

THEY WANT TO AUTHORIZE HOMOSEXUALITY! (HETERO)SEX(UAL) EDUCATION AND GENDER IN DISPUTE, ARGENTINA, 1991-1997*


*¡Quieren autorizar la homosexualidad! La educación
(hetero)sexual y el género en disputa, Argentina, 1991-1997*

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Abstract. As at other times in the recent history of education in Argentina, sex education created strong and tense conflicts between modernizing forces and conservative ones. In this article we are interested in concentrating on studying the tensions between these two forces, focusing on the disputes around the inclusion of sexuality and the gender perspective within teacher training and the national curriculum during the 1990s. For this we explore positions, initiatives, and conflicts that took place in the orbit of the Ministry of Culture and Education (MCyE). We first address the formation of a commission established in 1991 for the writing of materials on AIDS and “sexuality education”, made up of religious “specialists” with recognition in the field of sex education. Second, we focus on the inclusion of gender perspectives, driven by the Program for Equal Opportunities for Women (PRIOM, 1991-1995). In a third section, we focus on the context of curriculum reform (1994-1997), in which the PRIOM included the word “gender” in the initial versions of the Common Basic Contents (CBC) for Basic General Education (EGB) and the Polimodal levels. Subsequently, we reconstruct the criticisms of Catholic agents to the initial versions of the curricular change. Finally, we analyse the final versions of the curricular texts to indicate the hegemony of conservative discourses.

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Keywords: Sex education; Cis-heteronormative system; Gender perspective in educational field; Feminism; Religious agents.

Resumen. *Como en otros momentos de la historia reciente de la educación argentina, la educación sexual generó fuertes y tensos conflictos entre fuerzas modernizadoras y conservadoras. En este artículo nos interesa concentrarnos en estudiar las tensiones entre estas dos tendencias, centrándonos en las disputas en torno a la inclusión de la sexualidad y la perspectiva de género en la formación docente y el currículo nacional durante la década de 1990. Para ello exploramos posiciones, iniciativas y conflictos que se dieron en la órbita del Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (MCyE). Abordamos, en primer lugar, la formación de una comisión establecida en 1991 para la redacción de materiales sobre el SIDA y la «educación sexual», integrada por religiosos “especialistas” con reconocimiento en el campo de la educación sexual. En segundo lugar, abordamos la inclusión de la perspectiva de género, impulsada por el Programa de Igualdad de Oportunidades para la Mujer (PRIOM, 1991-1995). En un tercer apartado, nos centramos en el contexto de la reforma curricular (1994-1997), en el que el PRIOM incluyó la palabra «género» en las versiones iniciales de los Contenidos Básicos Comunes (CBC) para la Educación General Básica (EGB) y el Nivel Polimodal. Posteriormente, reconstruimos las críticas de los agentes católicos a las versiones iniciales del cambio curricular. Finalmente, analizamos las versiones finales de los textos curriculares para señalar la hegemonía de los discursos conservadores.*

Palabras clave: *Educación sexual; Sistema cis-heteronormativo; Perspectiva de género en el campo educativo; Feminismo, Agentes religioso.*

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the twentieth century in Argentina people with sexual- and gender-diverse identities have remained on the margin of what is morally acceptable, through the pathologicalization of scientific disciplines and exclusion of civil and political recognition. They were pigeonholed using terms such as “abnormal”, “amoral”, “sexual inverts”, “sissy children”, “men dressed as women”, “hysterical”, “fetishists”, and “uranists”.¹ The Argentine school, from its founding at that time, also

¹ Jorge Salessi, *Médicos maleantes y maricas. Higiene, criminología y homosexualidad en la construcción de la nación Argentina. (Buenos Aires: 1871-1914)* (Rosario: Biblioteca Estudios Culturales, 1995). Santiago Zemaitis, “¿Y antes de la ESI qué...? Moral, biologicismo y sanitarismo en las tradiciones de la educación sexual en la Argentina del siglo XX”, in *Ensamblajes de género, sexualidad(es) y educación. Intervenciones críticas entre el activismo y la academia*, comp. Gisella Giamberardino

contributed to this marginalization; from its beginnings, it was concerned with the sexual and gender education of children and young people, following the strong cis-heteronormative perspective. There were, for example, educational and psychological debates about the possible “masculinization of some and feminization of others” due to the daily contact between girls and boys in “mixed schools”, as well as “the risks” that coeducation brought. In this line, some educators questioned the expansion of “unisex schools” (“schools for boys” and “schools for girls”), fearing these could become propitious environments for the awakening of homoerotic desires. There were recurrent discourses that encouraged a normalizing sexual pedagogy to “avoid homosexuality”, and those that encouraged children to embrace heterosexuality so that they could “identify” with their “opposites”. Homosexuality was seen as a moment of “gender confusion” during sexual development.²

Educational prescriptions were also deployed with the objective that infants and young people identify with “their sex”: man and woman, and thus learn “their appropriate sexual role” and feel attraction to their “opposite”. All this was intended to ensure a future family/marital life for reproductive purposes, as an effect of the presumed natural complement of bodies. As a consequence, the history of sex education has had a strong cisheteronormative tendency to make visible and legitimize certain types of bodies, sexes, gender identities, and sexual orientations, omitting and silencing most sex-gender diversity or dissident identities of the LGBTQI+ collective. That is why researching historical pedagogical discourses –their silences, their presence, their operations of inclusion and exclusion– enhances our understanding of the institutional mechanisms of heteronormativity³ as the only sexual culture worth living and, with it, the gendered collective productions that have legitimized the school as a device for mass education.

and Matías Álvarez (Tandil: Editorial UNICEN, 2021), 27-46. Pablo Scharagrodsky y Santiago Zemaitis, “De vicios y extrañas perversiones durante la adolescencia. Sexualidades, sexos y relaciones de género en la paidología de Víctor Mercante (Argentina, principios del siglo XX)”, in *Discursos, prácticas e instituciones educativas*, comp. Ricardo Baquero, Pablo Scharagrodsky and Silvia Porro (Buenos Aires: Editorial Prometeo, 2020), 105-132.

² Louis-Georges Tin, *La invención de la cultural heterosexual*. (Buenos Aires: El Cuenco del Plata, 2012).

³ Judith Butler, *Los cuerpos que importan. Sobre los límites materiales y discursivos del “sexo”*. (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2008). Eve Sedgwick. *Epistemología del armario*. (Barcelona: Ediciones de La Tempestad, 1998).

From the 1980s sex education was included as a subject of special interest within some states educational policies. This was possible after the end of the last civic-military dictatorship that began in March 1976 and culminated in 1983 with the inauguration of President Raúl Ricardo Alfonsín (1983-1989). The context of political, social, and cultural reopening allowed the development of some state programs for training in sexuality, such as workshops and educational experiences for teachers, young students, and families. In addition, the AIDS emergency and a growing increase in pregnancies were also historical conditions of possibility for the development of these sexual education initiatives (from a predominantly preventive approach focused on “risks” of sexuality) implemented by the national ministry of education and other provincial ministries.⁴

In this article we delve into some of the bids to, ultimately, define what subjects, what sexualities, and what sexual orientations could have visibility in public education. The work focuses on the 1990s in Argentina, which, as in other Latin American countries, was marked by a political, social, and economic situation with a strong neoliberal imprint. The Argentine case was due to the implementation of the policies instituted by the governments of Carlos Saúl Menem (1989-1995/1995-1999).⁵ This implied the alignment of the government with economic policies dictated by international financial organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

In the educational sphere the menemist policy within the framework of the liberal economic program consisted of reducing the responsibility of the State as a financier and provider of public education. It established fees or private subsidies at all levels, starting with the universities, and reduced the public education system to as little as possible, among several other measures.⁶ Specifically, the set of educational reforms enacted through the Educational Resources Transfer Law in 1992, the Federal Education Law in 1993, and the Higher Education Law in 1995

⁴ Santiago Zemaitis, “Historia de la educación sexual en la Argentina contemporánea. Agentes, discursos y experiencias en torno a un significante en disputa (1960-1997)” (PhD. diss., Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2021).

⁵ In 1995 Menem was re-elected as President by the Justicialista party. His re-election was possible due to constitutional reform in 1994. This enabled, among other things, the possibility of immediate re-election of the President and the reduction of the presidential term (from six to four years).

⁶ Adriana Puiggrós, *¿Qué pasó en la educación argentina?* (Buenos Aires: Kapeluz, 1996).

involved restructuring the educational system, especially at the primary and secondary levels. The so-called Basic General School would extend to nine years and Polimodal Education to three years. This profound change brought with it the need to update the federal curriculum. In this article we situate the initiatives and disputes regarding sexuality and gender perspective in this curricular reform. To do this, we analyze positions, initiatives, and conflicts that took place in the orbit of the Ministry of Culture and Education (MCyE).

In this essay we are interested in concentrating on studying the tensions between two forces⁷, focusing on the disputes around the inclusion of sexuality and the gender perspective within teacher training and the national curriculum during the 1990s. We first address the formation of a commission established in 1991 for the writing of materials on AIDS and “sexuality education”, made up of religious “specialists” with recognition in the field, such as Orlando Martín, Encarnación Madrid, Enrique Fabbri, and Luis Parrilla. Second, we focus on the inclusion of gender perspectives, driven by the Program for Equal Opportunities for Women (PRIOM, 1991-1995). Due to the feminist leadership of its main promoters such as Gloria Bonder and Graciela Morgade, the first “sensitization” training in gender perspective within Teacher Training began at the national level. In a third section, we focus on the context of curriculum reform (1994-1997), in which the PRIOM included the word “gender” in the initial versions of the Common Basic Contents (CBC) for Basic General Education (EGB) and the Polimodal in 1994. However, as other studies have shown, due to the close political relations between the Menem government and the Catholic Church, the inclusion of gender was strongly opposed in Catholic discourse, resulting in the exclusion of this term, among others, in the final versions of the federal curriculum intended for the EGB in 1995.

SEX EDUCATION FROM THE “RELIGIOUS PLURALITY” 1991-1992

Sex education was already installed as a health and educational need in Argentine society before the emergence of neoliberal reform. Since

⁷ Santiago Zemaitis, Carolina Ojeda and Myriam Southwell, “Democracia, sensibilidades y educación sexual en la Argentina: derivas de la clandestinidad (1984-1989)”, in *Educação Clandestina: dimensões Conceituais e Novas Interlocações*, ed. Éder Silveira Almeida, Diego Orgel dal Bosco and Marcos Vilella (Curitiba: EDIPUC, 2021), 143.

the 1980s, the Ministry of Education had already specified training proposals on issues of sexuality and AIDS for teachers and families. However, due to the complementary relationship between the Menem government and the Catholic Church,⁸ the approach to sex education, like education regarding AIDS, was fraught with tension within the Ministry. This resulted in Catholic hegemony in the definition of these issues and their inclusion in the national curriculum.

The first education minister of Carlos Menem's government, Antonio Salonia (1989-1992), was particularly interested in including sex education in Argentine schools. According to the testimony of Orlando Martín, Salonia proclaimed: "Something has to be done about sexual education, but it is difficult... so we are going to try to summon all religious creeds". Martín took this to mean that Salonia "had to provide sex education but did not want to have problems with religions".⁹ The minister was under pressure, "not so much from the circles of the Menemist government itself, but from society", since "the issue of sex education was already installed and was being implemented in several countries" and also because "there were many sex education lines everywhere".¹⁰

Given this social need and the concern for religious positions, Salonia organized a meeting with the country's most important religious authorities to anticipate his intention to found a Sex Education Program. At this meeting, the approach to two issues was defined: sex education and AIDS education. Starting in 1991 work began on a special commission to carry out this objective. Although the program was not able to be implemented in the long term not generate actions within the educational system, two texts were produced by the commission that addressed these issues. The person in charge of the Social Policies Program of the MCyE, Beatriz Balian de Tagtachian, coordinated these publications and invited editors for the texts.

⁸ For a more detailed reading on these processes, see Germán Torres, *Educación pública, Estado e Iglesia en la Argentina democrática (1984-2013)* (Bernal: Ediciones UNQ, 2019). Sandra Ziegler, "Los docentes y la política curricular en los años 90", *Cadernos de Pesquisa* 38, no. 134 (2008): 393-411. Eiros, Nélica, "Las iglesias y los contenidos escolares". *Práxis Educativa* 2, no. 1 (2007): 75-84

⁹ Orlando Martín, "Personal interview", interview by Santiago Zemaitis, August 19, 2017.

¹⁰ Martín, interview.

The convened commission was made up of different profiles of specialists. Luis Parrilla was a renowned Protestant pastor of the Emanuel Evangelical Parish, educator and sex educator at the Orientation Center for Family and Community Life (COVIFAC) and director of the “Laura y Henry Fishbach” primary school in Villa Mitre, an institution where he had developed pedagogical plans since the mid-1960s. The psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carlos Robles Gorriti was Head of Pediatric Mental Health of the Italian Hospital of Buenos Aires. Alicia Pochelu was professor at the Argentine Catholic University and the University of Buenos Aires. The Jesuit priest Enrique Fabbri held a doctorate in Theology and was a specialist in anthropology of sexuality; he directed the Center for Research and Social Action (CIAS), was a founder of the Center for Family Studies (CEF), and also wrote about sex education in childhood and adolescence.¹¹ Rabbin Rubén Nisenbom was founder and director of the Sanctuary “Center for Universal and Ecumenical Spiritual Judaism”; Encarnación Madrid de Martín was a social worker and education inspector in the city of Buenos Aires and, as we mentioned, Orlando Martín was a theologian and professor of philosophy, well known for disseminating sex education issues in Catholic educational institutions belonging to the Superior Council of Catholic Education (CONSUDEC) and author of the first book on Didactics of sexual education published in 1985 (co-authored with his wife, Encarnación Madrid).

The group met fortnightly from April to June to prepare two documents published by the Ministry of Culture and Education in 1992. *AIDS: responsibility education of all* was a compilation of articles from national and international documents written during the 1980s and early 1990s. It included speeches from the World Health Organization, the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, the Argentine Episcopate Commission, the Central Council of Israelite Education of the Argentine Republic, and other complementary religious texts. The other document for teachers was *Education of sexuality*, a compilation of articles from the different members of the commission.

¹¹ Enrique Fabbri, *Pastoral de la realidad sexual* (Buenos Aires: CIAS, 1979). Enrique Fabbri, *Amor, familia, sexualidad* (Buenos Aires: Latinoamericana Libros, 1985).

In the opening words of this Series, Antonio Salonia pointed out:

Convinced of the importance of the integral development of man and that it deserves attention in all its facets: corporal, psychological, affective, spiritual, and also social, the Ministry of Culture and Education advanced in its treatment [...] In this frame of scientific seriousness and religious pluralism, this management convened specialists on the subject [...].¹²

The notions of “religious pluralism” and “integrality” were key to the religious discourse in the disputes over public education. The pluralism that Salonia points out came from the previous decade and functioned as a discursive strategy on the part of Catholic agents in the debates on public education. Specifically, this notion functioned hegemonically within the II National Pedagogical Congress, held between 1986 and 1987. According to Myriam Southwell, at this event the Catholic Church and conservative groups managed to organize the field of their arguments around the idea of “religious pluralism”, “[...] invoking the notion of plurality (which he did not exercise) to dispute with what he understood to be the state monopoly in educational matters [...] [the church] participated in a dispute over the signifier democracy charging it with the sense of plurality that made it possible to check the presence of the State”.¹³

Through the contributions of these participants, the concept of sex education was articulated in language within the Catholic tradition, such as “transcendence” and “spirituality”, justifying it under the notion of religious plurality. For this reason, Salonia insisted on the importance of the “integral development of man”.¹⁴ According to Martín, once again, the sexual education perspective agreed upon by this “religious conservative” group was an “integral approach” that differed from other approaches, which they called “partial”: biological, hygienic, socio-cultural, and moralistic. In Martín’s words: “Both Parilla and Pochelu,

¹² Antonio Salonia, “Respuesta educativa necesaria e impostergable”, in *Educación de la sexualidad*, comp. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1992), 10-11.

¹³ Myriam Southwell, “Postdictadura y política educativa: Una relocalización de viejos imaginarios en pugna”, *Políticas públicas* 1 (2007): 62.

¹⁴ Salonia, “Respuesta educativa necesaria...”, 9.

the rabbi and us, agreed that the religions were not opposed; on the contrary, we wanted an integral development, not an approach... let's call it hedonistic".¹⁵

In the chapter by Martín and Madrid, the authors proposed a "integral approach" or "integral-holistic personalist" approach that focused on "the gendered person and their integral development of sexuality as an integrating and qualifying area of the person".¹⁶ Each article dealt with a different aspect of sexuality and sexual education, although there were some identifiable limits: sexuality linked to "spirituality", to "transcendence", to "love", to the idea of "complementarity" but also of "completeness of being". It is worth saying that complementarity referred to the union between "man and woman". In his chapter "Love and education of sexuality", Enrique Fabbri pointed out, for example: "The man and the woman fulfill each other by reciprocally committing themselves. One is oneself for the other, and that is what fundamentally expresses sexuality".¹⁷

In the texts, heterosexuality is not explicitly mentioned (as the naturalization of the heterosexual norm was not made explicit), but we do find references to homosexuality and its visibility as part of social change and problems. Luis Parrilla, for example, pointed out a series of social changes that had occurred in previous decades. Among them he notes:

The consolidation of individual rights over those of the community group and that of sectorized groups (such as homosexuals and lesbians) are evident [...] AIDS exposes a sexuality that is not culturally manifest. Homosexuality occupies thought and opinion, both scientific and popular. Other forms of sexual life are exposed and their right to be lived is raised.¹⁸

¹⁵ Martín, interview.

¹⁶ Orlando Martín and Encarnación Madrid, "Educación de la sexualidad: consideraciones metodológicas", in *Educación de la sexualidad*, comp. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1992), 58-59.

¹⁷ Enrique Fabbri, "Amor y Educación de la sexualidad", in *Educación de la sexualidad*, comp. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1992), 45.

¹⁸ Luis Parrilla, "Sexualidad humana y nuestro tiempo", in *Educación de la sexualidad*, comp. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1992), 16.

For their part, Martín and Madrid described homosexuality and families that were not nuclear or traditional as some “problems linked to sexuality”:

a) Problems associated with the expression of adolescent youth sexuality:

- Anticipated teen relationships.
- Unwanted pregnancies.
- Abortion/newborn abandonment/incomplete families (single mothers), separation, domestic violence.

b) Problems from the private to the public:

- Existing situations that transcended the public, among which it is worth mentioning: the crisis of the institution of marriage, of family life, conflicts of ties.
- Homosexuality / feminism / gay / transvestism / lesbianism [...].¹⁹

The “specialists” and producers of these discourses were opposed to a “reduced or limited” sex education that focused on teaching genital aspects, since this meant linking sex education to “preventive issues”.²⁰ Even Martín tells us that on some occasions they had disputes with “the homosexuals”, “because they demanded a very reduced gaze from us. They had a more hygienist approach, more preventive...”.²¹

In almost all the articles in *Education of sexuality*, reference is made to the need to differentiate sexuality and genitalia and this can also be read through the silences, the omissions that the text in question contained. For example, consider the omission of methods to prevent sexually transmitted infections and methods to prevent teenage pregnancy. During the 1980s, these two issues became central to many proposals on sex education, due to the emergence of AIDS and the increase in pregnancy for young women. Those topics would be part of that “partial” approach that these authors wanted to get away from. These were the

¹⁹ Martín and Madrid, “Educación de la...”, 60.

²⁰ Martín, interview.

²¹ Martín, interview.

“preventive approaches”, traditional models of sexual education that included teaching about genital anatomy and physiology, about the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and contraceptive methods.

At this point it is important to remark that until the 1960s religious institutions and actors defended the freedom of families regarding the formation of sexuality, excluding the school as an area that could take up this social teaching. In 1965, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1963), approved the document *Gravissimum Educationis Momentum*, for the first time expressing support for teaching sex education in schools.²² “Education for Love” or “sexual education with a[n] integral approach” was how the Catholic discourse generated meanings associated with the formation of children and young people who insisted on the importance of sexual abstinence in youth, the conformation of the nuclear family, marriage and procreation as the ultimate ends of all human existence. The term “integral” thus functioned as a discursive strategy to avoid mentioning sexual practices or contraceptive methods.

The 1992 publication *Education of sexuality* was financed by the pharmaceutical company Laboratorios Bagó and 20,000 copies were printed to be distributed in schools throughout the country. However, this objective was not fully realized as most of the printed materials were removed when Minister Jorge Alberto Rodríguez (1992-1996) succeeded Salonia at the MCyE.²³

The close relationships that the MCyE initially maintained with religious sectors, especially regarding pedagogical approaches to sexuality, continued in a sustained way in the curricular reform proposed by Menem’s government after 1992. At the same time, the publication in question reflects dominant ideas within religious discourse about the normalization of heterosexuality and the dismissal of LGBTQI identities and movements as part of “the problems of sexuality”.

Due to its strong sexual moralism, the interest of the Catholic religion in the legitimization of some social identities (the heterosexual, such as the naturalization of “being a woman” and “being a man”) and

²² Juan Cruz Esquivel, *Cuestión de educación (sexual): pujas y negociaciones político-religiosas en la Argentina democrática* (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2013).

²³ Martín, interview.

the invisibility of others (not heteronormative), continued in disputes over public education regarding the curricular reform initiated in 1995. But to understand the resistance to these issues, we must first locate another ministerial initiative that promoted the inclusion of the gender perspective for the first time in teacher training, and then in the preliminary versions of the curricular reform.

THE INCLUSION OF “GENDER” IN TEACHER TRAINING AND CURRICULUM REFORM, 1991-1995

Salonia was not only motivated to develop sex education. During his tenure, he also put forward an initiative for the inclusion of the gender perspective, parallel to the formation of that Sexual Education Commission. The National Program for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities for Women (PRIOM) worked within the MCyE from 1991 to 1995, led by two feminist scholars: the psychologist Gloria Bonder and the pedagogue Graciela Morgade.

PRIOM began in the previous decade during the government of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989) as an institutional means to promote greater visibility of women’s political situation, particularly concerning their participation in public policies. In 1983, the year of the return to democratic life after the last civic-military dictatorship (1976-1983), the Women’s Equality Program (1983-1987) was founded. This Program worked within the Secretariat of Human Development and Family of the Ministry of Health and Social Action. In 1987, it became the Undersecretary for Women within the same Ministry (1987-1989). Then in 1991, a group of women graduates from the School of Psychology and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires created the National Council for Women (CNM) which was dependent on the national government. This Council was charged with promoting, coordinating, and evaluating equal opportunity policies for women in all areas of the state. Among its first institutional actions, the Council created PRIOM.²⁴

²⁴ Gloria Bonder, “El PRIOM en el Área Educativa. 1991-1995”, in *Panel: La ESI y la perspectiva de género en educación: antecedentes, debates y negociaciones*, Prosecretaría de Géneros y Feminismos. Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación. Universidad Nacional de La Plata (La Plata: September 28, 2020).

Because of her academic relationships and her feminist militancy, Gloria Bonder was summoned to form part of this new program within the CNM, that is, the PRIOM. Quickly, the program was assigned to the Ministry of Educational Planning and Evaluation within the MCyE.²⁵ From its beginnings until its completion in 1995 (for reasons that will be explained later), Bonder was the Technical Coordinator and main promoter. As Operational Coordinator, Bonder invited her former intern at the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET), Graciela Morgade, to join the effort. Morgade was a pedagogue who specialized in gender and education issues.²⁶

In its first years of development, PRIOM organized teacher training programs on gender issues and non-sexist education in different teacher training institutes in more than 20 provinces of the country. As Morgade recalls, “it was very difficult in the beginning, because we did not come from a strong tradition in matters of education and gender. We came from being women sensitized with feminism, with training in education, so, basically, those sensitization actions were what we did to carry out and then leave the material and then continue working on it”.²⁷

In these spaces for teacher training, the PRIOM teams brought new topics to the Argentine teachers, such as the contributions of Gender Studies and with it, the possibilities of the concept of gender to make social inequalities visible, the importance of equal opportunities for women and the existence of heteronormative presumption in the representations

²⁵ In 1966 she graduated with a degree in Psychology from the University of Buenos Aires. Her training in Women’s Studies and Gender theories was abroad, when she began traveling to the US in the 1970s. In 1979, during the dictatorship, she founded the Center for Women’s Studies (CEM). Bonder was also the creator of Postgraduate Specialization and Women’s Studies at the Faculty of Psychology, a pioneering experience in the Argentine university. With the return to democracy in 1983, Bonder already defined herself as “a militant of feminism”. Gloria Bonder, “Personal interview”, interview by Santiago Zemaitis, July 27, 2020.

²⁶ In the 1990s, Morgade earned a degree in Educational Sciences from the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the UBA and in 1990 she obtained her Master’s degree in Social Sciences from the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO). Morgade would also focus her academic activity in educational research and gender, inaugurating at the beginning of the 1990s an emerging field on the intersections between gender, feminist studies, education and pedagogical reflection. In 1992 she published *La determinación del género en el trabajo docente* [*The determinant of gender in teaching work*], edited by Miño and Dávila. In 1997, she compiled *Mujeres en la Educación* [Women in education] for the same publisher. Graciela Morgade, “Personal interview”, interview by Santiago Zemaitis, June 20, 2020.

²⁷ Morgade, interview.

of social identities. They discussed perspectives on how gender functioned in school life, the operations of androcentricity in scientific and school disciplines, reviews of discriminatory and/or sexist practices against women within schools, the elimination of gender stereotypes, contributions of the feminist movement to pedagogy, critiques of the historical associations between the teaching profession and the identity construction of women as “natural educators”, among other topics.²⁸

In the materials written by PRIOM for these training spaces, they also invited teachers to reflect on the opposition that gender approaches brought, the fear that these changes caused, in some sectors:

Another of the most common fears is that changes in male and female roles affect people’s sexual-genital orientation. Specifically, homosexuality is feared [...] In this way, other fears or misunderstandings will also go away: the change in the roles of men and women as a threat to the family, the contradiction between these new approaches and other knowledge learned in previous training (for example, some stereotyped notions within of psychology or pedagogy), feminism is understood as opposition to men...²⁹

Those fears identified by PRIOM would be the same ones expressed by sectors of Catholicism in their questioning of new theoretical and pedagogical perspectives for the educational system, a certain danger about the entry of “social constructivism” to the detriment of essentialist views on the genders that characterized the discursive strategies coming from these conservative groups.

That is why Bonder and Morgade were aware that they should also take strategic positions for the inclusion of this new perspective. The concept of “equal opportunities for women” turned out to be a strategic expression, “a gateway to the public meta-agenda of that moment”.³⁰

²⁸ Gloria Bonder, “Programa Nacional de Promoción de la Igualdad de Oportunidades para la Mujer en el Área Educativa”, in *Educando a mujeres y varones del siglo XXI. Nuevas perspectivas para la formación docente*, edit. Gloria Bonder and Graciela Morgade (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1993), 47.

²⁹ Bonder, “Programa Nacional de...”, 22 y 23.

³⁰ Bonder, “El PRIOM en...”.

According to Bonder, “this was all a tactical question [...] who was going to oppose equal educational opportunities for women?”³¹ This strategy was key to including the gender perspective, especially the visibility of the condition of women within the public policies of the State. This allowed them to include the gender perspective, both within the Ministry of Education and in the teacher training instances they organized.

In any case, it is interesting to note that the objectives and core ideas of work centered on “women” were later expanded in 1993 when PRIOM modified its central tenet of work from “equal opportunities” to a focus on equity in gender relations. As mentioned before, Minister Salonia had given free rein to the development of PRIOM after conversations with Bonder: “[Salonia] was very much in agreement with the functions of the PRIOM [...] [Between conversations] he told me: “What do you want to do?” And I tell him: “Well, I think people need to be made aware of this issue [...]”. He looked at me and said: “Look, Gloria, what isn’t in the curriculum isn’t in the school”. And I understood... and then I knew that the great challenge was to incorporate the theme [the gender approach] in the curriculum reform”.³² In this way, and unlike what happened with the Sex Education Commission, both during the Salonia administration and his predecessor, Minister Jorge Alberto Rodríguez (1992-1996), the intention to include the gender perspective did not stop.

In the XII Extraordinary Assembly of the Federal Council of Education (resolution 26/92) of the MCyE, the need to replace the old Common Basic Curriculum Guidelines (LCBC) with the Common Basic Contents (CBC) for initial, primary, and secondary education was established. Because of the inclusion of gender in the reform that was being planned, PRIOM held a series of conversations with Cecilia Braslavsky, who was in charge of technical coordination of the curriculum reform process. By 1993, according to Bonder, “We had already included gender... well we didn’t put “gender” on it, but we explained what we meant by that and how it was an expression that referred to “gender inequality” in a patriarchal system. There we go much further. And we made recommendations for all primary school subjects [EGB], all curriculum content recommendations”.

³¹ Bonder, interview.

³² Bonder, interview.

This process relied on dialogues with all the curriculum teams that were working on drafting of the contents and tenets of said reform. According to Morgade, the curriculum area that was most open to this inclusion was Ethics and Citizenship Training, which was led by Daniel Pinkas and Carlos Cullen. Despite this, according to Morgade, “We would have wanted much more themes... But well, we also understood that politically it was what he could achieve and it was a lot. To such an extent it was precisely what finally ended up being the key in the discussion with the Catholic Church”.³³

GENDER AND SEX EDUCATION IN DISPUTE DURING CURRICULAR REFORM, 1994-1997

The Federal Law of Education was promoted by Menem in 1993 and, with a strong neoliberal imprint, replaced the first educational law of Argentina, the Common Education Law 1420, passed in 1884. The new law established a new structure for the educational system that had to be adapted in each of the country’s provinces.³⁴ This restructuring, accompanied by a strong process of educational decentralization, included a revision of the curriculum contents for the different levels of the national educational system.³⁵ In this way, the curriculum reform process began with a public consultation carried out in 1994. In this initial reform process, a wide variety of social actors from all over the country participated through forums, surveys, and opinion interviews aimed at the public, families, educational communities, teachers, provincial educational authorities, youth, government organizations, businessmen, economic sectors, academic specialists, among others.

³³ Morgade, interview.

³⁴ In general terms, the law proposed redesigning the structure of the educational system by extending primary education from 7 to 9 years, thus producing not only a cut in the first two years of schooling at the former secondary level, but also incorporating these years into primary schooling (two-year primary education at the secondary level). Secondary education was reduced to only three years, under the name of “Middle School” or “Polimodal”. Another of the key points of the reform was linked to the processes of administrative decentralization of the establishments, without financial support to the provinces. Finally, it should be noted that this regulation was accompanied by a battery of targeted policies (the Educational Social Plan, the Retention Scholarships, among others) aimed at improving the equity of those less favored sectors.

³⁵ Adriana Puiggrós, *Luchas por una democracia educativa (1995-2018)* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2019).

Throughout November, the Ministry of Programming and Educational Evaluation of the MCyE worked with provincial authorities to reconcile all the contributions collected during the consultation process. As a final result, that same month, the XXII Assembly of the Federal Council of Education approved a first version of the Common Basic Contents (CBC) for the initial education level and the Basic General School (EGB) through resolution 39/94. This regulation also expressed the need to start an evaluation process of this first version “to introduce pertinent modifications” for the definitive curriculum design.

Thanks to the consensus achieved by PRIOM, the term “gender” was then included in a novel way in EGB subjects such as Social Sciences and Ethics and Citizenship Training. At the same time, mention was made within the Natural Sciences of content on “sexuality” and “AIDS”.³⁶

One of the sectors most interested in reading and reviewing the content that had been reached by consensus and synthesized during that consultation process was the Catholic Church. The revision proposed by this sector was carried out by the Catholic University of La Plata (UCALP). In its Report on the CBC of Argentine education, the UCALP (1995) reviewed the contents of all subjects. Regarding the contents of this analysis, for example, they criticized the Ethical and Citizen Education proposal, since according to this review: “The family –natural and primary agent of education according to the FEDERAL Law– is totally minimized and relativized [...]”.³⁷ They continued: “Relativized, in relation to the family and all its contents, the reference to marriage is completely omitted as if it were an unimportant topic to Argentines, and without personal and social relevance”.³⁸

Aware of the imminent development of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September of that year, the text was published in May and already projected the discussions that the ecclesiastical leaders gave in the event and in the framework of the conservative intellectual

³⁶ Consejo Federal de Educación, Resolution 39/94. (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1994).

³⁷ Universidad Católica de La Plata, in *Informe de los Contenidos Básicos Comunes de la Educación Argentina*, ed. Universidad Católica de La Plata (La Plata: Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación, 1995).

³⁸ Universidad Católica de La Plata, *Informe de los...*, 50.

lobby: opposition to the term “gender”, what would be called “gender ideology”. The UCALP document warned: “The integration of the “gender” perspective in the new Basic Contents is already planned [...] It is planned to overcome the “biologist” conception that considers that the roles of men and women are based on natural order, teaching that they are specific to each culture and present innumerable variations”.³⁹

About “sex education”, UCALP pointed out that this term “is referred to in a large part of the Natural Sciences, and on the moral plane the relationship between sex and love does not include the slightest allusion to the constitution of the family”. The treatment of AIDS in the preliminary version was also under suspicion since “concerning health it can easily be used to induce sexual permissiveness, through recommendations on the use of condoms”. In an articulation strategy pejoratively combining gender-AIDS-sex education-homosexuality, the document concludes:

In light of what has been seen [...] on the theme of “gender”, the insistence on “education in the recognition of basic human rights for social life, full and without discrimination for reasons... of gender...”. This supposes a frankly permissive sexual education regarding homosexuality.⁴⁰

Within the Report issued by UCALP, in an annex entitled “The common basic contents against the Federal Education Law” signed by the parish priest Jorge Luis Lona, a call is made “with concern” about the approval of said contents. According to this parish priest, “What is decided will depend on whether our children and young people receive an authentic education, or whether they are subjected, along with their teachers, to a process of ideological deformation”.⁴¹

Even with the previous criticisms, the issues of gender and sexuality turn out to be addressed again in this annex with a strong tone of denunciation. It refers to the definition that, according to the document that Argentina defended at the International Conference on Population and

³⁹ Universidad Católica de La Plata, *Informe de los...*

⁴⁰ Universidad Católica de La Plata, *Informe de los...*, 52-53.

⁴¹ Universidad Católica de La Plata, *Informe de los...*, 53.

Development held in Cairo (Egypt)⁴² in 1994: “The family, understood as the union of man and woman with a tendency to endure, [is the place] from which children are derived.” Lona adds that these CBCs violate that very definition and that with this “[...] our country opposed the aberrant models of family, derived precisely from “social constructionism” in their sexological versions that were proposed at the UN”.⁴³ It also refers to “the natural order”, a concept that “those responsible for the CBC always rejected,⁴⁴ despite requests made previously by the Catholic Church through the Superior Council of Catholic Education (CONSUDEC). According to Lona “sex education refers largely to Natural Sciences as if it were basically a zoological subject. Coincidentally, on the ethical plane, the relationship between sex and love is not referred to the constitution of the family”.⁴⁵ “The family” would be unrelated to marriage, a “banned term” in the contents. The document also goes on to warn that “despite the objections of CONSUDEC”, the CBC included “the new content of gender”, and defines it as follows:

The concept of “gender”, understood in a completely different way than currently normal, aims to relativize the characteristics between the sexes [...] From there, the concept of “equal opportunities” between both sexes is understood in a new way [...] Following this line of reasoning, one last necessary consequence is reached: full equality of opportunity must include the possibility of choosing one’s sexual identity. It is obvious that in this way, the concept of “family” and “family roles” is completely relativized.⁴⁶

⁴² It was an international conference organized by the UN. In this event, the commitment of the States to ensure “gender equality”, the “empowerment” of women was raised and, above all, the control of reproduction and reproductive health were raised as central aspects as fundamental human rights of women. Argentina’s position at this meeting was (together with Guatemala, El Salvador, Ecuador and Malta) to persistently oppose the most liberal proposals of the most developed countries, focusing its opposition on the recognition of abortion as a means of regulating fertility. The representatives of Argentina also defended themselves that the right to life begins from the very moment of conception. Thus, Argentina abstained on most of the points agreed upon in the conclusions of the meeting.

⁴³ Universidad Católica de La Plata, *Informe de los...*, 71.

⁴⁴ Universidad Católica de La Plata, *Informe de los...*

⁴⁵ Universidad Católica de La Plata, *Informe de los...*, 72.

⁴⁶ Universidad Católica de La Plata, *Informe de los...*, 74.

Lona mentions that the “projected curricular development in this regard [on the term gender] by the Ministry of Education and Culture can be estimated by the proposals presented by Gloria Bonder and Graciela Morgade, about the inclusion of the topic in teacher training and curriculum designs. To affirm that said inclusion of the (gender) perspective is contradictory, it refers again to the event in Beijing and argues that Argentina has objected to “the relativistic link between gender and family model”,⁴⁷ even earlier in a previous meeting held in Santiago, Chile in 1994, in line with what was already presented that same year in International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo.

From Gender to Sex: Catholic Curriculum Modifications and the Resignation of Curriculum Teams

On June 22, 1995, the XXIII Assembly of the CFCE approved resolution 40/95, by which the second edition and definitive version of the CBC for the initial level and the EGB were approved.⁴⁸ In this resolution, the curriculum modifications proposed by technicians, officials, teachers, and also “monotheistic religious confessions” are made explicit. Among the changes, it mentioned “the rejection of ideologies and fundamentalisms, as forms of cultural relativism”.⁴⁹

Let us then observe how the contents in question were expressed comparatively between the first version of 1994 and the final version of 1995, after religious interference. In Ethics and Citizenship Training, mention was made of “types of families” or “the family group”, broadening the views on the different and diverse social forms of family organization. But in the final version, that amplitude was reduced to “the family”. It is even referred to as the “basic cell”, “as a natural and fundamental element of society [...]”.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Universidad Católica de La Plata, *Informe de los...*, 75.

⁴⁸ Germán Torres, “Una lectura de las relaciones entre Iglesia católica, Estado y educación en 30 años de democracia”, *Propuesta Educativa* 23, no. 42 (2014): 77-85. http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?pid=S1995-77852014000200009&script=sci_abstract&tlng=en

⁴⁹ Consejo Federal de Cultura y Educación, “Resolución n° 40/95”, in *Contenidos básicos comunes para la educación general básica*. (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1995), 13.

⁵⁰ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, “Formación Ética y Ciudadana”, in *Contenidos básicos comunes para la educación general básica*, ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1995), 351.

“The family” is mentioned eleven times as a social organization, against a single mention of “families in the block “Human activities and family organization in Social Sciences in the Third Cycle”.⁵¹ Also within this subject it is proposed to teach “The roles assigned to men and women [...]”. The teaching of “identity” (“boys” and “girls”) and “social” models (“the feminine” and “the masculine”).⁵² These premises renew an old pedagogical objective of modern sexual education: that children learn to identify with (only) two sexual roles based on genitalia. That is, the supposed “natural” coherence between the sex assigned at birth and the display of gender identity and expression.

Consistent with the criticism received, sex education would be linked to the concept of “love” and the “integral” vision, within the Natural Sciences subject. In the initial version it read: “Contribute to satisfying needs linked to the development of sexuality”, while in the final version:

[...] meet needs related to health maintenance and the understanding of the integral development of sexuality [...] The knowledge of the reproductive system is deepened and this work is linked to the treatment of issues related to the love and sexuality of the human being as a person.⁵³

It is noteworthy how quickly the Catholic lobby managed to effect these changes. The documents produced by UCALP were published in May 1995 and the final version of the CBC was approved the following month. In addition, during the time that the review of the first version lasted, other Church agents made public statements and also held private interviews with Minister Jorge Rodríguez to include changes in the document.⁵⁴ Bonder remembers this episode: “And in one night, the reform that had been approved by the Council [CFE] was changed. And they turned it back, they wanted to remove the theories of evolution and

⁵¹ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, “Ciencias Sociales”, in *Contenidos básicos comunes para la educación general básica*, ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1995), 349.

⁵² Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, “Ciencias Sociales”.

⁵³ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, “Ciencias Naturales”, in *Contenidos básicos comunes para la educación general básica*, ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1995), 115-116.

⁵⁴ Torres, *Educación pública*, 302.

of course, they removed everything we had put on gender... well, all that was done in one night, in one night all that was removed..."⁵⁵

The consequence of these changes introduced in the CBC between July 8th and 14th, 1995, was that both Gloria Bonder and Graciela Morgade and the entire group of people who were part of the PRIOM presented their resignation as an act of opposition to the changes. These resignations meant the end of PRIOM as a ministerial program. But they were not the only ones. Other groups that had been part of the writing of the contents of the first version of 1994 also resigned, presenting their disagreement with said modifications. Among them were: the coordinator of the Ethics and Citizenship Training area, Carlos Cullen; the deputy coordinators of the Natural Sciences area, Marcelo Leonardo Levinas; two heads of the Social Sciences area, María Dolores Béjar and Adriana Villa; and the national coordinator of Kindergarten, Ana María Malajovich.⁵⁶

Those changes weren't just about face value. They had to do with the disputes around the meanings that were played out in the process of producing curriculum on topics that were strongly questioned. For example, the replacement of the gender category ignored the initiatives and advances that Bonder and the team had been carrying out since PRIOM. With the resignation of that team, PRIOM definitively ceased its activity.

The conflict over the collective resignation of the national experts and scholars did not only have repercussions within MCyE. The most important graphic media in the country echoed the conflict and followed it for several weeks. The press showed how these and other changes made to the curriculum content (the evolutionary theories of Darwin and Lamarck had also been eliminated) were repudiated by broad social sectors. In several journalistic notes in newspapers such as *Página 12*, *Clarín* and *La Nación*, criticism of the Carlos Menem government was levied for its links with the Catholic Church, the Ministry of Education, and even the figure of Minister Rodríguez about the aforementioned events.

⁵⁵ Bonder, interview.

⁵⁶ Carlos Alberto Estévez, "Nos critican por sectarismo, o por desconocimiento", *La Nación*, 18 July, 1995.

Criticisms were also pronounced by the most important representatives of teacher unions such as the Union of Education Workers (UTE),⁵⁷ the Confederation of State Workers of the Argentine Republic (CTERA),⁵⁸ and the Confederation of Argentine Educators (CEA).⁵⁹ Political leaders from the Socialist, the Radical Civic Union (UCR) and the Front for a Country in Solidarity (FREPASO) also spoke out and asked Minister Rodríguez for explanations.⁶⁰ The specialists who had resigned, such as Béjar and Cullen, questioned that those who were part of the drafting of the consultation versions had not been part of the curriculum debate, nor had they received an explanation of how and why the contents had been modified.⁶¹ At the same time, different sectors of other religions, such as the Bet-El Judaism community and representatives of the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary, also maligned the change in the press.⁶²

Even though Minister Rodríguez had initially taken an interest in PRIOM and its goals, he did not oppose the changes proposed by academic Catholicism. On the contrary, when the national press asked him the reasons for replacing the concept of “gender” with that of “sex”, he echoed the arguments of UCALP:

The term “sex” is clearer for anyone -he told the *Clarín* newspaper- I hope they don't accuse me of being “sexist”. Article 37 of the new National Constitution speaks of “men and women” and about the type of discrimination.⁶³

For Graciela Morgade, that collective resignation, and the press coverage that followed the whole episode, “[...] did a lot to spread the gender perspective and also to, in quotes, “convince” the male and female

⁵⁷ Jorge Rouillon, “Sigue el debate sobre contenidos educativos”, *La Nación*, 17 July, 1995.

⁵⁸ Nora Vieiras, “Críticas a los cambios en los CBC”, *Página 12*, 13 July, 1995. Santiago Rodríguez, “Cambios entre gallos y medianoche en los CBC”, *Página 12*, 14 July, 1995.

⁵⁹ Carlos Alberto Estévez, “Análisis crítico de los contenidos educativos”, *La Nación*, 20 July, 1995.

⁶⁰ “Desmienten renuncias por los contenidos”, *La Nación*, 15 July, 1995. “Pedido de informes”, *Página 12*, 14 July, 1995.

⁶¹ “Desmienten renuncias...”.

⁶² “Apoyo judío a los contenidos educativos”, *Página 12*, 13 July, 1995. Sergio Bergman “Opinión. Los contenidos de la reforma educativa”, *Página 12*, 20 July, 1995.

⁶³ “Cambios en los contenidos educativos”, *Clarín*, 8 July, 1995.

colleagues, especially in the field of education of that what we were doing was not proposing a concern of petty-bourgeois women who had their daily life resolved [...] Minister Rodríguez did not say anything, he let us resign [...] the definition was not made by Rodríguez alone [...]”.⁶⁴

The most conservative sectors had seen Bonder and Morgade as agents of a certain danger insofar as they represented the entry of an “ideology” that “attacked” their fundamental dogmatic principles. The UCALP intervention was an example of this. So much so that, after the conflict of mass resignations, Opus Dei published a book in which, according to Bonder, they said: “Gloria Bonder wants to destroy paternal authority in the family”... They also said that we wanted to authorize homosexuality!”.⁶⁵

Religious Modifications in the CBC of the Polimodal Level, 1995-1997

In December 1995, the Federal Council of Culture and Education of the National Ministry, in its XXV Extraordinary Assembly, issued a resolution that enabled public discussion on the contents of the Common Basic Contents and the Oriented Basic Contents of the document “Polimodal education. Framework Agreement”. In this section we are interested in indicating in which curricular areas of these proposals sex education was included in order to later analyze the readings and criticisms made by the Catholic sectors.

In the area of Natural Sciences, in Block 1, “Life and its properties”, sex education is mentioned immediately among the first contents: “with the promotion of health and sex education of young people from an integral approach [...] It should be noted that health education and sex education are cross-cutting issues, and therefore require multiple approaches that integrate strictly biological aspects with others of a social, cultural, moral nature, etc.”.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Morgade, interview.

⁶⁵ Bonder, interview.

⁶⁶ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, “Ciencias Naturales”, in *La educación polimodal. Acuerdo marco. Contenidos básicos para la educación polimodal. Versión para consulta*, ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1996), 78.

In the proposal of the conceptual contents, it was suggested for this block, among other contents: “Reproductive health: conception and contraception. Pregnancy. Embryonic development. Birth. Preventive measures against sexually transmitted diseases [...] Addictions, nutrition, and food [...] Alterations of the immune system, AIDS”.⁶⁷

In the area of Social Sciences, in thematic Block 2 “The contemporary historical cycle. Change and diversity, for the contents of the topic “Society and politics: the construction of democratic systems” is where the highly problematic inclusion of the gender perspective is mentioned:

Contemporary political and social traditions: liberalism, socialism, the Social Doctrine of the Church, social democracy, among others. Social movements and political change towards political and social citizenship (suffragists, the social question, and feminist movements, among others) [...] Tolerance and coexistence of minorities, public freedoms and gender perspectives.⁶⁸

For its part, in “Gymnastics”, one of the blocks in the Physical Education area, the following are also referenced among the first Conceptual Contents: “Exercise, health, and quality of life: role of bodily and motor activity in the sex education of children”.⁶⁹

The mainstreaming of the theme continues in the area of Humanities, in the thematic block “Psychological approach of the individual and groups” and within the section “The body, sexuality, affections”, it is proposed: “[...] analyze the stages of human sexual development. Based on this knowledge, the concept of sexual identity and the different conceptions of what is feminine and what is masculine will be analyzed”.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, “Ciencias Naturales”, 108.

⁶⁸ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, “Ciencias Sociales”, in *La educación polimodal. Acuerdo marco. Contenidos básicos para la educación polimodal. Versión para consulta*, ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1996), 108.

⁶⁹ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, “Gimnasia” in *La educación polimodal. Acuerdo marco. Contenidos básicos para la educación polimodal. Versión para consulta*, ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1996), 158.

⁷⁰ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, “Humanidades”, in *La educación polimodal. Acuerdo marco. Contenidos básicos para la educación polimodal. Versión para consulta*, ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1996), 193.

Within the CBO (Guided Basic Content), only in the Natural Sciences, Health, and Environmental Orientation is the subject addressed within the area “Health, person and Community”. There, Block 4, “Health and the immune system”, is developed, which aims to deepen the notions of immunity and knowledge of the immune system mentioned in Natural Sciences. Among the conceptual contents, it is detailed: “Diseases of the immune system. Autoimmune diseases. Congenital and acquired immunodeficiency syndromes. AIDS: preventive measures; psychological, family and social aspects of the disease”.⁷¹

The Catholic University of La Plata (UCALP), together with the Center for Research in Philosophical and Cultural Anthropology (CIAFIC), issued, due to the opening of the opportunity to consult the guidelines for the Polimodal previously reviewed, two documents in which they revised the contents and fundamentals. The document *Analysis of the basic documents for Polimodal education* is also a publication with observations and recommendations for the revision of the curriculum proposal. In this reading of the contents and themes of the different modalities, which contain these curriculum designs in their preliminary versions, the inclusion of contents linked to sex education was one of the aspects reviewed by professors and researchers. At that time, UCALP was led by the former minister of education during the last civic-military dictatorship (1976-1983) Cayetano Licciardo, who, together with Monsignor Juan Rodolfo Laise, was in charge of defending the position of UCALP with the technical team in charge of drafting the CBC.

In general terms, it was again a critical reading by the UCALP of the national curricular proposal for secondary education that insisted on the need for “an education understood as part of the process of integral formation of the person”. In this sense, we read in the development of the entire document, the need to understand education from an “integral perspective”, the claim of “the person” and the “spiritual dimension” to complete the Catholic anthropological definition. The same occurs in the observations on the definitions and articulations of meaning around the significant sex education and human sexuality, in the areas of Natural

⁷¹ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, “Orientación em Ciencias Naturales, Salud y Medio ambiente” in *La educación polimodal. Acuerdo marco. Contenidos básicos para la educación polimodal. Versión para consulta*, ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1996), 253.

Sciences, Social Sciences, Physical Education, and Humanities in the CBC and the Natural Sciences, Health, and CBO Environment.

Thus, in the block “Life and its properties”, in the area of Natural Sciences, it is criticized that there is an “insistence that health is related to the sexual education of young people almost exclusively [which] demonstrates a partial vision and erroneous understanding of what it means to protect health”,⁷² and that this could lead to “the legality of certain practices that harm the right to life”.⁷³ Regarding “the proposal to mainstream sex education for young people”, it is questioned that “its integration with philosophical or religious aspects is not taken into account, curtailing the operational scope of said integration and discriminating against said approaches [...]”.⁷⁴ Content on “contraceptives”, is criticized because is not clarified if these were artificial or natural.⁷⁵

It is important to point out that these were not arguments that insisted on eliminating the proposal to include sex education. It is even made explicit:

There can be no doubt about the inclusion of sex education as **one** of the cross-cutting themes, but there should not be any doubt about the fact that it loses effectiveness [...] if it is not undertaken within the broader problem of education for love, since in man sexuality is not only a biological reality since the spirit formalizes the body as a **human** body and integrates all its functions within the **purpose** of human life [the highlight is from the original text].⁷⁶

In the subject of Physical Education, it is questioned that:

sex education is part of education for love because human sexuality is integral to the act, it is an expression of human love

⁷² Universidad Católica de La Plata, “Ciencias Naturales”, in *Análisis de los Contenidos Básicos Comunes para la Educación Polimodal*, ed. Universidad Católica de La Plata (La Plata: Universidad Católica de La Plata, 1996), 49.

⁷³ Universidad Católica de La Plata, “Ciencias Naturales”.

⁷⁴ Universidad Católica de La Plata, “Ciencias Naturales”, 52.

⁷⁵ Universidad Católica de La Plata, “Ciencias Naturales”.

⁷⁶ Universidad Católica de La Plata, “Ciencias Naturales”.

between man and woman, as a mutual donation, open to the procreation of new life [...].⁷⁷

Without denying the importance of the inclusion of sexual education, this signifier is understood as an “education for love”. This expression is equivalent, in turn, to the integral sex education, which within the worldview of Catholicism includes the physical and spiritual dimension. However, at the same time, it is about a love and a notion of “integral” that only legitimizes the unions of heterosexual couples and for reproductive purposes. The association between “sex education” and “integral education” can be thought of as a strategic discursive movement used in conservative pedagogical discourses to generate exclusions of certain people or social groups. This then leads us to think that in this discourse not all subjects are recipients of school sex education.

For another hand, and once again, the gender perspective is questioned within the subject of Social Sciences. On this occasion, the articulation between “human rights, tolerance and coexistence of minorities” with “public freedoms and gender perspectives” is affirmed as “unacceptable”.⁷⁸ For another school subject such as Humanities, within the section “Psychological approach of the individual and groups”, the UCALP document accepts the approach of contents linked to the “stages of sexual development of the human being”,⁷⁹ but it warns that this is “totally separate from affectivity and love and the development of other capacities, which is adopted in an evolutionary perspective”.⁸⁰

Finally, the last criticism of the Framework Document by Catholic academics was in the area of Natural Sciences. From the “Health and Society” block, it is questioned that in the topics of “dependency and addiction”, a more detailed analysis of both the behavior and the risk group is

⁷⁷ Universidad Católica de La Plata, “Educación Física” in *Análisis de los Contenidos Básicos Comunes para la Educación Polimodal*, ed. Universidad Católica de La Plata (La Plata: Universidad Católica de La Plata, 1996), 114.

⁷⁸ Universidad Católica de La Plata, “Ciencias Sociales”, in *Análisis de los Contenidos Básicos Comunes para la Educación Polimodal*, ed. Universidad Católica de La Plata (La Plata: Universidad Católica de La Plata, 1996), 78.

⁷⁹ Universidad Católica de La Plata, “Humanidades”, in *Análisis de los Contenidos Básicos Comunes para la Educación Polimodal*, ed. Universidad Católica de La Plata (La Plata: Universidad Católica de La Plata, 1996), 147.

⁸⁰ Universidad Católica de La Plata, “Humanidades”.

lacking and noted the differences between them. Nor is the relationship between disordered sexuality and increased risk of addictive behaviors marked.⁸¹ In this way, the Catholic discourse not only reinforced the concept of a “risk group” –typical of the epidemiological discourse of the 1980s during the AIDS emergency– but also linked “sexual problems” with “addiction”. Concerning AIDS, it is requested to differentiate “prevention, protection and cure”, especially on the first aspect. The Catholic Church has called for preventive measures such as abstinence since it has always opposed contraceptive methods such as condoms. It is suggested, then, that the approach to AIDS “requires a very intense prevention process [...] to avoid risky behaviors”.⁸²

DEFINITIVE VERSION OF THE CBC FOR THE POLIMODAL LEVEL

After the conflict of resignations, in February 1997 the CBC for Polimodal Education was published, although it was on December 9, 1998, when the CFE officially approved the same contents through resolution 2336/98. There we read again a series of changes and/or additions based on the criticisms previously stated by UCALP, changes that were in line with the modifications established by the Federal Council of Education in 1995 with the CBC for the EGB.

In the area of Natural Sciences, the need to consider sex education as transversal⁸³ curriculum content was maintained without major modifications, although with a new clarification: that it must also be addressed in other areas such as Humanities, Ethics, and Citizenship Training and in Social Sciences. In the “Reproductive Health” aspect in Natural Sciences, the mention of contraception was eliminated: “Preventive measures against sexually transmitted diseases [...] conception and planning of

⁸¹ Universidad Católica de La Plata, “Ciencias Naturales”, in *Análisis de los Contenidos Básicos Comunes para la Educación Polimodal*, ed. Universidad Católica de La Plata (La Plata: Universidad Católica de La Plata, 1996), 174.

⁸² Universidad Católica de La Plata, “Ciencias Naturales”, 175.

⁸³ “Transversality” or transversal curriculum refers to the inclusion of social problems that present a certain urgency in a particular historical context. Cross-curricular themes, which are beginning to be included in Argentina in this context of curricular reform, represent a strong demand towards the school and are present in various subjects within the curriculum. At the same time, it is expected that these are not reduced to a single subject in particular; but can be taught from the different subjects that make up a curriculum (for example: the education for peace, the environmental problems or the human rights).

reproduction, sterility, assisted reproduction techniques, and preventive measures against sexually transmitted diseases [...]. Assisted reproductive techniques. Reproduction planning. Prevention of sexually transmitted disease, bioethical implications”.⁸⁴

The notion of “integrality” was present in the Expectations of Achievement where once again, it referred to the spiritual dimension, responsibility, and the balanced development of sexuality: “Understand and appreciate the importance of the affective, social and spiritual aspects of people, and ethical principles and norms, for responsible care of oneself and an integral and balanced development of sexuality”.⁸⁵ So as we have been demonstrating, in this “integral” discursive position is used to reify the Catholic norms and denigrate LGBTQ+ sexualities.

Following the pronatalist tradition of Catholic discourses, the contents of “new technologies of sexuality” such as assisted reproduction techniques were included. “Preventive measures” against sexually transmitted diseases are mentioned, although condoms or “contraceptive methods” or “abortion” are not mentioned. In this way, the preventive approach of sexual education appears linked to diseases, but not to forms of birth control.

We notice the same in Social Sciences. In the final version excluded mentions of: “the Social Doctrine of the Church”, “social-democracy”, “Social movements and political change towards political and social citizenship”, “suffrage”, “feminist movements”, as well as “human rights”, “Tolerance and coexistence of minorities”, “public freedoms” and “gender perspectives”.⁸⁶

For Physical Education, “[...] the role of bodily and motor activity in the sexual education of young people” was removed from the document.⁸⁷ Strategically, only in the case of Humanities would the original

⁸⁴ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, “Ciencias Naturales”, in *Contenidos Básicos Comunes para la Educación Polimodal*, ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación de la Nación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1997), 4.

⁸⁵ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación de la Nación, “Ciencias Naturales”.

⁸⁶ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación de la Nación, “Ciencias Sociales”, in *Contenidos Básicos Comunes para la Educación Polimodal*, ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación de la Nación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1997), 10.

⁸⁷ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación de la Nación, “Educación Física”, in *Contenidos Básicos Comunes para la Educación Polimodal*, ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación de la Nación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1997), 35.

text remain unchanged: “On the other hand, it is proposed to analyze the stages of sexual development of the human being. Based on this knowledge, the concept of sexual identity and the different conceptions of what is feminine and what is masculine will be analyzed”.⁸⁸

TOWARDS A DISSIDENT PERSPECTIVE IN THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION

In this article we reconstructed a series of discursive positions around controversial issues for society and for the educational system: sex and gender education. At the end of the twentieth century the Ministry of Culture and Education of Argentina is a site for examining a place to look at how these issues opened strong disputes regarding their inclusion in the curriculum.

The actors involved in disputes regarding topics within the national curriculum aligned in two forces of thought that are contrary due to their ideological foundations. On the one hand, we recover those religious positions which, under the protection of preserving “religious pluralism”, MyCE covertly adopted from Catholic agents in order to influence the sex education programming and curricular reform. The complementary relationship between the Menem government and the Catholic Church is demonstrated in these gestures of always counting on the approval of these sectors for the pedagogical orientations regarding the proposals of sex education as well as the contents of the profound curriculum reform in the mid-1990s. “Integral” education became the adjective that religious sectors insisted on to include their central concepts and traditional definitions in discourse on topics such as “education for love”, “family”, transcendence, spirituality, among others.

We also analyze the other force causing tension, an approach more linked to gender equality, more critical of the essential assumptions of “being a woman” and being “male” and concerned with social inequalities. PRIOM was the program that institutionally supported a curricular perspective that enabled questioning of gender norms within school life.

⁸⁸ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación de la Nación, “Humanidades”, in *Contenidos Básicos Comunes para la Educación Polimodal*, ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación de la Nación (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1997), 193.

As we also explored, PRIOM found its action limited regarding the mainstreaming of the gender approach in the context of the curriculum reform for primary and secondary education. This was because the conservative Catholic force managed to impose its hegemony on the meanings attributed to sexuality and “sex”.

The trend towards a cis-heterosexual education is visible in the supremacy that has been granted to certain bodies (binary, heterosexual, cis-gender, with reproductive capacity). This normative sexual regime also works because of what it does not name but ends up defining. The history of silencing other identities beyond “man” and “woman” is precisely the history of the empire of heteronormativity.

Explorations on the dissident movements and the processes of educational inclusion and discrimination in the history of education in Argentina are scarce and do not yet have sufficient development as a line of research within this discipline. This study affirms that researching pedagogical discourses, their silences and presences, their operations of inclusion and exclusion, increases our understanding of the history of the social mechanisms of heteronormativity, understood as the only sexual culture worth living. While there is still much to investigate in this regard this essay offers an opening to new lines of research, dissident lines that focus on the experiences, memories, and local histories of LG-BTQI+ movements and their relationships with the educational system and with hegemonic pedagogical discourses. Maybe telling these stories in the present can help make schools more liveable spaces for all people.

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