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Comprehensive Sexual Education (ESI) in the training of teachers and early childhood education graduates: debates and challenges facing the new righ

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Abstract: This study aims to identify students' preconceptions and representations about CSE, and the pedagogical practices of practicing teachers at the Preschool level. In the current context of regression in gender and rights policies in Argentina, the initial and continuing education of teachers for Early Childhood Education presents a particular challenge when it comes to CSE (Law 26.150RA). This is an exploratory and qualitative study conducted through in-depth interviews with students from the Teaching and Bachelor's Degree Programs in Early Childhood Education at two Argentine universities, who work in Early Childhood Education institutions in the Province of Chaco. The results revealed that taboos regarding the topic persist, and gender stereotypes are still present in early childhood institutions. Hence, the need to continue specific training. Recognizing these ideas and practices will allow us to identify strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of CSE, contributing to the generation of necessary changes for its effective integration in each educational community, improving access to a dignified life for the entire population. This study reviews the problems of continuing teacher training within a context of conflict related to sexuality, the gender perspective, and the regressive nature of rights in a region with the highest rates of violence against women and diversity, and poverty.

Keywords: teacher training. rights. comprehensive sexuality education. childhood education.

1 Introduction

While the inclusion of sex education on the Latin American public education policy agenda is a reality, the ways in which it has been incorporated reveal a map of differences and inequalities across the region, in which a range of actors disputes its meanings and pronouncements. International organizations have played a leading role in this process, initially contributing to the public debate by advocating for its necessity as a central element of educational policy, within the framework of supporting the curriculum development of nation-states. These interventions have been the subject of disputes among various actors, notably the Catholic Church and the Feminist Movement/Women's Social Movement. The inclusion of sexuality education on the



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public agenda is the result of the interplay of diverse struggles. In this process, feminist struggles, which challenge the parameters of the private/public sphere, have been fundamental. The slogan "the private is public" allowed for the envisioning of a new agenda from which sexuality acquires the status of a common good, challenging the meanings established by the Catholic Church or the biomedical discourse (Morgade, 2011).

In this scenario, we propose to identify the prior ideas and representations of students in Early Childhood Education programs regarding Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), as well as to analyze the pedagogical practices of teachers working in early childhood, seeking to recognize the strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of the right to Comprehensive Sexuality Education. This will allow us to highlight them, rethink educational practices and public policies from the perspective of CSE, in order to strengthen the development of a critical pedagogy from Comprehensive Sexuality Education with a perspective of gender, diversity and rights.

In Argentina, after Comprehensive Sexuality Education project became Law 26.150 in 2006 (Argentina, 2006a), the National Comprehensive Sexuality Education Program was created to guarantee the right of all students to receive comprehensive sexuality education in public and private educational institutions, from preschool through high school. University levels are exempt from mandatory implementation, leaving the decision to each teacher and the administration. However, 19 years after its enactment, both qualitative and quantitative evidence confirms that the limited progress in its implementation, far from reversing the trends and solving the problems for which it was approved, has become part of the problem. The main difficulty stemmed from the provincialization of the national education system carried out during the administration of President Carlos Menem in 1993, which placed the responsibility for its implementation on each jurisdiction using its own resources. Having a National Comprehensive Sexuality Education Law represents a significant step forward in terms of rights; however, it is not enough to guarantee them. To ensure that the law is implemented and that children and adolescents can enjoy their right to receive CSE, each jurisdiction must assume political responsibility for its implementation within its territory.

In this proposal, the notion of social discourse put forth by Angenot (2012) is also relevant. He argues that, “[...] there are no social movements, no social practices, no institutions without an accompanying discourse that gives them meaning, legitimizes them, and, if necessary, partially conceals their actual function” (Angenot, 2012, p. 17).

Within the framework of defining social discourse, it is considered to be everything that is narrated and argued, because narration and argumentation are the two main modes of discourse. Reflection on these discourses, on one's own assumptions, is fundamental because we are sexual beings, and these issues affect us as individuals and educators, influencing how we perceive, interpret, and resolve different situations. Therefore, it is not simply a matter of retrieving prior ideas and representations related to comprehensive sexuality education within the initial and ongoing teacher training process, but rather of questioning the thoughts, ideas, visions, perceptions, and conceptions used to interpret the reality in which they participate and co-construct. Through a dialogical process with these actors, their narratives will be explored as socially, historically, and culturally situated discourses (Rivas Flores; Sepúlveda Ruiz, 2009). The way to access the voices of students in the Teacher Training and Bachelor's Degree programs in Early Childhood Education, as well as Early Childhood Education teachers, their university life stories, and their discourses, was through in-depth interviews and written questions such as: What do you think about Sexuality Education? What are your feelings about sexuality as a topic to be addressed? What do you expect from initial and ongoing teacher training in relation to the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Law?. The methodology, based on an exploratory and qualitative study, relied on in-depth interviews conducted randomly, taking into account the availability of the interviewees, in order to question, interpret, and construct meanings to recover the voices of students and teachers. Qualitative methods involve constructing data through the interaction between the researcher and the subjects being studied. This is particularly evident in life narratives, where data emerges from a dialogue between two people: “all interviews are interactive events (...), they are constructed *in situ*, a product of the conversation between the interview participants” (Holstein; Gubrium, 1995). The sample of narratives analyzed here was obtained from a group of informants comprised of 15 first-year students in the Teacher Training and Bachelor's Degree programs in Early Childhood Education at the Faculty

of Humanities of Universidad Nacional del Nordeste (UNNE), Resistencia, Chaco, and 15 Early Childhood Education teachers working in kindergartens in the Province of Chaco, who were in their final year of the Bachelor's Degree articulation program in Early Childhood Education at Universidad Nacional del Chaco Austral (UNCAUS), located in Presidencia Roque Sáenz Peña, Province of Chaco.

2 Educational Policies regarding comprehensive Sexuality Education

The rights of children and adolescents are, first and foremost, human rights. When we speak of human rights, we must consider that they encompass the basic needs of human beings to live with dignity: food, clothing, housing, education, work, and health, initially; and subsequently, freedom of expression, organization, and participation; as well as universality and indivisibility. Indeed, they are not the product of natural development, but rather the product of social relations, a historical construct, recognized in every moment. And speaking of human rights and living with dignity leads us to discuss the construction of our society's values. They are the result of that specific context and the recognition granted to them by a given society. Not everything is written in human rights; just when we thought it was, the right to identity emerged as a result of the struggle of the grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, and even now, much remains to be written regarding economic, social, and cultural rights. To speak of human rights is to speak of values, of respect for human dignity, to question reality, to explore ethical dilemmas, and to seek answers to them. In particular, the discussion of sexuality as a right was framed within the context of feminist struggles, where, with the slogan "the personal is political," a critical examination of everyday relationships was proposed, highlighting gender inequalities. Feminists and dissident groups—with diverse perspectives and approaches—promoted a denaturalized conception of sexuality (Belucci; Rapisardi, 1999); that is, sexuality is constructed, not something given to us by nature.

The enactment of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) law in Argentina (Argentina, 2006, 2010, 2018) is part of a historical context of recognizing problems and formulating solutions in the form of rights. The National Congress approved this law with broad consensus, and since then, its implementation has

occurred through the content taught in classrooms, the approach to everyday problems, and the way educational institutions are organized.

In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo, emphasized the importance and commitment to advancing comprehensive sexuality education in order to guarantee the sexual and reproductive rights of the world's population. CSE is a fundamental tool for achieving some of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically those related to health and well-being, quality education, and gender equality. However, in Latin America, only a handful of countries have specific legislation on CSE: Argentina, Costa Rica, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Uruguay.

While the Intergovernmental Committee on Sexuality Education (IPCS) declared the importance of implementing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) worldwide, in Argentina the national government decentralized education through the Federal Education Law. Although this law established the guidelines for educational policy, it transferred the responsibility for educational systems to the 24 subnational jurisdictions, requiring them to assume the economic burden and generating inequalities among them (salaries, training, infrastructure). This form of organization of the educational system placed the burden of ensuring the implementation of a new program and its corresponding laws on each jurisdiction.

The evidence generated regarding sexuality education indicates positive results for people's health and lives: CSE works. UNESCO reviewed studies on CSE programs worldwide and concluded that the available evidence indicates that CSE does not lead to an increase in sexual activity, risky sexual behavior, or rates of HIV infection or sexually transmitted infections (STIs). On the contrary, people gain greater knowledge about sexuality and rights within a relationship, develop positive attitudes toward sexual and reproductive health and gender equality, and increase their self-efficacy in managing risky situations. Furthermore, countries that implemented CSE reduced teenage pregnancy rates and increased contraceptive use, in contrast to the lack of progress in countries where it was not implemented.

Law 26.150 of Argentina addresses sexuality from a comprehensive perspective. Its declaration, legal foundations, and educational methodology incorporate the approaches of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, the Convention on the Rights

of the Child (CRC), the Comprehensive Protection of the Rights of Girls, Boys, and Adolescents Act (Law No. 26.061), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, and the Gender Identity Act (Law No. 26.743).

Sexuality is an important part of a person's life, as we are sexual beings, and we define many of our projects and dreams around our sexuality. We can live, feel, and express our sexuality in diverse ways, which can even change throughout our lives. For a long time, sexuality has been confused with sex or genitality and sex with sexual relations, so it is important that, at first, as teachers, we clarify and internalize in ourselves the terms related to sexuality.

According to Albert Rams, *“There is not one, but many sexualities,”* one could even say that there are as many sexualities as there are individuals. According to the WHO – World Health Organization – sexuality is:

[...] a central aspect of being human throughout life. It encompasses sex, gender identities and expressions, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, reproduction, and sexual orientation. Sexuality is experienced and expressed through thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles, and interpersonal relationships. Sexuality can include all of these dimensions; however, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious, and spiritual factors (WHO, 2006).

Therefore, when discussing sexuality, we must consider that it has a biological aspect, but also psychological, social, and cultural dimensions, thus expressing the integral characteristics of a person. Human sexuality distinguishes us from other species, as it includes eroticism, the pursuit of pleasure, the need for privacy, and the personal nature of desire, which is expressed in different ways and through various pursuits. Discussing sexuality also involves discussing affections, sensations, emotions, feelings, and meanings. When we speak of comprehensive sexuality education, we are referring not only to specific content or a particular subject, but to a systematic space for teaching and learning that allows individuals acquiring the necessary knowledge for making responsible decisions regarding the rights of children and adolescents, self-care, interpersonal relationships, information, and sexuality; a

space that forms part of the school's community educational project and requires collaborative work with families and various social organizations.

Law 26.150 (Argentina, 2010a) recognizes “[...] the right of children and adolescents to receive comprehensive sexuality education in all schools in the country (Art. 1º),” however, 19 years after its enactment, misconceptions or “myths” about sexuality and the implementation of CSE in schools persist. If misconceptions exist about sexuality or even about the implementation of CSE, it is likely that risky sexual practices will occur, spaces of discrimination and even harassment will be fostered, and problems of devaluation, bullying, harassment, or violence will go unrecognized. Therefore, it is important to provide children, adolescents, and young people with the tools to develop a responsible sexual and reproductive life with autonomy and knowledge. Therefore, in order to support learning processes related to CSE, it is essential to recognize our own perspective on the proposals for its implementation in our daily work as teachers, as well as to expand and complement it, in order to provide our students with the best tools and resources that allow them to develop as whole human beings, without prejudice and capable of making decisions about their own lives.

Likewise, the Law creates the National Comprehensive Sexuality Education Program (NCSEP) with the purpose of coordinating the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of CSE actions in all jurisdictions of the country. Its objectives are: a) To incorporate comprehensive sexuality education into educational proposals aimed at the harmonious, balanced, and ongoing development of individuals; b) To ensure the transmission of relevant, accurate, reliable, and up-to-date knowledge on the various aspects involved in comprehensive sexuality education; c) To promote responsible attitudes toward sexuality; d) To prevent problems related to health in general and sexual and reproductive health in particular; e) To ensure equal treatment and opportunities for men and women (Art. 3, Law 26.150, Argentina, 2006a).

A significant consensus was reached regarding the thematic axes and curricular content of CSE, concluding that it is not only about educating on the use of condoms for disease prevention and methods of contraception, but also takes into account other situations that impact the lives of girls, boys and adolescents today: gender equality, abuse, emotional responsibility and respect for privacy, sexual

orientation, gender identity, consensual sexual initiation, discrimination and harassment in schools.

At the same time, it addresses five conceptual axes that reflect the comprehensiveness of the approach and establishes the priority learning objectives for CSE at each level. For the early childhood level, we can mention some of these: knowing the external parts of the human body, using the correct vocabulary to name the genitals, the processes of gestation and birth, the willingness to give and receive affection, confidence, freedom, and security to express ideas and opinions and ask for help, among others.

Although it establishes that each jurisdiction will implement the program through a set of actions ranging from disseminating its content and designing pedagogical proposals to developing specific materials and monitoring these actions, each educational community will be able to adapt the proposals to its sociocultural reality, within the framework of respect for its institutional values and the convictions of its members. This has generated much debate, raising concerns about its effective implementation, especially in religious educational institutions. The effective implementation of the CSE Law takes place at the local level; therefore, it is important to reflect on our participation and gather information from each of our experiences, however small they may seem.

Thus, in 2018, facing limited progress in its implementation, education officials meeting in the Federal Council approved Resolution 340, which promotes actions aimed at ensuring its implementation, such as: teacher training, specialized team formation, evaluation of CSE knowledge in promotion processes, and training workshops. It was proposed that each jurisdiction have a CSE coordinator and regulations (laws, programs, ministerial resolutions) that adhere to the national law. In addition to the regulations, policies, and programs that ensure the implementation of CSE, another key issue is monitoring and evaluation. A study of good pedagogical practices demonstrates the relevance and positive impact of CSE training for teachers. Since 2018, schools in all provinces and the City of Buenos Aires have been recording the work done on CSE in a form that they report to the National Ministry. The *Aprender* assessment has allowed us to access information that reveals the degree of implementation of the law, not only from the perspective of teaching staff but also from

that of students. *Aprender* is an educational census implemented nationwide since 2016 with the objective of obtaining data and diagnoses in order to implement improvements in the country's education system. Looking at the results of the 2017 assessment report, it is striking that when asked, "Do you think there are topics that the school should address/teach but doesn't?", 70% of 5th and 6th year secondary school students from all five regions of the country answered "yes". And when asked what topics they would like to receive information on, the majority responded "sexuality education," followed by "gender violence and other types of violence."

Each jurisdiction has its own process for adopting and implementing the Law. The province of Chaco immediately adopted Law 26.150 (Argentina, 2006a) on Comprehensive Sexuality Education. In the same year it was enacted, Chaco passed Provincial Law No. 5811 (now 1502-E), which adapts the national guidelines to the local context. However, Article 5 reinforces decentralization by allowing CSE projects to be aligned with the vision of the "educational community." Thus, the Church, NGOs, and other institutions different of schools can propose and promote their own projects. Furthermore, Article 6 stipulates that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology (MECST) will form an *ad hoc* commission composed of specialists and inter-ministerial members, along with representatives from various sectors of society. These sectors include churches, teachers' unions, "ethnic groups", NGOs, and others. While the law is a step forward, it is insufficient since the scientific content is not necessarily mandatory. It's important to note that the province of Chaco, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (NISC), especially the Gran Resistencia metropolitan area, has the highest poverty rates in the country. In the first half of 2024, 76.2% of the population of Gran Resistencia lived below the poverty line. This makes Chaco the province with the highest percentage of people living in poverty in Argentina¹.

3 Working on the comprehensiveness of Sexuality Education in times of conflict

Since the current government of President Javier Milei took office in December 2023, policies contrary to previously acquired rights regarding CSE and gender identity have been promoted. Even in presidential speeches, dissidents are attacked and

¹ Available in: <https://www.indec.gob.ar/>

stigmatized. A clear example of this was during the controversial speech given by the President of Argentina, Javier Milei, at the Davos Forum on January 23, 2025:

These forums promote the LGBT agenda, trying to impose on us the idea that women are men and men are women only if they self-identify as such, while remaining silent about when a man dresses as a woman and kills his opponent in a boxing ring, or when a prisoner claims to be a woman and ends up raping every woman he encounters in prison.

Just a few weeks ago, the case of two gay Americans, waving the flag of sexual diversity, made headlines worldwide. They were sentenced to one hundred years in prison for abusing and filming their adopted children for over two years. I want to be clear that when I say abuse, I'm not using a euphemism, because in its most extreme forms, gender ideology is simply child abuse. They are pedophiles, and therefore, I want to know who condones this behavior.

They are irreversibly damaging healthy children through hormonal treatments and mutilations, as if a child under five could consent to such a thing. And if it happens that their family disagrees, there will always be state agents ready to intervene in favor of what they call the child's best interests. Believe me, the scandalous experiments being carried out today in the name of this criminal ideology will be condemned and compared to those that occurred during the darkest periods of our history. And covering this multitude of abject practices is the eternal victimhood narrative, always ready to fire off accusations of homophobia or transphobia and other fabrications whose sole purpose is to try to silence those who denounce this scandal in which national and international authorities are complicit (Casa Rosada Presidency, on the website²).

These expressions and actions of the presidential figure distort the objectives and content of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Law, generating discrimination and confusion. In line with these policies, the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity (MWGD) and various programs related to CSE have been eliminated, marking a clear regression in human rights.

Similarly, in this context of misinformation and attacks on CSE from current educational policies, we value culturally generated content that enters educational institutions. This content informs about CSE in clear and playful language and is used as a resource to support the processes of deconstruction. As an example, they cite the song "Hay secretos" (There are secrets) by the children's musical group "Canticuénticos," written by Ruth Hillar (Hillar, 2017), which expresses in its verses:

There are tiny secrets
That invite you to play
And there are secrets so enormous
That come to frighten you
There are light secrets

² No page number; available *online*.

That make you fly
And there are secrets so heavy
That leave you breathless
Secrets that hurt shouldn't be kept
Secrets that hurt shouldn't be kept
If words aren't enough
For what needs to be said
Let's invent another language
I'll always listen to you
I'm here
I want to help you, I know you're telling the truth
There's no need to be afraid anymore
Because I'm going to take care of you
Secrets that hurt shouldn't be kept
Secrets that hurt shouldn't be kept
Secrets that hurt shouldn't be kept
Secrets that hurt shouldn't be kept
Secrets that hurt shouldn't be kept
Secrets that hurt shouldn't be kept
Secrets that hurt shouldn't be kept
There's no need to be afraid anymore
Because I'm going to take care of you

(Source: Musixmatch)

This song, which circulated in preschools, kindergartens, schools, teacher training colleges, and the community at large, and which, translated into several languages, transcended borders beyond Argentina due to its rights-based perspective and gender focus, was censored by the National Education Secretariat on the grounds that it originated from “gender ideology” and promoted “indoctrination.” It was also removed from the *Educar* portal (educ.ar) by the government, along with many other contents related to CSE on the National Education Secretariat's website. Among the reasons given were that “the materials are not age-appropriate for the students for whom they are intended, potentially affecting the reception and understanding of the content,” and the use of inclusive language was questioned, along with accusations of “a lack of biological and scientific rigor.” (Digital newspaper, Uno Santa Fe, 2025).

It is worth noting that the protest and opposition from different sectors of society, expressed through the media and social networks, was so widespread that these national organizations quickly republished the songs on the *Educar* portal website. Songs like this, in addition to fostering resistance, raise awareness and promote prevention and education in various aspects related to CSE, from a holistic perspective that promotes learning not only cognitively, but also affectively, and in concrete practices related to life in society. This involves both transmitting relevant and up-to-date information about sexuality and promoting critical thinking about that information, enabling its conscious, autonomous, and responsible application.

For teachers, facing the challenge of addressing CSE in schools during these times of far-right politics, they assume they have the support of the law and, in this sense, express “the importance of being direct and using precise terms” (interview 1³). They also advise adapting the language to each age group to ensure comprehension, adding that “it's difficult, but it's possible to build the trust that girls and boys need to achieve great things.” One teacher, currently enrolled in the articulation program for the Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education, believes that “it's important to bring to light content that remains taboo or is not discussed; that's a major challenge.” (interviewee 2⁴). Morgade's research (2011) in her book, *All Education is Sexual*, explains how schools have historically silenced these topics. The “challenge,” if we're referring to the pedagogies of sexuality, is to move from a model of omission to one of visibility and recognition as a right.

Teachers agree that issues related to sexuality have long been hidden in society, and even more so in schools and teacher training colleges. They acknowledge the existence of taboos and cultural mandates that “limit us and make us feel ashamed of our sexuality. We know that everyone needs the satisfaction of basic needs such as the desire for contact, intimacy, emotional expression, pleasure, and love,” (interview 2) while also admitting that throughout their lives they have been taught to repress and hide these needs. They point out that when there is a different sexual orientation, those individuals are judged, and sometimes even discriminated because of it. There has been progress on this issue, but we still have a long way to go, especially within the framework of the current Argentine government's policies, which, as in so many other areas, have seen setbacks with a significant negative impact, such as the closure of the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity and the National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism), which was dissolved by Decree No. 696/2024 of the National Executive Branch, published in the official gazette on August 6, 2024. They vehemently express that greater responsibility is required, from the teaching profession and educational management, to address the gender perspective,

³ Interview conducted on June 5, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

⁴ Interview conducted on June 13, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina

reject violence and stigmatization, foster reflection and critical thinking based on respect, and ensure the fulfillment of the rights of every individual.

Another teacher adds: "...at the preschool level, as you rightly say, we introduce children to the parts of their bodies, and we often help them name things they don't know." (interview 3)⁵ Similarly, another teacher pursuing a transitional education program appreciates that, since beginning her teacher training in 2017, she "gained a thorough understanding of the arguments behind the CSE law." (interview 4)⁶. She emphasizes that "this was what I needed to reaffirm my stance on the purposes of this law, which I had previously only understood in a very general, personal way." The importance of ongoing teacher training is highlighted, as it is academic training that allows teachers to separate their religious or moral beliefs, "their stance," from their role as guarantors of rights, based on Law 26.150. Discussing comprehensive sexuality means integrating biological, psychological, social, emotional, and ethical aspects. The content developed must be adapted to each age and developmental stage of the individual. These are presented in the curriculum guidelines approved by the Federal Council of Education. In the case of early childhood education, through the core learning objectives for each level, appropriate scientific information is provided, promoting habits of body care, recognition of one's own and others' privacy, expression of affection and respect for the feelings and needs of others, development of psychosocial skills and competencies, and the development of self-protective behaviors.

They emphasize the importance of CSE in the early years and the fundamental role of teachers in preschools and kindergartens "in the holistic education of children, and part of that education includes understanding their own identity, respecting others, and developing healthy relationships." (interview 5)⁷. The teachers agree that comprehensive sexuality education "is of utmost importance." As one teacher put it, "it allows us to work on topics such as the body, its differences, and its care precisely at this stage where children are curious about their own bodies and those of their peers" (interview 6)⁸. They express that children begin to be aware of the differences between their bodies and those of their peers [...] by working on care and respect, it is also

⁵ Interview conducted on June 13, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

⁶ Interview conducted on June 13, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina

⁷ Interview conducted on July 2, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

⁸ Interview conducted on June 13, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

preventative against situations that could harm children's well-being" (Valentina Escalante, interview on July 2, 2024). We consider CSE to be an important tool for preventing child sexual abuse. Several studies confirm that children who receive CSE content (intimacy, "good" vs. "bad" secrets, bodily autonomy) have greater assertiveness skills in communicating situations of risk or vulnerability.

They also warn that, since family members are the first educators, it is necessary to work on the content of CSE together with families, who sometimes have little or distorted information. While the State must guarantee rights, the family-school relationship in CSE is key to acting as a space for information and communication about the content and objectives of the law, and to transform "resistance" into collaboration.

The school, as an alternative space to the family environment, is where children begin secondary socialization from the Early Childhood level. In this process, transference is the affective bond established between individuals in the educational setting. This particular way of bonding affectively with another person sustains and allows the relationship, based on identification with the teacher through love, to become a bond of trust through which knowledge is constructed. This trust will either allow or prevent the individual from reinterpreting what is presented as new and appealing based on their own history. In this sense, reality and knowledge are constructed during childhood; early relationships determine the construction of reality that the infant will establish with others. Intersubjective relationships among its members are the origin of the meaning and pleasure that the subject rediscovers in their representational activity, governs the fundamental processes of psychic development, the organization of emotions according to types conditioned by the environment it constitutes, [...] establishes a psychic continuity between generations whose causality is of a mental order (Lacan, 1938, p. 35).

We asked them, "What do you expect from initial and ongoing teacher training in relation to the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Law?" Here, the school environment takes on meaning as a space for realizing rights. Therefore, in the words of one teacher,

[...] training in new strategies for addressing *such important topics* at the early childhood level, how to handle cases of vulnerability, how to help our students,

and also to learn more about CSE, to know if there are new regulations or content to cover (interview 7)⁹.

Education, with its political and social functions, and particularly CSE, means that we not only transmit content but also educate subjects of rights. Both students and teachers value the opportunities for initial and ongoing training in seminars that address Human Rights and CSE. In this regard, one teacher stated: "I wasn't aware that sexuality is present in everything we do, feel, and experience. Training opportunities to work on this curriculum content are essential" (interview 8)¹⁰.

At the same time, they mention the need to delve deeper into the gender perspective in order to have solid tools and arguments to work as much as possible, whether in the classroom or in working and personal relationships; to redefine values such as respect, tolerance, and solidarity with others in everyday life. They also add that training on the subject is essential, given the challenge of working with families and the community in general, due to the prejudices and misinformation regarding CSE mentioned earlier, which generates strong resistance that sometimes leads to violent situations, often leaving them in a position of defenselessness. In short, the cross-cutting nature of CSE throughout all aspects of institutional life is becoming increasingly necessary.

They raise a clear demand regarding knowledge of protocols against all types of child abuse, networking with other institutions, and the need for professionals to handle potential reports of child abuse or situations involving families. "There has always been resistance, but today, given the government's xenophobic rhetoric, it is difficult to address these issues due to the Ministry's guidelines and the resistance of some principals and colleagues; not all of them are willing to speak out" (interview 9)¹¹. They state that there is a gap in legal training, given the complexities and social, political, and economic conflicts that, as has historically occurred, resonate strongly within educational institutions.

From different levels of education, they agree that it is necessary to delve deeper into the, often erroneous, conceptions surrounding the idea that CSE (Argentina, 2010) is limited to genital sexual health. We consider the debate on the

⁹ Interview conducted on June 5, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

¹⁰ Interview conducted on June 7, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

¹¹ Interview conducted on June 12, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

notion that we are sexual beings to be fundamental, and that this is not an initial biological fact, but a historical, social, and cultural construct. An individual is constituted as a sexual subject in a process that begins at birth, within the indispensable bonds that sustain him and provide him with much more than satisfaction of vital subsistence needs (Morgade, 2011).

They consider it vitally important to give the Law the attention, development, and treatment that deserves, which establishes as paramount the State's responsibility to uphold the inalienable right of children and adolescents to receive CSE in all educational institutions, and to comply with the Curriculum Guidelines, which on page 9 mentions participation and access to information. In this regard, they highlight the existence of a regulatory framework with Resolution 340/18 of the Federal Council of Education (FCE), which reaffirms the mandatory nature of Comprehensive Sexuality Education at all educational levels, CSE as a right of all children and adolescents.

However, the gap between the formulation of a right—its formal expression in current legislation—and its effective fulfillment is an issue that involves both the State and civil society. In this regard, Faur (2005) states, "...societies with full democracy are increasingly opening up more and better spaces for the participation of their citizens, starting from a young age...the more children and adolescents participate in building their society, the stronger democracy becomes." Hence the importance of understanding and reflecting on the conceptions and practices of teachers who have the responsibility of guaranteeing the right to CSE.

4 Comprehensive sexuality education at the university level: not mandatory, but so necessary

The absence or presence of a gender and human rights perspective in initial teacher training hinders opportunities for systematic and critical review of patriarchal biases in future practice, based on one's own educational experiences, in order to build a pedagogy of emancipation. It is worth mentioning, as Rebeca Anijovich states, that the training process begins long before entering university; she defines it as:

[...] a process that begins long before entering the training institution and in which different moments or stages of impact can be identified, such as the school biography, which is the product of complex internalizations made in the student's life, the stage of formal institutionalized preparation of teacher

training, professional socialization and continuous teacher training. (2009 p. 28).

Therefore, it is essential to work with students' narratives to deconstruct stereotypes, myths, and prejudices related to their school experiences and linked to internalized teacher and student's models. It is necessary to analyze and reflect on one's own biography, both in the encounter with oneself and with others, in order to build alternative educational approaches outside of hegemonic patriarchal traditions and discourses.

In this sense, when asked what they think about sex education, they mention that "it is a topic that produces many conflicts within families"; "it generates rejection in people, because they are misinformed, thinking that it is only about sexual reproduction"; "it is a very delicate topic to address"; and "there are many taboos related to sexuality and comprehensive sex education; it is reduced to the sexual aspect"(student interview 1)¹². Another student comments: "There are things that shouldn't be talked about because of 'shame, fear, respect,' and today they must be made visible because they are part of our being as something natural (...) in my case, I became a mother at 15" (student interview 2)¹³. Referring to the secondary level, she states that it is necessary to rethink what she believed some time ago about what comprehensive sex education was; there was a misconception that it was reduced solely to contraceptive methods."

In particular, students who have completed their internship in Nursery and Kindergartens express that there are teachers who approach pedagogical activity from a rights-based perspective with a gender focus. They highlight situations such as diaper changing, where a caring bond is created through verbal and gestural communication, with the teacher putting into words what she is doing. They also mention feeding times, with eye contact between the baby and the teacher, saying, "She picks him up and they look at each other while he drinks from the bottle, the teacher talks to him," (student interview 3)¹⁴. "The teacher tells him what he is going to eat, asks him if he likes it, while she feeds him." In other classrooms with older children, when organizing themselves to leave or enter the room, they do so by

¹² Interview conducted on May 14, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

¹³ Interview conducted on May 14, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

¹⁴ Interview conducted on May 14, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

walking, without differentiating the traditional line of girls and boys, which allows them to interact with each other and choose who to be near to. They also highlight the integration into different games and activities without discrimination based on gender stereotypes, naturally distributing roles and functions, as well as sharing games, toys, and other materials. Some student groups, who completed their internship in public kindergartens with 3, 4, and 5-year-old classrooms, mentioned that they participated in informative workshops on Comprehensive Sexuality Education with the involvement of families, where the children presented and shared their work on the topic.

In contrast, other groups of students witnessed opposite situations, stating that "in most kindergartens there are still very strong gender stereotypes, and CSE is not taught" (student interview 4)¹⁵. They observed this through the colors, pink (girls) and light blue (boys), used to organize groups of girls and boys, the formation of lines of girls and boys at the beginning or ending of the day, among other examples. This also applies to the organization of different areas or sections of the classroom, such as the "home" or "house" area, which includes costumes and other objects that, according to social norms, are considered feminine; while the construction area is designated for masculine use. This is often accompanied by interventions from teachers or even the children themselves, who sometimes dictate who goes to which area with phrases like, "This is for girls, you go with the boys," (student interview 4) "We girls are here, you have to play over there," (student interview 5)¹⁶ pointing to the construction area, or "There are girls' things here" (student interview 6)¹⁷. It also happens that boys sometimes laugh when they see a male classmate enter the "home" area. They are occasionally accepted when they join in the games, playing the role of "babies" or "sons." It is also observed that some teachers restrict the games and toys if their suggestions or interventions are sexist. What kind of toys do the boys and girls choose? Do boys prefer playing with cars, building blocks, and toys related to action and adventure, while girls opt for dolls, toy kitchen, and toys related to caregiving and the home? Or are these choices simply a response to the ways adults interact with them? These preferences are strongly linked to patriarchal notions, which define roles

¹⁵ Interview conducted on May 8, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

¹⁶ Interview conducted on May 8, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

¹⁷ Interview conducted on May 8, 2024 in the city of Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina.

and functions for women and men from a hegemonic perspective. Based on expression of teachers in charge of classrooms, many state that they prefer not to address the topic for fear of misunderstandings with families, or due to shame or embarrassment. Sexuality is rarely discussed; there are exceptions.

Given this information gathered by students, we must ask ourselves: how sufficient is the training process, and how adequate is it from the gender perspective? We might also consider that the strength of established practices in some preschools and kindergartens, as well as in institutions at other levels—that is, what has been consolidated throughout history and is experienced as institutionally established—makes the challenge of transformation complex. Like any process of profound change, it generates uncertainty, fear, and resistance. Another issue to reflect on is how deeply ingrained school and personal histories are when these events are examined. How much opportunity for denaturalization and deconstruction exists for some teachers during their training? It is worth recalling here what a teacher said in the previous section when she highlighted the Comprehensive Sex Education Law as "a support."

It is necessary to consider the fact that CSE Law, as already mentioned, explicitly states the obligation in the Initial, Primary and Secondary levels of the Educational System, but does not refer to the implementation in the Higher Education level in Argentina. However, from Higher Education Institutes and public Universities, there is an effort to incorporate and work from the perspective of human rights with a gender focus in most curricular spaces in a transversal manner from the first to the last level of study, as well as in continuing education.

In particular, the Universidad Nacional del Nordeste (UNNE) declared itself a violence-free institution in 2016 (Resolution 823/16 CS), within the framework of international instruments and national law. In doing so, it assumed social responsibility to promote the necessary actions for an institutional life free from discrimination and violence. This entailed advancing the approach to gender-based violence, and not just through isolated actions. In 2018, this process led to the approval by the Higher Council of the "Institutional Protocol for Situations of Discrimination and Violence Based on Gender or Sexual Orientation" (Resolution 1098/18 CS), which became a tool for channeling and supporting complaints from women and gender-diverse individuals. Then, in 2022, the Directorate of Gender and Sexual Diversity Policies was created to prioritize the mainstreaming of a sustained gender policy and to implement substantive

actions across the various functions of the university—teaching, researching, and community outreaching—as well as to comprehensively address urgent situations of this nature throughout the university community.

In this regard, in 2024, UNNE approved the new Ordinance for Teaching Staff of the National University of the Northeast (UNNE) through Resolution No. 832/2024 - CS – UNNE -. Among the obligations mentioned in Article 29, item 16, it is established as a requirement for applying for positions or for evaluations within the teaching career the completion of “the mandatory training provided for by law, or any other training related to gender studies.” It should be noted that in 2018, Congress passed Law No. 27,499, the Micaela Law, which mandates training on gender issues and violence against women for all public employees at all levels and ranks within the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. This law is named after Micaela García, a young woman who was a victim of femicide in 2017, and aims to promote equality and prevent gender-based violence.

Furthermore, we must mention that the first institutional precedent at UNNE regarding the implementation of gender policies was the creation in 2011 of the Interdisciplinary Center for Gender Studies (ICGS) within the Faculty of Humanities (FH), a pioneering initiative in gender policies at our university. ICGS is an academic space with a dynamic, open, and pluralistic organization, which initial objective was to promote a non-androcentric science that would allow for greater development of equality between women and men. In 2018, this same academic unit created the first instrument specifically designed to address violence based on gender and sexual diversity at UNNE (Resolution 109/18 HCDFH), the precursor to the UNNE protocol. In 2022, the UNNE created the Diverse Humanities Program (Resolution No. 968/22 – CDFH), with various lines of action, including “creating institutional conditions so that FH is a genuine experience in the exercise of human rights (...) and guarantee the inclusion of people with disabilities, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals.”

Through other formats, the University develops specific training programs within academic projects for students as a complement to their coursework, and outreach projects with the participation of different sectors of the community. Each activity is coordinated by university teachers and, occasionally, by invited specialists from both academia and other community groups. Experiential workshops are

conducted with the aim of creating spaces where participants can share their thoughts and feelings regarding the implications of CSE both in their own training trajectory and in their future professional performance. One of the workshops was: “CSE from a Rights Perspective,” which was held with first year students in the Teacher Training and Bachelor's Degree programs in Early Childhood Education in March 2024. We are convinced that it is necessary to work on our own experiences and biographies to advance in the deconstruction of myths and stereotypes in order to achieve a teacher training from a professional approach with a rights-based focus.

Furthermore, regarding Continuing Teacher Training, there are specific Extension Diploma programs that address the topic and are designed for professionals in education, health, law, public safety, and members of social organizations and movements. At the Postgraduate level, there are Specialization Programs for professionals in education, health, and law. These continuing education opportunities have had a significant impact in the region, both in terms of the number and diversity of professional profiles and the diverse work experiences of those who participated in the various programs.

The students value the human rights training they received during their educational journey. Having completed their studies, they express that they found arguments and strategies to address the issue from the perspective of guaranteeing respect for the right of all individuals to be educated, ensuring the effective implementation of the curriculum's content, including CSE. Those who participate in continuing education programs from different professions and work environments perceive the University as an alternative for growth, expansion and deepening of knowledge, where they are welcomed and listened to within a community where a sense of belonging is built, in which it is possible to share knowledge, doubts, certainties, uncertainties, and anxieties. This is not insignificant, both because of the topic being addressed and because of the political situation our society is experiencing in this period of regression of rights, as we have already explained.

In the face of an increasingly violent and unequal world, a human rights-based educational approach with a gender focus, and a holistic educational perspective for all students, requires collaborative work among teaching teams across different subjects and non-teaching staff. This collaborative learning process takes place within institutional and local contexts. The educational approach aims to build capacity to

develop support strategies that enable individuals to successfully navigate their educational paths within the institution, across all teams, and in the various communities of the region.

5 Conclusion

From the interviews, we were able to recognize that taboos surrounding sexuality persist among both teachers and families. Therefore, various spaces for training and discussion, such as workshops, talks, and informational meetings, remain essential. These spaces are developed within educational institutions through specific institutional events and also involve families. Furthermore, they must be sustained over time, as not only are there changes in the number of participants attending the institutions, but also due to shifts in scientific content, debates among different members of the educational community, and, currently, in particular, the erosion of rights through policies. In this context, we believe that issues related to gender stereotypes, which are still deeply ingrained in early childhood education institutions, have been strongly expressed. This necessitates a more comprehensive approach within a process of deconstructing these stereotypes.

While both students and teachers value CSE and a human right perspective in initial and ongoing teacher training, they make it clear that, while necessary, it is not sufficient. Based on these narratives, a demand emerges for a deeper exploration of the topic and the development of training programs focused on how teachers can manage problematic situations involving human right violations within the framework of CSE. This need is heightened by the onslaught of regressive far-right policies that delegitimize and dismantle ministries and programs that, despite the need for some reforms, strongly supported the process of consolidating rights.

Regarding teacher training and continuing education, they express a need for more in-depth training and content coverage, particularly concerning protocols to follow in situations of violence or abuse, and training in networking to provide tools for managing problematic situations. There is a perceived sense of vulnerability among teachers when faced with questions from the community, families, and sometimes even from within the education system and the institution itself, regarding the full implementation of CSE. The current curriculum for Early Childhood Education Teacher

Training and Bachelor's Degree programs, in effect since 2001, addresses the perspective of human rights and children's rights, but in most cases not from a gender perspective, nor does it incorporate CSE. However, over the years, the proposals of most course syllabi have incorporated specific content related to these topics in a cross-cutting manner, in accordance with current regulations. Furthermore, spaces for continuing professional development related to these issues have been developed, responding to demands, primarily from other government bodies.

On the other hand, it remains a challenge, within the framework of curriculum review, to incorporate these perspectives and content in order to strengthen the training of future education professionals, ensuring training based on gender equity, respect for diversity, valuing emotional well-being, and caring for the body and health. The responsibility and ethical commitment to provide relevant, accurate, reliable, and up-to-date knowledge to foster responsible and supportive behavior towards others will allow us to inhabit educational institutions where the rights of boys and girls are equally respected, free from gender stereotypes that promote inequalities; to live without violence; to freely experience sexuality without discrimination based on gender and/or sexual orientation; to express emotions and feelings; to say no to peer or adult pressure; and to have responsible adults who can support and guide them in situations of mistreatment or abuse. It is urgent to address these issues to consolidate our position from these perspectives and advance the effective exercise of children's rights, contributing to the necessary changes that improve access for the entire population to resources that enable a dignified life. Likewise, it is crucial to effectively transform CSE into a tool for promoting holistic health.

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