessem o discurso e as capacidades educacionais do Estado. Ao analisar os documentos e intervenções intelectuais, discuto tanto as tensões quanto as possibilidades que se apresentam nos depoimentos dos acadêmicos da Educação na Argentina, na luta para o fortalecimento de uma burocracia estatal especializada. As conclusões permitem considerar três tensões: (i) a debilidade técnico-burocrática e estatística do sistema educativo; (ii) a falta de coesão deste espaço profissional; e (iii) a dificuldade para estabelecer um programa científico moderno, com acesso a posições de poder no Estado

Palavras-chave: Acadêmicos; Educação; Argentina; Intelectuais; Democracia.

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