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Escuela Normal de Costa Rica (Normal School of Costa Rica): History and Legacy

Escuela Normal de Costa Rica: Historia y legado



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Abstract. On the centennial of Escuela Normal de Costa Rica (Normal School of Costa Rica), this paper discusses its role and its legacy in teacher training. It is structured in three parts. First, it presents a brief historical background on the origin and profiles of normal schools in several parts of the world. Second, it describes the development of Escuela Normal in Costa Rica, refers to various personalities and significant elements that set the course and reputation of this institution, and emphasizes its key role in the humanistic training of teachers, which helped lay the foundations of the Costa Rican educational development. Finally, it presents some remarks about the education legacy of this fine institution, which has remained to this date - particularly in tertiary education - within the teacher training career at the Universidad Nacional (National University), major historical heir of Escuela Normal.

Keywords. Teacher training, Normal School, Universidad Nacional (National University).

Resumen. En el marco del centenario de la Escuela Normal de Costa Rica, este documento discute su rol y legado en la formación docente. Se estructura en tres partes. En primer lugar, se presenta una breve contextualización histórica sobre el origen y perfil de las escuelas normales en varias partes del mundo. En segundo lugar, se describe el desarrollo de la Escuela Normal en Costa Rica, se referencian varias personalidades y elementos significativos que marcaron el rumbo y prestigio de la institución, y se destaca su papel clave en la formación humanista de maestros, la cual contribuyó a cimentar el florecer educativo costarricense. Finalmente, se presentan algunas consideraciones sobre los remanentes del legado formativo de esta noble institución en el presente, concretamente en el ámbito de la educación terciaria, en las carreras de formación docente de la Universidad Nacional, principal heredera histórica de la Escuela Normal.

Palabras claves. Formación docente, Escuela Normal, Universidad Nacional.

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The education and training of teachers are an indisputable issue of vital importance worldwide. In particular, since the end of the 20th century, numerous international agreements and conferences from around the globe have postulated teacher training as a matter of priority. As a result, this issue has to be placed on the agendas of the country and, therefore, is open to raise questions related to tertiary education and its relevance regarding the professionalism of teachers.

In the Costa Rican case, 100 years after the uprising of Escuela Normal, and although decades ago teacher training has been up to universities, it is undeniable that to consolidate humanist training that meets the demands of society and groups more socially disadvantaged, it is imperative to appeal to history and rescue the benefits of different training systems, particularly those which were successful and innovative. In this sense, Escuela Normal always emerges as a significant emblem evoking the origins of the training of teachers in Costa Rica.

Escuela Normal, its legacy and how this materializes and gains validity in the training of teachers in our time –in particular at Universidad Nacional– main heir of the work of that institution, is an issue that calls for prominence in the face of current educational paradigms with the needs of today. Precisely, this text covers the origins of this institution and its legacy to the training of teachers today. Following is a summary around these issues.

Normal Schools: Origins and Profile

After the Napoleonic Wars and the social restructuring that they carry throughout Europe, a reconfiguration of the school and fields implied began, given that European States assume control of school systems aimed at children and, thus, to train teachers, which touts then from an innovative and modern optic (Escolano, 1982).

The conformation of these institutions is closely related to the French Enlightenment period and its educational projects, with the recognition of education as an essential right, the popular education movements and rating this as a support element to nationalists and the liberal-bourgeois order that newly emerged (Escolano, 1982); which obviously positions normal schools as allies in the promotion or indoctrination of specific ideological projects.

In this regard, Dengo (2013) mentions that “Escuela Normal as an institution is a creation of the 19th century... in the context of the French Revolution” (p. 203), a time in which there was concern for:

The lack of competence (of those who taught) to convey knowledge with the proper method to promote the reasoning capacity of students and to adapt to their psychological needs, pointed out the urgent need to form a new type of teacher, who was specifically prepared for this purpose. (Dengo, 2013, p. 203)





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Also, movements such as mutual schools (Great Britain)³ and pestalozzianos⁴ in Central Europe contributed to profiling the first educational and State actions aimed at teachers.

In Russia, for example, there are data on the existence of 40 normal schools by the 1800s. Of Prussia there is knowledge of a type of educating homes by 1828. For its part, France opened 11 normal schools in 1829. In the United States the first normal school was founded in Massachusetts in 1837, and in Belgium by 1875 they already had 40 normal schools (Escolano, 1982).

In Latin America, normal schools as centers to train teachers date back even before mid-19th century. Thus, Peru organizes its first normal school of males in 1822, the same year in which Mexico opens the first facility of this type (Salgado, s. f.), while Chile, inspired by the model, opens the doors of the first training-institution for teachers in 1842 (Núñez, 2010). According to Núñez (2010), before the creation of that instance, elementary schools were scarce and their conditions were deplorable, with teachers who lacked any training to exercise their task.

In Latin America as in Europe, these institutions receive a strong influence from moralistic groups, making the first normal schools stand out for their discipline and habits (Escolano, 1982; Núñez, 2010). The truth of the matter is that since the creation of the Chilean normal school, the model continues to recreate for the rest of the Latin world, mostly replicating the postulates and principles which view the origin of the institution in the European Continent, since that reality in our continent was different and that, in practice, would be the social situation which eventually would impose and define the Latin American normal school.

In this way, Argentina founded its first normal school in 1870, followed by Colombia; Uruguay which started with a normal school in 1885 and Ecuador opens an institution for males in 1889. For its part, Bolivia inaugurated a normal school in 1909. Dominican Republic began in 1863 and Cuba 1959.

In Central America, El Salvador has a normal school since 1832, Honduras since 1836, Guatemala opened in 1875 and Panama in 1872 (Salgado, s. f.). For its part, Nicaragua founded the first Escuela Normal de Señoritas (Normal School for Girls) of the region in 1908; and Costa Rica followed in 1914; although 100 years before, Costa Rica already had a training center for educators: Casa de Enseñanza Santo Tomás (Santo Tomás Teaching House).

³ School or mutual teaching is linked to the industrial revolution and the precarious conditions of the workers. It basically consisted of a strategy to alphabetize the masses, inspired by the ideas of the French Revolution (Charconnet, 1975).

⁴ Pestalozzi was a Swiss pedagogue that revolutionizes the educational system starting from the principle that intelligence is possible through the spontaneous perception. His ideas influenced the schools of the European Continent and he is believed to have contributed to the development of the pedagogy worldwide. The main objective of Pestalozzi was to adapt the teaching to the natural development of children, which should learn from their own experiences.





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Researchers as [Núñez \(2010\)](#) point out that Latin American normal school configuration develop at different times. Thus, a first period of more than four decades is marked, between 1842, with the opening of the Chilean normal, and 1885; where it was clearly much more influenced by a moralistic model than a teaching model; although it was said that the training aims at suitable teaching in the sense of methodological expertise, it was clear that "... the pedagogical dimension was the poor family member of schoolteacher training" (p. 34). Certainly, the moral disseminated by those first efforts to professionalize teaching practice, was but a reflection of prejudice, the dominant ideology, official religiosity and political interests that predominate among wealthy classes:

The "civilizadores" (civilizing) of the popular mass had to be civilized ... the first normal, and those following, became a boarding school with strong and disproportionate flagellant sense. The entry requirements and selective practices that normal schools had were also added, ... the morality and decency of the original families and the behavior of students at school determined their career. ([Núñez, 2010, p. 35](#))

Afterwards, another moment in the Latin American normal evolution was shown between 1885 and 1928. During this period the German influence becomes noticeable, as it is frequent that Austrian and German professors visit normal schools, especially in Chile, and normal teachers travel also to be trained in "the most advanced countries" ([Núñez, 2010, p. 36](#)). In addition, American trends were imported what makes it clear that reality, local context and regional needs, pass to a second place in terms of setting a pedagogical model relevant to this part of the world.

According to [Salgado \(s.f.\)](#), the Latin American normal schools of that era were characterized by the presence of foreign missions, which were usually invited by the government of the day, given the interest of introducing new pedagogical models; however, participation of religious orders was also recurring, which is consistent with a still moralizing model.

In addition, around this time, the Latin American normal schools had the following features ([Núñez, 2010](#)):

- Normal school teaching is subordinated to the school system; since, although it was a post primary level, its completion did not allow continuing studies at the university.
- The teaching (suitability) and discipline (morality) was normal activity seals even during the 20th century.
- Their offices were at the service of education or training ministries, and in many cases, assigned to them.
- They were inefficient to supply all the real demand for teachers because in spite of the existence of normal schools, the amount of teachers without title continued to be overwhelming.
- The training had a cloistered character: primary school teachers had to train primary school teachers.



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- When someone started studying at a normal school indicated that he/she had begun to work for the State apparatus and “that he/she had decades of life ahead as government employee” with limited salaries and low professional prestige (Núñez, 2010, p. 37).
- Its regime was, in many cases, as a boarding school, with expenses borne by the Government, which began to gradually change in the 20th century, with the admission of external students.

It is important to mention that at the end of the second period, specifically in 1927 and 1928, in some countries of the region, a protest movement was created among teachers, who in guilds, launched a proposal for a comprehensive reform inspired by the Escuela Nueva (New School)⁵.

Between 1929 and 1967 it is the third time in the evolution of the normal school model, where standardizing regulations are strengthened and the boarding school is weakened. Likewise, it also tends to shyly begin to support diversity, by admitting students from rural areas and women. In addition to these changes, the impoverished State contribution and the prevailing demand for teachers generated an accelerated training process.

Finally, the fourth phase occurs between 1967 and 1973, time when the normal model as known then is abandoned and, in several countries, while maintaining the institutional structure, normal schools turn into a post high school instance of non-university higher education.

Without a doubt, for more than 130 years, normal schools contributed to the strengthening of most literate societies, which slowly starts the access to education of groups traditionally excluded from the system. Of course, this training takes place in correspondence with the canons of the period and along with the premises of what in those years was considered “correct”. However, training, then, was already defined as at least a six-year process, which was a sort of identity luck among those who participated in it.

In this way, Maya and Zenteno (2003) refer that normal school is not only a sign of what happened in the world, given that in most countries where the model establishes, it is linked to key historical moments that are held in the progress and achievements of public education in the region, what becomes its empowerment in the cultural and social configuration.

For Salgado (s. f.), the fact that during most of the 20th century normal schools in Latin America are a powerful tool of social mobility is undeniable, since large numbers of young people from lower social class have access to them. This author points out that, to a greater or lesser extent, in some countries of the region teacher training was marked by militarism and dictatorship. This is a key factor, since in some cases normal schools were closed for political reasons, and in others, students were transferred to universities, going from high school to tertiary education.

⁵ Set of principles that emerge at the end of the 19th century in Europe, and are consolidated in the first third of the 20th century as an alternative to traditional teaching.



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To the authors mentioned above ([Maya & Zenteno, 2003](#); [Salgado, s. f.](#)), with the upcoming of globalization, the scientific and technological advances, as well as the questioning of conventional paradigms, educational policies diversify focusing on the quality of education, which necessarily permeates in the work of normal schools in the region.

In this context, mainly from the 70s decade, many countries change the teachers training model in normal schools and began to establish teaching institutes or universities, or create pedagogical faculties affiliated to universities ([Salgado, s. f.](#)).

For [Figueroa \(2000\)](#), in modern times teacher training and professionalization in normal schools is a cause of deep discussions, although the interdisciplinary vision and professional identity built around normal schools as training instances for high school and pre university levels is evident. This training, seen as a State task, is one of the most assisted by educational policies, so the transformations experienced by normal schools throughout their existence relate directly to social and contextual changes. In the words of [Figueroa \(2000\)](#):

The training offered in normal schools has been characterized by a tendency to standardize practices and messages. Such messages and practices adhere to unique methodological models which modernity has implemented. Searching for the recipe of how to become a teacher seems to be the trend of the positivist approach... How to think about training and its strategies has been a priority for various actors... The result of this is the models built that are characterized by a greater emphasis on the technical aspects than on the theoretical ones. In addition to this emphasis in the normal school spaces, you can see the importance... [of] planning, greater than in any other academic event in their daily lives.

The tension that develops between what ought to be and being is one of the most difficult issues to deal; however, the message expresses too idealized profiles, being fully aware that to be a teacher is not a matter of operational definitions... ([Figueroa, 2000, p. 120](#))

This idealization of the teaching staff should add the undeniable bond that exists between the disappearance or transformation of normal schools and the political changes occurring in Latin America. In the whole region, the abolition or pinning down of primary school teachers and teaching staff - almost always prominent thinkers - is consistent with the beginning of dictatorships or revolutions. Even to this day, despite the fact that the message and normal model has been characterized by their moralistic and indoctrinator tone, in different areas and countries of the continent, normal groups have been persecuted by their controversial and challenging stance.

Escuela Normal (Normal School) of Costa Rica

The occurrences of normal education in Costa Rica goes back to the mid-19th century, when the bases for a normal school were set by means of a decree issued on November 13, 1840





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by Doctor José María Castro Madriz ([Cordero, 1998](#)). By that time, the concern arises to give the teacher the specific training required to respond to the processes of basic education developed in the country. However, by 1814 the Casa de Enseñanza de Santo Tomás (Santo Tomás Teaching House), which afterwards in 1843 was turned into a university, opens its doors.

With Doctor Castro Madriz decree, in 1840, a normal school for boys only and in 1849 a Liceo para Niñas (Girls High School), a middle education center with normal character, was established.

In the second half of the 19th century, due to the interests of extending and improving public education, other colleges in the center of the country are founded, among those were Liceo de Costa Rica (Costa Rica High School) and Colegio de Señoritas (Young Lady High School), created by Mauro Fernández in 1887 and 1888, respectively. According to [Hernández and Lobo \(1996\)](#), these education centers operated as model schools where “technical pedagogical bases to train teachers as a career” (p. 5) were established, because in them “courses, lectures, exams for teachers, inspection and advice policies” (p. 5) were taught. This division of the normal sections in schools for boys and for girls had been institutionalized and ruled during the last decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century ([Solera, 1965](#)).

Precisely by this time in Costa Rica, there was a great need to train teachers who respond to the expansion of the national school system, especially at the elementary level, which explains the opening of different sections of normal schools.

As the teaching profession acquire relevance and social prestige it begins to be urgent to have “a real normal school” ([Dengo, 2013, p. 217](#)), which could trained the teachers required for our country. At the beginning of the 21st century, for example, more than 80% of teachers in service lacked a degree or certification of fitness for teaching ([Dengo, 2013](#)).

In general, several attempts to consolidate a normal training in the country were given, many of which are made in different sections and institutions which provided educational courses for teacher training, but in an ephemeral way. Normal teaching reaches its peak with the creation of Escuela Normal de Costa Rica (Normal School of Costa Rica) and energizes even further with the establishment of normal schools in other provinces and rural areas.

The Escuela Normal de Costa Rica was created on November 28, 1914, through Decree number 10, during the Presidential term of Alfredo González Flores with the support of his brother Luis Felipe González Flores, who at the time was in charge of the Office of Public Education. Due to lack of own facilities and land, González Flores ordered to use the space and the plans destined for the Liceo de Heredia (Heredia High School) to establish instead the Escuela Normal (Normal School). In this institution, however, the first school year began in April 1915 at Escuela Braulio Morales (Braulio Morales School), while the construction of the new campus was completed. Five months later, the school moves to the new building where it remained until 1956 ([Meléndez, 2001](#)).





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With the creation of Escuela Normal de Costa Rica, educational studies of the sections belonging to Liceo de Costa Rica and Colegio Superior de Señoritas are transferred to that school, and since that time, the training of teachers mainly emerges from this institution.

According to [Dengo \(2013\)](#), with the establishment of Escuela Normal, the objective was to “introduce a new socioeconomic process in the country [and] locate education within social and scientific trends in vogue and strengthen its democratic capacity; [...] with teacher education as a key strategy (p. 221)”.

In addition, with this new institution an answer regarding the “belief... of the true nature, within a new concept of what a training institution for teachers should be was given; in other words, not a section but a Escuela Normal in the broad and better sense” ([Dengo, 2013, p. 222](#)).

Don Arturo Torres was the first director of Escuela Normal. His appointment was given “in an interim form and surcharge quality” ([Hernández & Lobo, 1996, p. 13](#)). Under his leadership, in the first graduation, which took place in November 1915, 20 persons graduated and the official hymn, “Alma Mater”, was released.

Alma Mater! We come,
as your respectful sons,
to give you tributes
of love with hymns.
You give us the most intimate essence of your life and your science, sweet School,
from whom is our honor.
With the purest desire
for virtue and hope,
we lit our souls
in the light of your altar.
Yours is our strength, yours is the promise
planting your flag in extremely high ideal.
In the sorrow or victory, the brightness of your star will mark our course,
our path will unfold.
And later, when we reach manhood, as in a bronze urn,
we will carry your name,
Sweet Escuela Normal
Lyrics: Roberto Brenes Mesén
Music: José Joaquín Vargas Calvo
([Tribute from Escuela Normal de Costa Rica to his graduate teachers, 1933, p. 3](#)).





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The lyrics were written by Roberto Brenes Mesén, and its music composed by José Joaquín Vargas Calvo, both professors of Escuela Normal, evidence that, in the case of Costa Rica, were distinguished teachers and with great cultural background who were responsible for the training of teachers.

Alma Mater, Escuela Normal official piece and emblem, highlights the respect, admiration, esteem and gratitude for 'life' and 'science' felt by the staff being trained there. In addition, the commitment and delivery that with eagerness and hope could feel for their school. At the end of the hymn, it expresses the commitment of treasuring and carrying with them the name of the institution.

These feelings of commitment, respect, loyalty and admiration for the institution, not only is shown in the lyrics of the hymn, but in the behavior and in the professional practice of its graduate staff. In this regard, [Hernández and Lobo \(1996\)](#) state that the influence of Escuela Normal de Costa Rica in the "professional, spiritual, cultural, social and human" life of students is undeniable (p. 1).

At the beginning, the preparation provided by the Normal was comprised of general and educational courses as it corresponds to the second evolutionary moment of these institutions. Among courses in general studies were highlighted: calligraphy, singing, health science, cooking, sewing, drawing, study of the nature and agriculture, geography, geology and mineralogy, history and public management, English or French, school games, Spanish literature, literature for children, logic and debate, mathematics and methods, school practice, education psychology, educational sociology, and craftwork; all characterized by their humanist approach, that even though for us today results revealing as part of the curricular training of teachers, it must be contextualized also in terms of the supposing role at the time, because in high school (which primary school teachers did not took), as mentioned above, this type of humanist approach was also approved. Moreover, the educational courses were composed of school administration, school agriculture and gardening, drawing in tarpaulin, extension school, school hygiene, history and principles of education, history of national education, school legislation and practice in special branches, preparation of school material, and school practice, the latter of major curricular priority ([Tribute from Escuela Normal de Costa Rica to its Graduate Teachers, 1933](#); [Hernández and Lobo, 1996](#)).

The preparation was divided into three sections: 1) General studies section, whose objective was to prepare students in the first three years of high school, 2) Normal section, consisting of three years dedicated to the professional preparation and 3) School of application section, which consisted of five years of elementary education practice ([Tribute from Escuela Normal de Costa Rica to its Graduate Teachers, 1933](#)). These practices were carried out under the supervision of a personal tutor and took place at Escuela de Aplicación (Application School). In





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Heredia, for example, when Escuela Normal open, future teachers made their practice in what was once Escuela República de Argentina, which in those years became known first as Escuela de Aplicación and later as Escuela de Aplicación República de Argentina (Meléndez, 2001).

Obviously the humanist approach spanning from teacher training at Normal was dyed by art and culture, which is why many of the teachers of the time are remembered in Costa Rican history as artists, women and men of culture. This fact had to deeply marked the generations of those who studied in this institution, and of course, the hundreds of children who passed then through the classrooms of those teachers: they were train to appreciate art, culture, literature and music. Added to this, the relevance that already given to the game as part of the study plan, which is a ludic training oriented towards providing formal education courses as opportunities where children could learn in a pleasant way and from their nature and needs.

Most of the student population of the school belonged to the Costa Rican humble class. Many of them, especially those who came from remote areas, were receiving aid through a grant system. It is important to point out that, during that time, "teaching was one of the few career options for those who wish to study, in particular for women. On the other hand, the title of Normal teacher open up the possibility of entering law school and thus achieving a highest academic status" (Hernández & Lobo, 1996, pp. 43-44). Hence, Escuela Normal meant for its graduates a means of cognitive, social, and economic transformation.

In the period 1917-1919, due to the economic and political situation of the country, marked by the coup d'état of Federico Tinoco, the interests of political order deprived over education, so the administrative and teaching staff of Escuela Normal which disagreed with the Government was repressed and censored. As a result, a large number of its teachers are fired, changes in the school administration occurred, staff is appointed with temporary status, the number of scholarships decreased, scholarship students were repatriated and several primary school teachers stop teaching (Fischel, 2013). Moreover, according to the notes of don Felipe Gonzalez, the Escuela Normal had to re-establish in San Jose and depended more on the Secretary of War and less on the Secretary of Education (Tribute from Escuela Normal de Costa Rica to its Graduate Teachers, 1933).

As noted a few paragraphs ago, in the history of normal schools political repression has not been unusual. It seems that the training developed at the heart of these institutions, in charge of activists, characters of culture and politics, and other renowned figures⁶, exceeded by far the pedagogical model that was officially imposed. According to Fischel (2013), at that time, Escuela Normal:

⁶ Among them Máximo Blanco, Omar Dengo and Emma Gamboa.



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... had become a center of advanced political and pedagogical studies. While most of the teachers taught classes in high school, they gathered at "Normal" to discuss different currents of thought, ranging from esoteric to pragmatic. These intellectual analyses were not only of academic nature but also involved a critical questioning of the established social system with the privileges of the dominant groups. (p. 94)

Evidence of the above, was the national demonstration against the dictatorial government of the Tinoco⁷ directed by normal teacher and writer María Isabel Carvajal (Carmen Lyra).

In 1919, the recently established new constitutional Government, Omar Dengo Guerrero takes over the Direction of Escuela Normal. During his tenure as director, he reorganized teaching staff and strives to improve the cultural level of the institution. Furthermore, among its actions, proposes to modify the study plan and reduces the three sections into two: high school and Normal.

The high school section included the following courses:

mother tongue, English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, natural sciences, geography, history, hygiene, commercial arithmetic, calligraphy, music, drawing, agriculture, crafts, cooking, sewing and home economics. As for the Normal section, consisted of the following: "literature, English, French, mathematics, physics and chemistry, natural sciences, history, geography, elements of public administration, psychology and logic, anatomy, physiology, hygiene and nursing, pedagogy, school hygiene, preparation of educational material, history of education, history of national education, educational psychology, pedagogy, psychology of the classes of primary education, educational and general sociology, administration and school legislation, teaching practice, crafts, music, drawing, physical education, agriculture, sewing and cooking. (Tribute from Escuela Normal de Costa Rica to his graduate teachers, 1933, pp. 8-9)

At Escuela Normal, educational affairs constituted a priority; its directors watch over so it would be like that and were concern about being at the forefront of the latest methods and techniques. However, not everything remained in the technique and the educational system, because the institution had a reputation for its social spirit and was recognized as the place where elementary teachers, loving and conscious of the responsibility that implied their profession were trained. In the words of Cordero (1998), the Normal constituted "a special school

⁷ However, the worst repression for Carmen Lyra came much later, in 1948. During the Government of don Julio Acosta, Carmen Lyra traveled to Europe to carry out pedagogical studies, and there she stepped in communist ideas; in fact, María Isabel translated the Communist Manifesto to Spanish. It was after the armed revolution in 1948, when José Figueres Ferrer ousted the country's communists when María Isabel was exiled to Mexico.





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of education" devoted to the preparation of suitable teachers to direct the official elementary schools in the country" (p. 30). This statement indicates that teaching suitability, as a feature of the Latin American normal training, was also effective in Costa Rica.

The social spirit identifying Escuela Normal was mainly instilled by their directors, which included don Arturo Torres, for whom teachers had to comply with the social and political role of being leaders of the democracy. Other directors such as Roberto Brenes Mesén and Joaquín García Monge, who held the post in 1916 and 1917-1918, respectively, kept the same feeling:

They continued with the same spirit... inspiring labor in the educational area, in the social spirit of the Escuela, in modern teaching methods and systems and the understanding of the social role of primary school teachers, making students feel the responsibility involved in that role. ([Tribute from Escuela Normal de Costa Rica to his graduate teachers, 1933, pp. 7-8](#))

Apart from these renowned directors, Escuela Normal counted on other important characters in the post: Carlos Gagini, Juan Dávila, Carlos Luis Sáenz and Hernán Zamora Elizondo. All of them permeate and developed the social spirit of the institution while directing it. For [Solera \(1965\)](#), principals "were the pioneers of the mysticism that engulfed the Escuela and flooded the national education fields" (p. 30). Undoubtedly, this task was accompanied and strengthened by the teaching staff of the institution, among this group were: Luis Dobles Segreda, Jose Joaquin Vargas Calvo, Samuel Saenz Flores, Juan Ramon Bonilla, Carlos Luis Sáenz, Adela Ferreto, Angélica Gamboa and María Isabel Carvajal ([Dengo, 2013](#)).

In general, Escuela Normal de Costa Rica was influenced by:

A true sense of primary education with the improvement in the systems, methods, connecting teaching to national problems and with [sic] the constant desire to make of a teacher a real professional, fulfilling more and more the social and political role of a teacher. ([Tribute from Escuela Normal de Costa Rica to his graduate teachers, 1933, p. 13](#))

[Meléndez \(2001\)](#), who underwent the influence of this institution closely, first as a graduate and afterwards as a teacher, stated:

It is not possible to even synthesize what Escuela Normal has meant in the cultural life of the city and the country. It should be recalled that during that time, there was no university and Escuela Normal play that role between 1915 and 1941. The quality of teachers, the fact that students come from across the country and the mysticism that existed, are perhaps three of the most outstanding features of this educational institution. (p. 63)



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In this sense, Escuela Normal was entitled to fill the supreme and forefront post in the training of teachers in Costa Rica, not only by the number of graduated groups, but also by the quality of teachers that were trained there (Chaves, quoted by Hernández & Lobo, 1996).

According to Dengo (2013), after the 1940s a series of facts that affect Escuela Normal and finally end up with its gradual disappearance happened.

- In 1940, the creation of Universidad de Costa Rica or UCR (University of Costa Rica), establishing the School of Pedagogy, which absorbs the Normal Section. In the beginning, the School of Pedagogy is located in Heredia, along with the Escuela Normal, but years later is moved to San Jose, where, in 1956, is transformed into the Education Department. The training of teachers for high school education also initiates, systematically, when creating the UCR, but subordinated to academic units other than the School of Pedagogy.
- In 1950, Escuela Normal with a higher education model goes back to Heredia, and together with the School of Pedagogy and other normal schools that existed in the country was responsible for the training of teachers for elementary schools for several years more.
- In 1967, a section of Escuela Normal de Heredia begins to operate as Escuela Normal Superior, which would be devoted to training teachers for middle school. This section closed in 1973, when Universidad Nacional or UNA (National University) was created; specifically because the Normal Superior– together with other institutions which trained teachers –was taken over by the School of Education, which later became the Centro de Investigación y Docencia en Educación or CIDE (Centre for Education Research and Teaching), which still operates.

As seen in recent data, the historical legacy of the Normal is shared between CIDE of Universidad Nacional and the Faculty of Education of UCR, both “in compelling gratitude, today must recognize the remote source of origin, august Escuela Normal de Costa Rica” (Cordero, 1998, p. 33).

Training Legacy of Escuela Normal: Final Considerations

The Universidad Nacional, heiress the work that Escuela Normal was once in charge, it obtains another meaning as training house of professionals in the broaden branches of knowledge, and in that line, it has sought to be recognized as an entity socially committed; thus expressed by Rivera (2012):



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Universidad Nacional... allowed expanding and strengthening the university autonomy, promoting the process of democratization of the State higher education encouraging the growth and expansion of the university system. In addition, this house of studies has allowed greater access to top level offering a comprehensive education to students. Also, it has prepared researchers and professionals from top level in all fields. (p. 28)

To this characterization of UNA, it should be added a humanist approach and a constant concern to serve, in a supportive way, populations and realities usually excluded from the centers of power and decision-making, where unquestionably the academy plays an important role.

In regards to the initial training of teachers, Universidad Nacional directs its attention, from CIDE, towards sectors where teachers with a commitment to equity and educational quality are required, so, following the example of Escuela Normal, strengthens access and opportunity equality among its students, bringing education to the most remote areas of the country and strengthening its scholarship system, conditions that make genuine access to higher education become a reality to alienated sectors. Therefore, UNA recognizes itself as the Required University, by which:

It guarantees that the study opportunities and integral development that offers reach all sectors of the Costa Rican society. This opportunity of access to study without exclusions joins the humanistic seal of UNA. The humanistic orientation and vision of integral development that characterizes this house of studies is reflected in the horizontal way that students, teachers and administrative officers relate, as well as in extracurricular activities that make students feel "at home". ([Universidad Nacional, s. f., para. 3-5](#))

During four decades, UNA has been strengthened as an institution and, thanks to the contributions of academic staff, students and administrative staff, receives recognition by distinguished personalities of science, culture and humanities; a great important fact for the country. It is necessary to highlight that teaching and learning go hand in hand with cultural and historical processes, in the context of each student and his/her career.

Although times have changed, and hence the way in how to deliver teaching, the origins of Universidad Nacional are still an inspiration for many people who believe in education as a key element for the development of the country, therefore from CIDE, values and experiences that once were key to the consolidation of our society are rescued.

School marks the lives of students; this is the space where the teacher contributes to the training in a mental, physical and spiritual way. The influence of the teacher either positive or negative cannot be ignored; the person who has the call for teaching should know that his/her work does not end in the classroom. ([León, 1982, p.108](#))





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In this way, the social, interdisciplinary and humanist approach that characterized the Costa Rican normal school is still valid in the mission of the CIDE, the center responsible for training teachers at UNA:

The Centro de Investigación en Docencia en Educación (Center for Research in Teaching Education) contributes to the qualitative and continuous improvement of education at institutional, national and international levels, to promote the comprehensive development of people and social transformation, through teaching processes, research, extension and academic production, based on humanism, excellence, social and environmental responsibility, integrity, equity and diversity assessment. (CIDE, s. f., para.1)

Therefore, while today calls for important changes in all areas, and particularly in education, the training of humanist teachers with solidarity spirit continues to be a fundamental and necessary premise for the promotion of an equitable society; therefore, it must be said that Escuela Normal de Costa Rica responded to the educational needs of the country and supplied thousands of teachers who inspired, trained and were in charge of Costa Rican education basis. Without this recognition, the educational history of our country would be incomplete.

Nowadays, the early humanists who excelled in that training are recovered and strengthened by the university democratic life and training priorities of UNA remain valid as well as the strong-willed spirit that today characterizes the initial training of teachers at CIDE.

Therefore, it can be stated, together with Cordero (1998), that Escuela Normal de Costa Rica, "in its scarce 60 years of existence fulfilled the purpose of its creation, and most importantly it has done it abundantly" (p. 30); such much that its legacy outlives it.

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