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CURRICULUM REFORM AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

Written by Museo de la Memoria de Rosario

Title: Case Study – Argentina

Section 1: Introduction and Background

The research into this case study was conducted based on a variety of sources, including: bibliographic material belonging to the collection of the “Raúl Frutos” Library from the Collective Memory Museum; newspaper articles; official documents; work in conjunction with human rights bodies; the internal experience acquired during 20 years of work; semi-structured interviews with teachers from the different levels of the formal education system and external agents such as social communicators, investigators specialized in recent history, trade unions representing teachers from public and private schools; members of memorial sites and spaces in our country, official educational agencies, consultations to official websites of the national and provincial government and of memorial sites; and internal training sessions, such as the “Research and teaching the recent past” virtual course. Strategies for teaching and the educational approach”, in which teachers, student teachers and students in various humanistic careers participate, along with face-to-face teaching training sessions aimed at the same segment of the educational population as mentioned above.

In addition to elementary and secondary students, each year, we at the Department of Education receive university and tertiary career students (education sciences, teachers of language and literature, history, educational communication, English, physics, degrees in tourism). This training mechanism allows us see at which point of their different levels of training the students address or do not address the topic of our recent history. Each year, we incorporate different materials for these training sessions based on the search for new sources of theoretical content from different disciplines, such as artistic language provided to us through contemporary art. On the other hand, the students’ points of view and the meaning they derive from this subject, through both their realities and from our present times, encourage us to continue investigating how the teaching of collective memory in our country’s formal education system is carried out at different levels and educational modalities.

National history: last civic military dictatorship in Argentina, which lasted from March 24, 1976 to December 10, 1983. On that date, the military junta carried out the coup d’état, overthrowing the constitutional government of María Estela Martínez de Perón¹, who had been left in charge of the presidency upon the death of General Perón, and she was the vice president. But the repression had already begun of social activist groups, politicians, unions, young participants in groups of secondary and university students, nearby social activists in religious groups like the Priests’ Movement for the Third World, and armed groups that were part of political organizations that demanded an armed struggle (like the Montoneros organization or the Revolutionary Army of the

¹ Vice President elected in September 1973. She assumed the position of president in July of the year following the death of Juan Domingo Perón, her husband and President of the Nation.



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People). They were already repressed and practically decimated before the dictatorship, mainly by the actions of the so-called Triple A (Argentine Anti-communist Alliance), who pursued anyone fighting from different sectors to implement a transformative model that would imply the equality of the different classes that make up society, both on an economic, social and political level. The international context of the Cold War and the climate of protest at the time were decisive for the fight to achieve this objective.

Although the focus of the repression was placed on those who participated in these instances of mobilization in different ways, people linked to them were also affected by their ties to the activism (partners, family members, friends, close friends, colleagues), including people who provided support or assistance to the detainees and their family members (lawyers, religious ministers, etc.). There were also incidental victims, as well.

The people arrested and disappeared suffered different forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence. In addition to torture, they had to withstand conditions of overcrowding, lack of hygiene and medical care and were even subjected to providing different services for their captors. They had to bear uncertainty about their fates, the eventuality of the “transfers” that could involve death, the legalization of their detention or even, in very exceptional cases, freedom.

Once the de facto government was illegitimately installed in power, the repression of the “internal enemy”², the local iteration of international communism, was planned systematically through the kidnapping, disappearances, death and detention in clandestine centers of all those considered “subversive”, under what is called state terrorism. That expression implies the illegitimate use of the legitimate means available to the State for the exercise of force, but making a mass and systematic use of that violence against its own citizens by collectively violating the rights of individuals and the guarantees that protect them through law. This spread a generalized feeling of fear anchored in helplessness against abuses of State power.

Through a neo-liberal economic plan based on a clear hegemony of the proprietary classes and fragmentation of the subordinate classes, private debt was nationalized, so-called external debt was initiated by requesting loans from the IMF with interests that were impossible to pay, the country was deindustrialized by provoking unemployment rates never seen, all product of an economic model based on the agro-exports and the financial sector.

During these years, the status quo was being besieged, censorship, all political parties and unions were prohibited, universities were intervened, the Congress was closed, governors, intendents and judges were removed in the name of the so-called National Security Doctrine promoted by the foreign policy of the United States, aimed at using the armed forces of Latin American countries to guarantee the internal order in the context of the Cold War.

The dictatorship left a balance of 30,000 people disappeared and murdered (mostly poor workers, who represented 30% of the total), 500 children of disappeared persons appropriated by the military that are still being sought, thousands of exiles, and the rupture of social ties.

In the first years of democracy, the so-called “Theory of the Two Devils” prevailed, which maintained that there were two armed factions, both of which were governed with different ranks

² Expression that encompasses all types of dissent toward the current political and economic regime.



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of authority. Both of them committed excesses, both the military sector and the armed political organizations, as in any war, with this one specifically called the “dirty war”. This implied innocent victims and in both sectors, there were subordinates who had to follow orders from their superiors (mandate of due obedience). Society supported the actions of the Armed Forces, for them to once again come to bring peace to the country in the context of political violence that had been unleashed.

This narrative did not contemplate the complicity with the coup d’état of certain sectors of civil society, including ecclesiastical leader, the media, political parties and unions, of society’s silence driven by state terror. There was no deep reflection on the conditions from the last civil-military dictatorship. The main objective was Never Again, the exemplary concept about collective memory driving people to “remember in order to not repeat”.

This situation was reflected in the educational field, where the period was addressed through the Report of the National Commission for the Disappearance of Persons (*Comisión Nacional por la Desaparición de Personas*, CONADEP), whose report was published in the book *Never Again*, whose first edition dates back to 1984. It includes literal representations of what happened during this period of State terrorism and featured a reflection and analysis of what happened. The figure of the disappeared detainee or the survivor was approached from a depoliticized point of view, even when the crude testimonies of former detainees began to be heard during the Trial of the Juntas as soon as the return to democracy began in 1985. Then began the stage of searching for national reconciliation and peace, forgiveness and forgetting, to build a forward-facing society. Following this line, the topic was addressed at the different educational levels in Argentina, without a deep analysis of the causes and fundamental consequences of a past that had not stopped, when any teacher committed to the topic was willing to address it.

In 1998, the government of Carlos Menem issued a Decree of Necessity and Urgency establishing that on March 24 of each year, all educational areas and dependencies would dedicate themselves to critically analyzing the coup d’état of March 24, 1976, and it was to remind victims of both the irrational violence unleashed by armed groups and illegal repression. Such a provision, the product of the narrative of “reconciliation and pacification” shows, in any case, ambivalence between a critical analysis of the last dictatorship and the recognition of “errors” of both sides.

Oral teaching was the main educational resource when addressing these topics in the educational field in this period. Teachers interested in the topic invited mothers, grandmothers, recovered grandchildren, survivors, former political prisoners and family members of disappeared persons to give testimonies to students about their lives, their fights, searches, and resistance. Little by little literary stories, testimonials, works of fiction, essays, journalistic publications, films and theater works began to emerge, which give rise to the so-called “memory boom”. These are being transferred to the classrooms as educational tools for addressing recent history.

In Argentina, fundamentally from the different human rights bodies, there is no mention of reconciliation, rather the healing of the social ties that the dictatorship cut. Even so, as already mentioned, various government attempts have emerged for people to leave the past behind, forget and look ahead in the name of national peace. At the same time, those responsible for crimes against humanity never showed regret for their actions, even when they were judged through lawsuits. On the contrary, they justified their actions by protecting themselves in the conception of dirty war in which “excesses” were committed. Therefore, the agencies maintain



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“No forgetting, nor forgiveness. We don’t reconcile, we don’t forgive.” Through the peaceful search for justice, the trials went forward of the repressors who acted under the action of State terrorism. Those who had committed possible illegal actions could not be subject to this trial, since the State managed by military power proceeded to kidnap, disappear, murder and steal children through systematic, clandestine and illegal actions.

This path of rebuilding the social bonds that the dictatorship destroyed, causing the common citizen to think that if someone disappeared, “they must have done something” or “don’t get into involved and nothing will happen to you”, began to be built with the first constitutional government of Raúl Alfonsín after the return to democracy. It convened a group of notable persons to form a National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), whose results were published in the “Never Again” Report and encouraged the Trial of the Military Juntas.

These events led to citizens beginning to understand the dimensions of what the dictatorship had caused and its disastrous consequences that affected society as a whole.

Although there were certain government periods in which decisions were made in that regard on behalf of reconciliation (during the government of Raúl Alfonsín, when faced with different pressures from the Armed Forces, the Final Point Laws and Due Obedience Laws were enacted. In the 1990s, President Carlos Menem proclaimed pardons to those responsible for crimes against humanity and members of armed political organizations, with the clear intention of leaving the past behind, look forward), resistance from the different human rights organizations did not stop.

When Néstor Kirchner assumed the presidency in 2003, he began a public policy on the subject of collective memory and human rights. Thus, the State assumed its role from different fields: from the field of justice, pardons were declared unconstitutional and the so-called laws of impunity were repealed. This opened the way for the proceedings to be resumed for repressors, giving way to the restoration of social ties through the Memory, Truth and Justice processes. From a symbolic and effective point of view, buildings occupied by the armed forces during the dictatorship were expropriated to convert them into memorial spaces and sites. The portraits of the dictators who acted during the dictatorship that remained in the Military College were removed. The State issued an apology for the crimes committed against its own citizens. The Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo were declared the “Mothers of all Argentines”. In the educational field, certain laws were enacted to allow for the formal education of recent history in the classrooms.

The reconstruction of the recent past in Argentina, with its advances, setbacks, forgetting, silence and denialism, through the struggles for collective memory, its oral stories and academic research, show us that such reconstruction is permanent if we take into account that if something happens in the past, it affects our today.

Section 2: Reforms and innovations

Within the framework of the public collective memory policies, various laws and decrees were enacted to promote the education of recent history in a mandatory manner in the field of formal education governed by the national and provincial ministries of education. Starting with the management that the national government initiated in 2003, it was accepted that education would play a fundamental role in the teaching of that recent past, with the mandate to not forget so it will not repeat itself. Educational institutions, at all levels and in all modalities, was supposed to begin to accept that commitment in a systematized manner. Addressing the subject of state terrorism would no longer depend on the individual or isolated will or commitment of a teacher.



This subject became part of the compulsory school curriculum from a state mandate. This happened through a legal framework and a long road that began prior to the aforementioned period:

*Recent Argentinean history entered school curriculums, officially and nationally, with the approval of Federal Education Law No. 24195 of 1993. Before this, it had been incorporated into certain provisions on school commemorations, in certain teaching practices and, above all, in the Civic Education courses, which studied the multiple coups d'état. The Federal Law stipulated an educational policy that sought: "the consolidation of Democracy in its Representative, Republican and Federal form."³

*In 2002, during Eduardo Duhalde's presidency, Congress approved Law No. 25633, which established March 24 as "National Day of Memory for Truth and Justice in commemoration of those who were victims of the process initiated on that date in 1976."⁴

It also ordered the Federal Education Council and the educational authorities of the different jurisdictions to include this date in the school calendars to carry out remembrance days that: "consolidate the collective memory of society, generate feelings contrary to all kinds of authoritarianism and encourage the permanent defense of the rule of Law and the full validity of human rights"⁵, but without giving it the category of holiday.

*In 2004, and as a result of the unequal implementation of the Federal Law, the National Ministry of Education began a new process of defining the curriculum at the national level. To do this, it identified a set of "Priority Learning Cores" (*Núcleos de Aprendizajes Prioritarios*, NAP) to homogenize content for different educational levels. In the area of Social Sciences, the following was stipulated as necessary: "Understanding the multiple causes that led to a stage of political instability in Argentina in the period of 1955-1976, identifying the various actors and interests at stake. Knowledge of the characteristics of State terrorism implemented in Argentina by the 1976-1983 military dictatorship and its relationship with the Cold War and the application of a neoliberal economic and social model."⁶ In addition, this law, in its Article 92, provided curricular content common to all jurisdictions: "The exercise and construction of the collective memory of the historical and political processes that broke the constitutional order and established State terrorism, in order to generate democratic reflections in the students and a desire to defend the rule of law and the full validity of human rights, in accordance with the provisions of Law 25633."⁷

*On March 15, 2006, the Congress of the Nation approved Law No. 26,085, which established March 24 as the National Day for Memory, Truth and Justice, as an unchangeable holiday in the calendar. This was done during the presidency of Néstor Kirchner within the framework of the 30th anniversary of the coup d'état. Kirchner did not establish collective memory policies willy nilly, but rather with a clear endpoint. Wide sectors of society viewed the implementation of March 24 as a non-working day and national holiday favorably, as part of collective memory policies and as an opportunity to stop, think and reflect—both from the education fields and

³ Fragment of Law No. 24195

⁴ Fragment of Law No. 25633

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Article "History and memory of the recent past in school: a look at the official proposal" María Paula González

⁷ Ibid.



professional environment—on what happened on that date to have everybody not go to school or work, and for it to not go unnoticed.

The foundation of March 24 as a date incorporated into the school calendar was presented in order to condemn any usurpation of the powers legitimately granted by the Constitution, placing an emphasis on deep knowledge of the provisions of Article 22 of the National Constitution. Promote attitudes of coexistence in the educational community, characterized by respect for freedom and tolerance—the fundamental pillars of a plural society—with clear popular roots and strong democratic content. Consolidate the collective memory of society, generate feelings contrary to all kinds of authoritarianism and encourage the permanent defense of the rule of Law and the full validity of human rights.

*In 2017, President Mauricio Macri issued a Decree of Need and Urgency, establishing the movement of the holiday, but eleven days later he revoked it through another DNU, due to the rejection from human rights bodies, political sectors and complaints from a large part of the citizenry.

*Education Law No. 26206, approved in 2006, states that “the topic of collective memory must be configured as mandatory curricular content. Its specific provisions, Article 92, especially paragraphs “b” and “c”, establishes as curricular content: the historical processes that led to the establishment of State terrorism, the case of the Falkland Islands and human rights.”⁸ Within this regulatory framework, teachers establish the content to teach and how to do it. In this regard, it can be noted that while the Federal Law of 1993 emphasized that education should favor the “consolidation of democracy,” the National Law of 2006 not only supports this function, but adds another: “the exercise and construction of collective memory”⁹ on the recent past.

It should be noted that the inclusion of this content in teaching programs did not correspond as much to advances in academic history as it did to contributions from other social sciences such as sociology, political sciences and economic history, along with non-academic representations in cinema, theater, literature and journalism. Another influence was the claim from human rights agencies for a process of memory, truth and justice.

It can be seen that as the topic of human rights violations by military dictators began to be more widely addressed, the concepts referred to as problematic became more complex. At the beginning, for example, the last dictatorship was mentioned as a process of national reorganization (a name that the military themselves granted to the *de facto* government) and after 2005 it became categorized as state terrorism.

*This state decision from the Provincial Ministries of Education established the actions that educational institutions would have to carry out, such as, for example, school acts. In the province of Santa Fe, in 2007, the Ministry of Education established that the acts were carried out under Form III (Consolidated Education Decree No. 4720/61), which established the orientation that the act must have. In this regard, “Articles 55 and 56 establish the purposes, goals and general characteristics of the acts, emphasizing the link they must have with daily classes (an extension

⁸ Fragment of Law No. 26206

⁹ Ibid.



thereof) in their formative nature.”¹⁰ Thus, the commemoration of March 24 in school space has the same rank as Independence Day.

*September 16 “Day of the Rights of Secondary Students” in commemoration of “The Night of Pencils,” a name that the military gave to the operation through which the kidnapping and disappearance of secondary students was carried out. It was thus established in the school calendar through Law No. 10,671 in 1988, with amendments introduced by Law No. 12030 in 1998. The main objective of this statement is to promote reflection on the topic of “Democracy and human rights” and to promote memorial activities in all establishments of the education system.

*On September 16, “Youth Day” was declared in 2006 by President Néstor Kirchner, with the objective of “defending the militancy and commitment of the young people who were disappeared by the last Argentine civic-military dictatorship.” Finally, Law No. 27 enacted Youth Day in 2014, which provided: “Let September 16 of each year be celebrated as National Youth Day in commemoration of the so-called Night of the Pencils”, in Article 1. In its article 2, the regulations state that “the Ministry of Education of the Nation, within the framework of the Federal Council of Education, shall incorporate the aforementioned date in the school calendar and implement activities aimed at disseminating the knowledge and meaning of the commemoration among students”.¹¹ (9)

We agree with Silvia Serra and Diego Gurvich, in this regard, when they argue that “Assuming such a mandate faces teachers with other decisions: what to teach and how to do it. How do they incorporate the commemoration of a painful period in our history in their teaching? How do they abide by this mandate with the complex configuration of teaching identities that mirrors Argentine society? How do they weigh decisions on commemoration that they approved for schools with the way adolescents and young have come to understand that period through other cultural teaching, other languages and esthetics?” [...] Although it can be said that “school is at the center of teaching the recent past, (...) what this data shows is that the school has occupied a central place in teaching the recent past. This fact is not insignificant, given that on many occasions the school is accused of not putting the necessary mechanisms into place to allot time and space within classrooms to reflect on the last dictatorship. Obviously, recognizing that the school is an important “source” of the information for young people about the dictatorship does not necessarily imply “teaching achieved”¹² nor does it erase the need to focus on how and what proposals the schools deploy. It does, however, discard claims of unfulfilled responsibilities. [...] It is true that teaching about the dictatorship places school action *between* collective memory policies and educational resources, toeing the line on the latter and encouraging daily work”.¹³

It can be said that there is still a lack of training in the so-called education on human rights to provide teachers with specific skills and educational tools and strategies in relation to the subject, to then be able to address it transversally through history, art and culture.

These topics are addressed through multiple subjects, such as social sciences and language at the elementary level (especially from the concept of “identity” and reading prohibited books). At

¹⁰ Fragment of Consolidated Education Decree No. 4720-61

¹¹ Fragment of Law No. 27

¹² Hassoun, 1996.

¹³ “Education, memory and dictatorship in middle school. The teaching of the traumatic past in the south of the province of Santa Fe” María Silvia Serra (dir.) Pg. 11 and 29



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the secondary level, through history, citizenship and identity, literature, music and visual arts. These address topics such as: what are human rights; what is citizenship; civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; the State and human rights violations in Argentina; the people as holders of rights. In our country, content referring to human rights is mainly included in the curricular space of ethics and citizen formation. Human rights education through art, culture and history aims to form citizens committed to demanding the full recognition of these rights through the system of democratic government, in order to make it ever more fair, empathetic and representative. These are citizens committed to a culture of peace, dialogue, tolerance, respect for cultural diversity and the realities of each student and their environment.

As a theoretical field, history addresses the period of the last military dictatorship, as mentioned above, by including it in the official curriculum, with the clear objective of fulfilling the educational mandate on collective memory, to remember to not repeat, to analyze the conditions of how State terrorism took place in our society and how it affects our present, in order to build the society of the future.

Through our experience, we have seen that teaching plans have steadily increased school visits to memorial sites and spaces as a way to approach what happened in our country during the last dictatorship. In the case of our Museum, many teachers from the disciplines mentioned above come to take guided tours of the various artistic facilities with their students. The demand for visits is high, which is why teachers are trained to take tours of the Museum with their students, thus becoming multipliers of our proposal. This not only allows teachers to fully use the space and its educational proposal, but also allows them to design various narratives throughout the visit.

In this way, formal and informal education spaces use a mix of language to generate interest in the subject, promote debates and raise awareness among the new generations about the value of continuing to build democracy so that the atrocities that the last Argentine dictatorship committed never happen again.

Art is a great ally in the communication process that is education. When we address distressing, painful and violent topics from our history, art trumps what can be expressed in words. Songs, paintings and theatrical works are the great contribution of artists, who can sensibly express themselves through their creative acts. The work generates questions and reflections that help us better develop the topics. When education meets art and culture, a great path opens up that gives children and young people the opportunity to develop their full potential. Education through art allows us to develop emotional, mental and communication skills and forms values and responses in areas of study that are not necessarily artistic.

While school is the traditional field to teach art, culture and history, informal education is also part of the population's education and gives diversity to the educational experience. Museums, cultural centers, libraries and public spaces are favorable settings for all types of learning. It is important for interactions to be promoted through specific activities where those involved can exchange their views, values, attitudes, feelings—where they can build new knowledge and sensitive experiences. These are things not found every day in formal teaching.

The “See to Know” Audiovisual Production Educational Program is carried out by the Museum and the Rosario Audiovisual Center (*Centro Audiovisual Rosario, CAR*), an institution that is also part of the Ministry of Education from the Municipality of Rosario. It is one of the informal initiatives aimed at promoting narratives of truth and non-repetition. Short films are made with



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fourth-year teenagers from secondary schools in the different districts of the city, addressing topics related to memory, human rights, democracy, the last military dictatorship, identity, etc. The objective is to generate new content on these topics with a young outlook, involving the adolescents as protagonists. To do this, every year we choose a subject and offer three training sessions in the Museum on the subject, the different audiovisual genres and the performances. Then we continue working in their schools on a weekly basis to complete training on how to write a literary and a technical script, a shooting plan, how to divide the roles (director, producer, cameraman, soundperson, wardrobe, script supervisor, editor, etc.). Then, we schedule two days of filming and the material is later edited in the CAR. The organizing institutions provide the filming and editing team to ensure the equal possibilities of producing quality material. At the end of the school year, short films are premiered on the Museum's terrace-patio. The students attend the premiere with their families and friends and are given a QR code to display in the libraries of their educational establishments, allowing others to watch the productions. What interests us most in this entire process is the collective work of each group, the way each group frames the topic and the democratization of speech.

The short films can be viewed on the CAR's YouTube channel. (See Annex)

Work Carried out by Sites of Conscience, the Government or civil society

Involvement in the urban space

*Signage at memorial sites: marks (plaques, posters or structures) that recognize and make visible places linked to State terrorism actions. The signage is part of the Memory, Truth and Justice public policies. They are located at the entrance to barracks, police stations and any place where crimes against humanity were committed or planned, both during the last civic dictatorship (1976-1983) and at other times in our history. These interventions in the public space both accompany and offer reparations for victims of illegal repression and participate in the community in constructing the collective memory.¹⁴

*Tiles for memory: built from the Barrios for Memory and Justice collective, these are a tribute to people detained/disappeared and/or murdered by State terrorism before and during the last Argentine civic-military dictatorship. These leave a mark, a footprint in their paths by signposting the public roadway where they lived, studied, worked, demonstrated or where they were kidnapped or murdered. The tiles once again give space and presence to the names included on them. They are a physical representation of their memory and allow us to reconstruct stories of lives and demonstrations, to recognize our political commitment and the struggle of our popular activists. They build a bridge between generations, between the past and the present, thus keeping us from forgetting and strengthening the policies of Memory, Truth and Justice.¹⁵

*Footprints of the Mothers: created by visual artist Dante Taparelli, they are located in Plaza 25 de Mayo in the city of Rosario, where the March of the Mothers continue every Thursday. This installation was carried out as part of the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the coup d'état of 1976. The artist gave a lasting tribute to the Mothers in Rosario by replacing certain tiles with a bronze reproduction of their own footsteps, recreating the march they made over 40 years ago. With genuine footprints from the Mothers, their fight becomes a permanent fixture in the urban landscape.

¹⁴ Official website Argentina.gob.ar

¹⁵ Ex ESMA Memorial and Human Rights Space



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*Memorial Forest: located in Scalabrini Ortiz Park, it seeks to act as a memorial, in the public space, of the murdered and disappeared during the years of State terrorism. Created by municipal ordinance No. 6644 on September 10, 1999, through a project presented by the Memorial Forest Commission, it is tribute to the victims of the last military dictatorship that attempts to symbolize, through air, light, sun and the green color of life, the hope, freedom and presence of those who are no longer there.

*Let me tell you: This is a collection included as a permanent exhibition at the Rosario Memory Museum and is also digitized on its website: www.museodelamemoria.gob.ar. The collection is made up of artisan edition books that tell details from the life of disappeared and murdered people in the area of influence of the city of Rosario during State terrorism, through historical-literary work, which highlights the uniqueness story of each individual and the connection between each one's social, political and activist activity. The Museum's Center of Studies created this collection and new copies are made each year, which are then added to it.

*Teaching materials prepared by the "Education and Memory" Program, belonging to the National Ministry of Education, for consultation by teachers and students at different educational levels, distributed throughout and across our country. These include: "Think about the Dictatorship. State Terrorism in Argentina" (2011); "Pensar Malvinas" ("Think about the Falklands") (2011); "Think about Democracy: 30 years produced in Argentine classrooms" (2015); "40 years after the coup: Know the past, examine the present and build the future" (2016); "Build democratic citizenship in schools. Memory and Human Rights" (2020). This Program "is aimed at consolidating an educational policy that promotes the teaching of recent history through preparing and making available teaching materials and activities at a national level. Its actions fall under the general framework of National Education Law No. 26,206, whose Article 3 states that: "Education is a national priority and is established as a State policy to build a fair society, to reaffirm national sovereignty and identity, to deepen the exercise of democratic citizenship, to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and strengthen the economic-social development of the nation."¹⁶

*March 24 (the date commemorating the beginning of the last dictatorship) and September 16 (the date commemorating the "Night of the Pencils" operation, in which military forces kidnapped a group of secondary school student activists): mass marches are carried out every year on these dates, which are increasingly numerous, organized by human rights bodies and student centers, respectively. Other sectors of the public also participate, however, that do not belong to any particular group, but who have a strong commitment to memory and justice. "The growing presence of girls and boys taking over the streets to march every March 24 or September 16 continues to surprise. There is prior work behind this, an educational one from the school, from teaching or from the students themselves. Sometimes these protests do not receive the coverage they deserve in the mass media, but the boys and girls are there. And they cause surprise. It is a matter of offering them opportunities and opening spaces so that no one is excluded from this teaching. Participating in student centers contributes greatly to making this happen. But the Mothers and Grandmothers have done more with their teaching of love and presence. Never giving up and demanding memory, truth and justice is a life example that girls and boys value".¹⁷

Successes and Challenges

¹⁶ Institutional Repository Ministry of Education of the Nation

¹⁷ Testimony of Marcela Isaías, journalist specializing in Education. External Source consulted.



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Even if a legal framework exists, we continue to wonder whether teaching recent history is part of the schools' educational policy or if in reality it continues to depend on the lone attempts of principals, teachers and students.

The regulatory framework mentioned above allowed for the teaching of the topics before us to be more systematic, but we must also consider that the school, as an essential institution for our "duty to the collective memory", is a space where multiple determinations come into play and different subjects are involved, marked by conflicts and negotiations.

Although addressing recent history was incorporated as mandatory, with the objective of addressing in a multi-dimensional way and at all educational levels, the process was not easy. The collective memory process itself is complex and certain debates remain open, even if Justice has been served, and multiple voices and collective memories are disputed.

Nonetheless, we can affirm that certain schools express a clear commitment to constructing a collective memory allowing its students to critically position themselves in today's society. They promote it through the involvement of numerous teachers and in different interdisciplinary spaces and activities, expressed, for example, in institutional projects where the recent past is not reduced to a reminder on a single day, but is rather addressed throughout a whole school year and in a multi-dimensional way. That said, we should point out that this institutional commitment cannot be considered as widespread. We affirm this view through the testimonies of the numerous educators who have come to participate with their students in the activities that the Museum's educational area offers, or who come participate in different training sessions.

The following testimonies reaffirm what we stated:

*"Reality shows us that it is still conflictive to approach this topic. Not all educational institutions take heed of the ministerial requirement and many educational authorities disregard its placement in the curriculum. We receive complaints about obstacles to carrying out the educational proposals. From our institution, we are fighting to expand our view on the historical recognition of the events and transparency in addressing the topics. We find it very serious that certain schools do not allow history to be challenged and we are fighting with trade union delegates to force compliance with the ministerial provisions. We continuously accompany teachers to train them and raise awareness about addressing the topic through courses and workshops. We explain the need to approach the past from the perspective of human rights and the need for students to learn about history in a broad way. Teachers who offer activities about March 24 are always ones who believe that the Argentine State implemented State terrorism starting from that date. For that reason, wish to make the crimes of humanity committed during that period visible. Some parents agree with this position. Others maintain that only one part of the truth is being told, that it was a war. Taking into account my personal experience, even though some parents (at the elementary school level) or students (at the secondary level) protest that we must "show both sides of the coin", that position is less common. The real change is in the students' interest and desire to learn and know more about historical facts. The media and social networks allow access to a lot of information and it is the responsibility of educators and families to bring them closer to the truth." (Francisco Fraile, elementary teacher and union representative of the Argentine Union of Private Teachers [*Sindicato Argentino de Docentes Privados, SADOP*])

*"My first experience as a principal to commemorate March 24 was controversial, it was extremely hard. It met great resistance from many teachers on the school's executive committee, given my decision to support the initiative of the kids in the newly founded student center, who had asked me permission to paint a mural alluding to the date. But "we won the arm wrestling



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match” and from there on out, very emotional events are carried out every March 24. We invite members and activists from human rights organizations and give students a voice while making them aware of that date. Prior to the Law, there was no institutional approach. It was only addressed in educational spaces when teachers decided to do so. It was an individual approach and the points of view and ways of addressing it generated controversies. It was even the case that teachers didn’t want to do it, out of fear of reprimands from their higher ups. Once it became mandatory to address recent history in the curriculum, the relevant acts were carried out.” (Aristides Álvarez, teacher and former secondary-school principal)

*“In the institutions where I have been as a teacher, the approach depends on the knowledge of the teacher in charge of the event, regarding the subject. It may only be oral information or include work with school children. In general, those who take a more comprehensive approach are trained in history or are activists. Those in which I worked in the administration, we worked to encourage reflection and participation on this topic. We generally work on it through social sciences and ethical and citizen training. The interdisciplinary approach depends on the commitment of teachers from visual arts and music, for example. The institutional implementation basically depends on the management team. The difference now is that no one can oppose a law.” (Gasbriela Furia, elementary teacher and principal)

*“Before the Law, addressing it remained the consideration of each teacher. I was a student at the same school where I am currently a teacher and at that time, only some teachers talked about the subject. In relation to the acts, we do them. It’s a time when we address the topic to touch on all matters related to citizenship and history. There have sometimes been a day mandatory workshops, in others we planted the memorial tree, or others we constructed a resource promoting the collective memory. It can be said that it generally remains in the hands of the Social Sciences Department, so we don’t see much interdisciplinary work.” (Cristian Alegre, secondary teacher)

*“In some cases recognizing this past date becomes a ritual. It happens very early in the academic year, so in some schools the date of the 24th occurs very formally, although in others it is addressed with greater interest and depth. It being incorporated into the official curriculum helps ensure that the topic is addressed in more educational institutions and with greater interest and diversity. In some institutions, it depends on the initiative of students and teachers. In others, it is given a more institutional treatment.” (Juan Pablo Cassiello, teacher and union representative of the Association of Teachers in Santa Fe [*Asociación del Magisterio de Santa Fe, AMSAFE*]).

*“Ever since the subject entered the school curriculum, the work that many teachers had been doing on their own initiative has been justified—it even challenges those who preferred to look the other way. They no longer need to ask for “permission” to teach recent history and, on the contrary, those who do not stand out. More programs, materials and resources have been provided to work in the classrooms. The State and its various bodies are responsible for ensuring that this happens, thus guaranteeing that it is addressed in the different stages of the mandatory educational system. Little by little, this has led to more discussions and consultations, and even in promoting new proposals. This manner of addressing it still depends on the schools, though. For many, it is still a date to comply with the mandatory school calendar—i.e., they are restricted to incorporating this memorial date in the curriculum. I understand that these people are fewer and fewer. That’s because talking about March 24 is no longer just about referring to a specific date, but rather talking about the recent past—about human rights in their different dimensions and expressions. Stated like this, this has created rich multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary learning, not just a one-off act or a chapter in the class on Argentine history.” (Marcela Isaías, journalist specializing in Education)



Section 3: Lessons, Reflections and Recommendations

Below, we will share testimonies and reflections from students who visited the Museum or did their practicum there:

“Today, we are visiting
The Collective Memory Museum
To remember
The story
Of death and repression
The years that Argentina
Was stained
With violence
Planned genocides
They planted death and terror
We are the Night school
Nahuel, Walter
Rodri y Juan
We were able to reflect
To never forget
Never Again, Never Again” (Reflection of students at the end of a guided tour)

“Education should be understood as a space for production, socialization, learning and transformation of culture, knowledge and know-how. From this logic, all educational practice is political. In this sense, it is worth reflecting on which social and political subject we want to explain. That is why you must ask yourself: What is the reason for teaching collective memory in educational spaces? In general, it can be said that the collective memory addresses a past that is present and contributes to a future. In other words, building the collective memory is reliving or reclaiming the past, which has caused dilemmas in the present, in order to build a different and better future. In this sense, we should create a citizenship with a collective memory that acts and is set up to defend human rights and democracy. Therefore, from educational spaces, we have an ethical and moral obligation to society, and especially to our youth, since they are the seeds that will grow in the future. They will be the ones who have to mobilize flags and fight for a better world.” (Resident in Education Sciences)

“We had a very nice feeling coming to the museum. We also felt a little sad to know that some grandchildren could not meet their grandmothers. Grandchildren without identity.” (12-year-old students)

“Today our visit to the museum was accompanied by the appearance of grandson 128. It allowed us to live and learn about the daily struggle for justice and the truth of the facts. We are beginning to understand the importance of knowing the real story, being immersed in the events” (Students, 16 years old, whose visit coincided with the announcement of the appearance of grandson No. 128)

“This road full of stories, marked by advances and setbacks, led to the democracy that we have today in our country. As political and active subjects, we should not let the memory of the past be lost. These experiences and events will help form awareness and transmit peace. I am convinced, as a future teacher, that education changes people. Guaranteed education is a right



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for everyone. The meaning of our history will be marked by the children who learn through us today” (Resident in the Teaching of History)

The participation of multiple stakeholders is fundamental for improving governmental action to implement curricular reforms or the educational system. An example of this are the testimonies that former political prisoners, survivors of the dictatorship and members of human rights organizations provide to students of different ages at their educational institutions. First-person testimonies are fundamental to winning the empathy students and teachers with the subject.

We have been able to verify that calls to participate in activities proposed through the informal education system, such as those organized by the Collective Memory Museum’s Department of Education, receive better results when the calls to participate are made through the formal education system—i.e., through direct contact with teachers. When performed by other means, the response was lower.

The large majority of the audience that visits the Collective Memory Museum are students. This was confirmed by a public study conducted by the Secretariat of Culture and Education, to which we belong. At the same time, we have been able to confirm that many of them later returned accompanied by their families.

Strategies that facilitate the widespread adoption in the educational system

*From the moment the March 24 event took a certain form and became part of the school calendar, this made addressing the topic easier. It is even more visible when addressed jointly with the date commemorated the Falklands War, April 2, given the proximity in the calendar and because it is a way of remembering and reflecting on what the last military dictatorship provoked. Often, the approach to this war has been separate from State terrorism.

*Conducting seminars on human rights in different teaching courses, at both tertiary and university levels, aimed especially at future elementary and secondary school teachers.

In the future, an improvement could be made for school events commemorating the National Day of Memory for Truth and Justice not to be stereotyped and exhausted in addressing this anniversary. It could be addressed, both in the organization of the act and the topic of the collective memory of the recent past, in an interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional manner at different stages of the academic year. Strategically, each year we begin the guided tours at our permanent and temporary exhibitions at the Museum of Collective Memory, after March 24 and April 2, given the high demand from teachers for these dates. Our objective is for them not to be seen as just dates commemorating an anniversary. To achieve this objective, we have prepared various educational materials that can be found on the institutional website: www.museodelamoria.gob.ar, by going to the Education tab, in the Teacher Materials section. Two folders can be found with educational activities and resources, testimonies and recreational and reflective activities, among others. <https://www.museodelamemoria.gob.ar/page/educacion/idcat/5/title/Materiales+para+Docentes>

For these memorial dates, we propose special activities that incorporate teaching through various artistic languages that support the respective historical content.

It should be noted that addressing recent Argentinean history is not easy. It often continues to present difficulties, as resistance to addressing the topic remains within school institutions, since certain sectors of the educational community consider that this implies indoctrinating children or believe that political topics must be left outside of school walls. The different activities, educational programs or projects do not always flow as expected. You must be prepared to resolve resistance and be able to account for them based on a broad and rigorous knowledge of the subject.



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Recommendations

Governments and state councils: budget support for initiatives and proposals arising from state agencies that address the subject of human rights and democracy as government systems for resolving conflicts, since they foster dialogue, participation, free expression and represent the interests of different sectors of society.

To endorse ministerial resolutions granting recognition and points within the teaching hierarchy to educators who are interested in being trained in these topics.

Send draft bills to the corresponding Chambers of legislators, so that the subject of human rights violations, depending on the specificity of each country or region, is incorporated into the school curriculum.

Civil society organizations: such as popular libraries, neighborhood centers, clubs, human rights organizations, art workshops, cultural centers, community radio stations, who may be involved in these topics, as they foster an identity with a democratic culture of the citizenship. They drive collaboration through their different collective actions to fully uphold human rights, thus building bridges with new generations and providing tools to sectors who see their rights as being violated.

International bodies and institutions: foster meetings at memorial sites and spaces on a regional (such as Latin American awareness sites, for example) and international level, by specific regions of each country, since the human rights violations committed by the States were specific to each place. These meetings are essential for exchanging knowledge, advances, challenges, experiences, know-how and to plan collective action.

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Annex

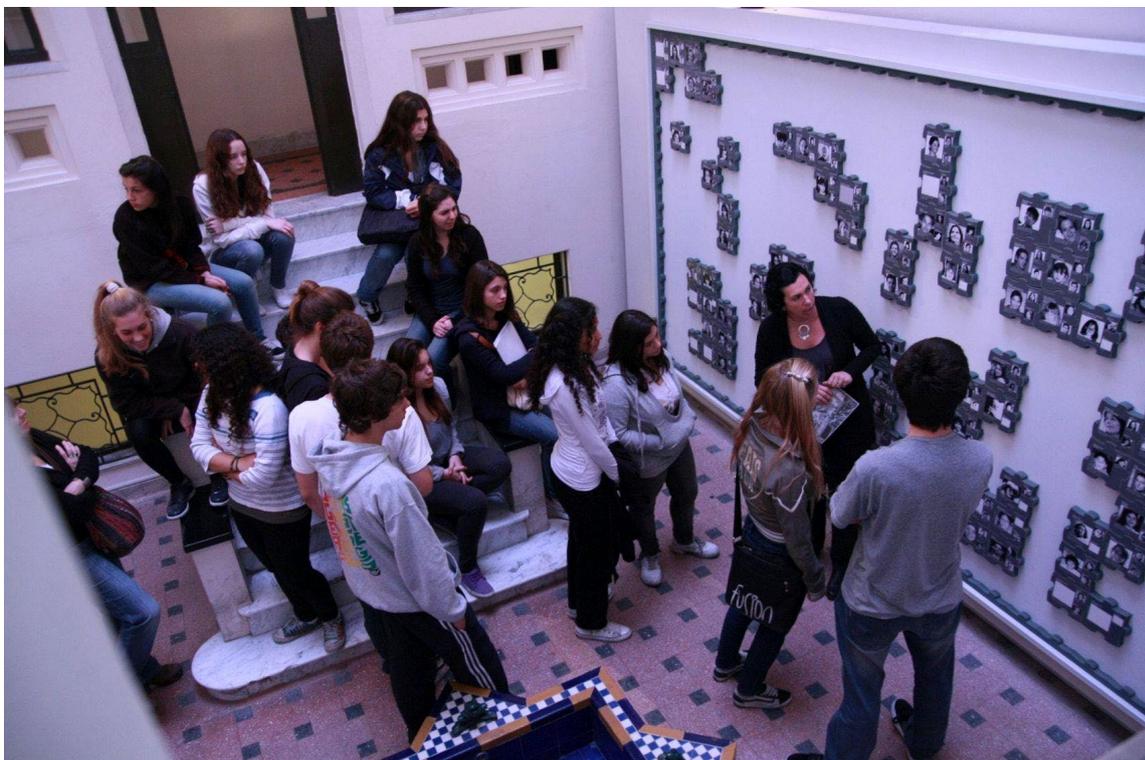
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