

***Estrategias de inserción laboral de profesores  
principiantes en escuelas públicas de Buenos Aires  
Start-up strategies for beginner teachers in state schools  
of Buenos Aires***

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**Resumen:** Nos proponemos en este artículo analizar cómo se insertan los profesores principiantes en las escuelas secundarias de gestión estatal y privada de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires a partir de las características que porta el sistema de ingreso a la docencia. Desde el paradigma interpretativo, un enfoque histórico-cultural, y un abordaje cualitativo, realizamos entrevistas en profundidad y observación participante en espacios de formación por los que circulan estos profesores. Los resultados indican que particularmente quienes deciden trabajar en las escuelas de gestión estatal resignifican “lo público” a partir de esa elección, fenómeno que denominamos “militar la escuela pública”.

**Palabras clave:** Formación de Profesores; Enseñanza Secundaria; Experiencia Laboral; Escuela pública

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**Abstract:** We propose in this article to analyze how beginner professors are inserted in state and private management high schools of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, based on the characteristics of the teaching admission system. From the interpretive paradigm, a historical-cultural approach, and a qualitative approach, we conduct in-depth interviews and participant observation in training spaces through which these teachers circulate. The results indicate that particularly those who decide to work in state-run schools resignify “the public” from that election, a phenomenon we call “military the public school”

**Keywords:** Teacher training; Secondary education; Work experience; Public school

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## **Introduction**

The present article takes up the results of a research where we analyze the relationship between the trajectories of teacher training (initial and continuous) and the strategies of labor insertion of the beginning professors that are inserted in the secondary schools (of state and private management) of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA).

The theme of teachers who begin in their profession was very present in the public policies of Latin America and Argentina in recent decades, and was investigated by numerous studies (Alliaud, 2004), which mostly work from the category of novels or newbies. Here we opt for that of “beginning teachers” (Menghini and Negrin, 2015) based on the recent changes in the Argentine training subsystem (Birgin and Charovsky, 2013), which carries dual characteristics, being that secondary school teachers can be trained both in the university and in Higher Institutes of Teacher Training (ISFD).

These changes took place in the context of the compulsory nature of secondary education and the expansion of higher education in the region (Ezcurra, 2011), with the consequent modification and diversification of enrollment profiles in the face of the recent entry of first-generation youth in their families to access the upper level (Rinesi, 2015).

Our research sought to investigate the working conditions in which these beginning teachers are inserted in the framework of recent high school reforms (Southwell, 2011).

The population under study includes a group of beginning teachers who travel their first work experiences in the education system (up to five years old). From the interpretative paradigm (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2006), an analysis was carried out with a qualitative approach and a historical-cultural approach to the training trajectories and the strategies of labor insertion of the teachers who were trained in History, Geography and Letters, both in ISFD and in universities. These practice in state and private management secondary schools of the CABA in the context of reform and implementation of the New High School (NES). The empirical data corpus prepared among 2014 and 2016 consisted of 24 in-depth interviews with beginning professors, participant observation in eight courses of continuous teaching training of the CABA and two Boards of Teacher Classification.

We propose in this article to analyze the ways in which these professors are inserted considering the characteristics of the system of admission to teaching in the state and private management secondary schools of the CABA. We will focus here on those who aspire to work as "ideal" in state-run schools and those who decide to stay there, revising the senses acquired by "the public" from their choice.

## Development

### Characteristics of the system of admission to teaching

In the CABA, according to the Teaching Statute, the teacher to enter to work in a state high school must have a teaching or qualification for the profession obtained in an ISFD or in the university. After graduating, to obtain class hours or positions in schools as a substitute or interim (access to the education system), the teacher must go through an enrollment and contest instance that is annual and is done digitally in the different Boards of Teacher Classification. There he obtains an order of merit according to the seniority (element that gives the highest score) and the background that allow the teacher to join the list and be able to appear in the Public Acts of each Board of Teacher Classification.

Due to the characteristics of this system, and since they do not yet have seniority, both for the insertion and for the permanence and stability in the state work environment, teachers must resort to the different options offered by the market for continuous training (Davini, 2015), to accumulate score and to be able to compete in better conditions with their colleagues in the so-called “race for the score”.

On the other hand, the private management secondary schools of the CABA are more numerous than the state ones. Teachers working in private management are partially regulated by the Statute of the Teacher since the admission and permanence is not governed by an order of merit but by the “free hiring” defined by each manager or owner of the establishment (Narodowski, Vinacur & Alegre, 2013).

The National Education Law (LEN), enacted in 2006, specifies that teachers in private establishments must also carry an official title for the exercise of the profession (Art. 64). However, it is common to find teachers who have not yet graduated and do not have an enabling degree as part of the uses and customs of these institutions (Perazza & Suárez, 2011). This leads to many young people entering to work first in private schools, given the ease of entry and the faster securitization in the position. In this sense, some authors consider that these schools constitute the “entrance” door (sometimes even as headlines) and

the state one is configured as the “exit” door (as substitutes or interim ones until securitization) (Narodowski et al, 2013).

### **The way to enter and stay in state-run schools**

In the interviews carried out, it is observed, in the first place, that the beginners do not have the necessary information on the operation of the entrance system to the teaching of the state-run schools of the CABA, which generates a serious inconvenience for its insertion. Likewise, we observe in the testimonies how “paperwork” and the times that the teacher has to invest in the annual enrollment are situations that discourage, and that seems to denote that they are not welcome to work in the state school.

At the same time, the observations made in the Public Acts show that many vacancies remain in the absence of teachers in some areas, precisely those that beginners manage to take for the system of remnants. Many times, they are schools with vulnerable populations far away from the city center where nobody wants to go, in the words of the interviewees. Although the regulations allowed this flexibility in the conditions of entering the state-run school and opened a gap where beginners can access, working conditions imply disadvantages and a great challenge for teachers who have just started in the profession, such as Fabian explains:

The system is a bit perverse, because what it does is rely on everything when they are public schools [with vulnerable populations], so it has a lot of pretty high issues. Let's say that the system all it does is to take these young wills, who have this predisposition to change things, this energy and so on, and exploit them as fuses. When there is no problem, they call another young man who is coming. And so on (...) are eternal alternates that are being renewed year after year. For me that is a problem. (Interview Fabián, 32, U, G, E, 5 years).

This system generates a paradox that for the analytical purposes of our research we call "school is sought" versus "teacher is sought", in reference to schools that do not find teachers to cover their hours and teachers who do not find schools to be inserted. Sergio is

one of those professors who was not enrolled in the Teaching Classification Boards, but looking for work he entered through the Remnants System in a school that "nobody wants", and then accumulated hours there, which allowed him to remain in school state:

S: - Looking for work (...) I entered the remnants. It is a school that nobody wants. The truth is that, nobody wants to go there. I did not know her. Looking for remnants here were language remnants. And I introduced myself and there was no one, I was vacant. At that time, it was a 1st and 2nd year. And then I took other courses that were also vacant in the competitions (...) That internship was like that. A teacher left, was free, came out contest, nobody took it and I kept it.

E: - I mean you went to the Board and came back.

S: - Eighty percent of the hours go to the Board and return.

E: - Do other professors take them in remnants or are they still vacant?

S: - We have had vacancies for whole months. In general, someone always appears (Interview Sergio, 36, U, G, E, 5 years old)

In contrast, Ariel managed to enter but not stay, since it was a short substitution in a school in the city center much desired by colleagues with higher scores. Then, he decided to give up the most stable hours he had, an internship in a school where "nobody wants to go", since he encountered situations that, he said, because of his lack of experience he could not handle:

It was a tremendous experience. I was there three months. I quit. I said "internship in remnants? What a goal". Come on! I left folder. Two days later they called me: "tomorrow you start". Great! (emphasizes). I went and got a tremendous surprise. A classroom situation that I had never lived in my life (...) That obviously made it unattractive, because it was an internship in remnants, is rare.

E: - Sure. By resignation

A: - By resignation and they told me "no, because the teacher got something better". And yes (laughs). (Interview Ariel, 26, U, G, E, 1 year)

Like Sergio, Nahuel managed to increase hours in his school and obtained a certain stability because it is a school that has "bad reputation" and nobody wants to take hours there:

I do not go [to the Public Act] because as we work in this school. Nobody wants to go to this school, it has a reputation created that it is like working in hell (laughs). Many times, it is, unfortunately. There are always hours left, then one way or another one is nourished (...) Every week there are hours left. It has happened to us to send a charge of Language, English to Public Act a month in a row. And let it remain. Because the school, "not there, don't go." It is difficult, I will not deny that it is easy, because it cost me a lot. And I started to take (...) I took substitutions, the professors quit. I drank And I made a compendium of hours (Interview Nahuel, 24, I, E, E and P, 2 and a half years).

Many times, the characteristics and problems that this "bureaucratic" system entails crystallize in the very instance of the Public Act. There the rules of the system are experienced in the first person, along with other teachers who go through the same inconveniences and also leave without hours because the competition is great and, as they themselves state, "it is very difficult" and "it is a long road". Let's look at an observation record as an example:

I stop to get accredited for Civic Education, I do not appear in the list of the Board. They look for me several times and I am not. They tell me to make the claim on the Board to see why I am not. I insist that I am listed on that Board [I have proof of registration in my backpack]. They tell me that I have to make the claim and I cannot prove myself. I go to the next room where the other Board is about to begin. A history professor with whom I had been speaking before the Act began tells me that the place in line is taking care of me to accredit me, that I will see if the hours I wanted to go on Monday for the claim remained.

I come back. A teacher who has half the score that I take all hours of Civic Education. I return to the line, I tell the teacher what happened and he tells me to make the claim. That happened to him other times. That once could not take a few

hours for a month due to an administrative error. I meet another teacher [we met in the course of a union where I am also doing field work], I tell him that I was not in a meeting, he tells me that this meeting is "crap" that happened a thousand times. I start talking to her, she tells me that she has only 10 hours of class and that she has another job, that she looks for hours, but that "this is a long road". She tells me that it wasn't too many times for her, and that it takes a long time to pay attention to the claim. He tells me that it is "very bureaucratic" (...) We enter the classroom to wait for them to call for the hours of both. Then I talk to a teacher who I hear complains because it doesn't take hours. I ask for the data for an interview [Lara]. She is 3 years old, is from a state-run ISFD, is a history teacher, studying a master's degree in a public university, and has few hours because she does not get in public school, she tells me. It takes time to begin accreditation. We talked for a while. He tells me that "it is very difficult" to take hours for the high scores that others have. None of the three of us took hours (...) The Public Act ends, I finish the registration together with my things and I leave. I leave with that bitter taste of the aforementioned "bureaucracy", once again without hours, and seeing that many teachers also run out of hours like me. As they say "the thing is difficult" to get to work in public school (Board A and B, 11/20/2015).

As observed in the records and in the interviews, the system of admission to teaching in the state school is complex and presents multiple obstacles that the beginner must learn to circumvent and find the "shortcuts" if he wishes to work there. In addition, although not always, in most cases you enter for the "hours nobody wants" and there is little choice. We will see below how, given this situation, the private management school becomes a possibility to enter teaching more quickly.

### **Insert in the private management school. Plan B"**

From the report of the interviewees it follows that the private institutions where they work are not uniform since, as the bibliography points out, after the fragmentation produced in the decade of the 90s, a multiplicity of schools coexist between the extremes of the "old free public school" and the "elite private schools" (Tiramonti, 2004). In this context, the

interviewed beginners are inserted to work. Contrary to what certain inquiries show (Tiramonti and Ziegler, 2008), no differential features are observed in the formative trajectories of the interviewed professors who work in schools called “elite” (those that form the privileged sectors), since all they have varied career paths (Jacinto, 2010) and work at the same time in different types of private schools, and even combine with jobs in state schools in vulnerable sectors, so in coincidence with other inquiries, we maintain that it is difficult to state that there is a “Homogeneous teaching staff” (Arroyo and Poliak, 2008).

Once they enter to work there many of the interviewees state that their true intention is to practice in state-run schools, but they began their career in private management for various reasons.

In the first place, they express that it is the bureaucracy and the “overwhelming” stratum that makes them opt for privately run schools, like several of the Geography professors that are more required since they have fewer graduates than in the careers of History and Letters, as the case of Ariana who managed to title it quickly. However, she intends to work at the state school even though she knows it will not be an easy task:

Yes, the idea is not to always be in private schools, but it is easier to start in a private school than in a public one. So that is a reality. Although I am listed in the Acts, in the list (...) But in turn it is like the bureaucracy of the list, all these questions overwhelm a little (...) I know that I have to do it if I want, because My idea is to work in the public (Interview Catalina, 27, U, E, P, 4 years, 27, U, E, P, 4 years).

Second, we observe cases that choose private school, at least provisionally, while accumulating “experience” since they find in the state schools more problematic classrooms that are afraid to deal with their short practice. We observe in many of the interviewees the same intention to enter the state school. In some cases, it is ignorance of the income system, lack of time, or simply the fact that they already achieved a certain stability in the private management school (as in the case of Geography teachers), so go through this bureaucratic system is even more tedious and less necessary:



When I got a job, I dedicated myself a lot to this, to teaching. And I got private, they went private. I didn't even sign up on the board. I missed the dates, a disaster. Now next year will not happen to me. But I slept like in the laurels (...) I had that luck. Then afterwards I never had a specific need to go out and go to the Acts (Interview Gabriel, 34, I, G, P, 2 years).

However, many of these teachers expressed that although they feel comfortable with the environment where they work, such as the story of Sofia, there is a greater "identification" with students in the public sector, and that is where they hope to contribute and it is the place for the one they consider formed. Likewise, his formative trajectories passed between the private and the state, but certain institutional logics of the type of private management generate that Sofia feels a distance with the rest of the faculty and sometimes with the students of a neighborhood in the center of the City where entered to work:

I always worked in private schools (...) it is a nice work environment (...) however, I say there are different backgrounds between teachers and students and I ... let's say it is a school of a medium, medium -high level and so with life experiences and different training (Interview Sofía, 38, U, G, P, 2 and a half years).

Those teachers who work in schools of both types of management manifest similarities in relation to the lack of choice and the need to adjust to reality in the face of work needs: "I do not choose schools. (...) I fell into this private, and then I went to Public Acts and grabbed. What I prioritize is that the hour closes, and then I see the school. I drink and see what happens" (Interview Adrián, 34, U, G, E and P, 4 years). In the same sense, they state that although they were trained to work in the state and would like to be able to do so, "after that, reality took me the other way" (Interview Gabriel, 34, I, G, P, 2 years).

Thirdly, the economic need is one of the determining factors when entering these schools since although they would like to join the state, they consider that given their beginners status, "choosing is still a privilege", and there is no other than to encourage and "go out to the ring":

María tells me about her adventures by teaching, from license to license, which seeks to stabilize (...) She is 22 years old and lives with her boyfriend, she tells me

that she needs job stability, so she also looks for work in private schools. We talked about his salary at the public school where he has few hours, "every time I charge it makes me want to cry," he says (Syndicate Course A, September-December, 2015).

In Maria's story, the conditions in which the beginner finds himself when he has the economic need to insert himself are clearly observed. We conclude then that in the face of this haste, and the difficulties presented by the system of admission to the state-run school, private management appears as the option of the "meanwhile" (Nicastro & Greco, 2009), accumulate the necessary seniority and score in order to compete with their colleagues in the Public Acts, and at the same time, they gain more experience in teaching.

### **Choose to work in state management and "military public school"**

In the cases of the newly graduated interviewees who were inserted a few months ago, as in the case of María or Sofía, the private school operates in this "meanwhile", what they call "Plan B". However, they argue that they did not train for that or feel "useful" there. Or the case of the geography professors interviewed who aspire to enter the State more quickly while maintaining their hours in the private management school where they are holders. In terms of Bourdieu (1999), we could define them as "false agents", to disgust, that they occupy "false positions" in the social space, which gives them less possibility to fix provisions, but at the same time they have greater possibility of observing what for those who are "in place" is evident and not questioned.

We also found cases of teachers who had negative experiences in private management schools before the control exercised by the owners of the establishments, so they later opted for the state management school, generating a certain "avoidance circuit" (Birgin, 2000). Along with these cases, we find teachers who, despite the "bureaucratic" way, support their decision to work only in state schools while combining with jobs outside of teaching, such as the case of Lara that we met in the Public Act mentioned above:

I believe in public school. I am still one of those who believes that all education should be public, the same for all (...) the boy who receives in a private school has much better training than the boy who receives in public school. And as I say, that is

to disguise the exclusion of inclusion. The public-school boy does not receive the same treatment, does not receive the same content. Cannot train (Interview Lara, 35, I, G, E, 3 years).

However, we agree with the need to go beyond the mere analysis of the working conditions of teachers (Southwell & Vassiliades, 2014), since in their stories other elements emerge for those who choose or wish to work in the management school state. We understand from their experiences that, according to the management to which they belong, schools have institutional profiles and serve different audiences. Within this wide range we find what the literature calls the “elite” institutions that form for “excellence” (Tiramonti & Ziegler, 2008), and those that “resist the collapse” together with the disadvantaged sectors (Tiramonti, 2004) , considering among them a wide and heterogeneous range of schools. Faced with this “inequality” described by Lara, there is a strong statement in the stories we have called “military public school.”

I, ideologically, I think, I bet on public school. And that is why in these years, since I received it, I am trying to transfer hours [from the privately-run schools that are currently working towards the state ones] (...) my bet is to the public school (Interview Franco, 26, U, G, E and P, 3 years and 2 months).

There is also in many of the interviewees, whose formative trajectory passed mostly in the state management school, a need to “return” to society the possibilities they had. There is also a stronger “identification” with the students who attend the state-run school, even more present in those who make up the first generation of their family to access higher education:

I feel more identified with the boy’s students of public school, I want to try to give them tools as I had to overcome, to have a good life. I feel that those who need me are them... more than others (Interview Sofía, 38, U, G, P, 2 and a half years).

Several teachers said they want to leave “something else” in these schools with vulnerable sectors. The professors interviewed thus discuss the senses of the public in the school (Feldfeber, 2011), since as Pedro relates there is a “conception of the public” and a “political decision” to contribute there or, in Franco’s terms, there is an “ideological” choice

when "betting" to enter the state school where he feels comfortable. There is something to understand that this is the "true" school. As Pedro says, "after all the public belongs to everyone":

A whole conception of the public, which comes behind that (...) On the one hand is this, the typical thing that one was formed in a public institution, then to return to society (...) if I have to choose I prefer a public school (...) if the best teachers, if everything goes supposedly, supposedly (emphasis), to private school, every time the public school is going to be worse. So, it is a political decision (...) I think it would be good not to continue having less public school. At least that what is public school is sustained or expanded. Because, after all, the public belongs to everyone (Interview Pedro, 31, I, E, P, 3 and a half years).

## Conclusions

Product of the fragmentation that the educational system has been suffering in recent decades (Tiramonti, 2004), and the particularity of the CABA where private management establishments have been growing in recent years (Perazza and Suárez, 2011), beginners have greater probabilities of labor insertion in these institutions.

As we have analyzed, beginners who wish to enter to work in the state-run secondary schools of the CABA face a regulated and arbitrary system. Those who enroll in the Teaching Classification Boards enter the lists with a low score since they have just started in the profession. This situation generates low probabilities of choosing the desired hours in the Public Acts so beginners look for other alternatives such as working in privately managed schools while accumulating the necessary score to take hours in state management.

The difficulty in entering state-run schools generates the paradox mentioned "school is sought" versus "teacher is sought", installing an intricate system that complicates access to the first job. However, despite the difficulties analyzed, we found that the relaxation in certain rules or shortcuts in access to the workplace allowed these teachers to increase their chances of insertion, specifically through the system of remaining vacant positions and hours.

This is constituted as an interstitium through which they usually enter schools in vulnerable sectors and where “nobody wants to go”, achieving relatively fast job stability and accumulation of points. As beginners and from their position of weakness in the system, we understand that these teachers' choices are constituted as tactical actions (De Certeau, 1996), since the arrival at school hours that "nobody wants" allows them to remain in office and stabilize, improving their working conditions and therefore their position in the social space (Bourdieu, 2007).

Contrary to the more generalized thesis that argue that beginners enter only for the “worst hours” - ruled out by their colleagues with the highest score-, we find that our interviewees work in state schools with diverse audiences. However, although they manage to enter the "best hours", it is confirmed in the testimonies the difficulty of staying in them because they are short substitutions.

On the other hand, in many cases the beginners decide to remain in the institutions where “nobody wants to go” because they are considered an important formative experience, and a way to prove themselves to the challenge of entering new audiences (Rayou and van Zanten , 2004) in the framework of the extension of the compulsory nature of secondary education.

The latter phenomenon that we call "public school military", since we consider that the reason for the choice of these teachers by these schools implies resignifying "the public" by choosing to occupy these spaces and fight against the income difficulties that arise.

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