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Teachers' identities in Second Chance Schools: a comparative analysis of Buenos Aires and Barcelona

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Abstract

Second Chance Schools (SCS) aims to provide excluded young people with new opportunities for educational success. However, there is scarce research on teachers' identities as a crucial factor in understanding how these schools operate as sites of educational inclusion. Based on a comparison between SCS in Buenos Aires and Barcelona, this article argues that this modality of schooling contributes to the configuration of a dominant teacher identity, distant from that forged during the emergence of modern secondary schooling. Three elements feature this identity: the ethics of care, the personalization of teaching and the conception of teaching as a collective endeavour.

Keywords: second chance schools, educational exclusion, teacher identity, inclusive education, social justice

Introduction

Exclusion from secondary schooling is one of the key global challenges in ensuring equal opportunities and rights to all children and young people. Studies show that it dramatically affects their life chances (Gallagher, 2011: 448) leading to long-term dynamics of social exclusion (Macrae, Maguire & Milbourne, 2003). School and social exclusion reinforce each other, promoting a vicious circle of vulnerability, deprivation

and poverty (Harris, 2000, in Gallagher, 2011). Due to the individual and social benefits of staying in school (Looker & Thiessen, 2008), both the interest and the demand for alternative or Second Chance Schools (SCS) have increased (Mills et al., 2017). As indicated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2007), second chance programmes are of crucial importance to ensure a fair and equitable education system capable of dealing with school exclusion, early school leaving and dropping out.

Names such as 'flexible learning centres', 'second chance schools' and 'alternative schools' have been used both in the Global North and the Global South. They provide educational and social opportunities for young people who have been excluded from formal schooling. They are run by state or private institutions, target different groups of young people and have different institutional arrangements. They also differ in terms of philosophical, political and/or theoretical frameworks (Vadeboncoeur & Padilla-Petry, 2017). Although it is not possible to refer to a unique or coherent system of SCS (Looker & Thiessen, 2008), research from different countries shows that they all aim to support young people to re-engage with meaningful learning (Mills et al., 2015). They are all committed to providing new social and educational opportunities for socially disadvantaged young people through more flexible and personalized environments than mainstream schools. They all share 'the intention to change the way education is offered' (Mills et al., 2017: 8), challenging the exclusionary practices that operate within ordinary schools that prevent students from being educationally successful (Tarabini, 2019).

Although teachers' understanding of their profession has been recognized as relevant to any form of schooling (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996), few researchers have focused on their views, commitments and challenges in second chance educational settings. The recent publication of a special issue on teaching in alternative and flexible education settings is the first attempt to provide a general overview of this topic (Mills et al. 2017). This article aims to contribute to this line of inquiry. Following Mills et al. (2017), conducting research on teachers and teaching in alternative schools is of interest in its own right, as recognition of the relevance of these settings as workplaces and the implications to potentially inform policy change in mainstream schooling. Following Francis and Mills (2012), SCS attempt to challenge institutional practices of 'distinction', 'discipline' and 'brutalization' fostered by the organization of mainstream schooling, improving the wellbeing of young people and teachers and, consequently, increasing their potential to engage in social justice.

This piece aims to delve into the analysis of teachers' identities in two SCS from two different cities: Buenos Aires and the City of Cornellà de Llobregat (Barcelona). The following research questions frame the analysis: How do teachers define their role and their work in SCS? How do they organize their pedagogical practices according to that perceived mission and role? How do they see their own responsibility with regard to students' educational and social opportunities and trajectories? In order to address these questions, the paper is organized into five sections. The first section presents our theoretical take on teachers' identities, unfolding how the post-structuralist notion of 'teacher's position' helps trace teachers' perspectives and understandings of their jobs, responsibilities and their role in dealing with social and educational injustice. The second section offers basic contextual information on regular schools and SCS in the

two cities under study. The third section explains the methods and illustrates the main features of the two selected SCS (SCS1 for the case of Buenos Aires and SCS2 for the case of Barcelona). The fourth section deals with the key findings of the comparative analysis. In both schools, teachers assume similar positions and identities, which articulate an ethic of care, the personalization of teaching and an understanding of teaching as a collective endeavour. Here, the authors not only compare and contrast teachers' views in the cases under study, but also trace distances between them and dominant practices and discourses in mainstream schooling in both cities. In the last section, the authors discuss the main findings and argue that similarities in both schools must be understood as local responses to the crisis of modern secondary schooling (Dubet, 2010). The main hypothesis structuring the analysis is that this crisis is serving as fertile ground for the creation of alternative modalities of schooling and the production of a specific teacher's position that has been historically neglected by mainstream education in the Argentinean and Spanish education systems.

Teachers' identities in SCS

Since the 1980s there has been a steady growth of studies problematizing teachers' identities in Western post-industrial, emerging and developing countries (such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Spain, Finland, Chile and Argentina). In line with wider epistemological and theoretical turns within the social sciences and humanities, educational researchers have used the concept of identity to deal with what several authors have defined as the crisis of the social, institutional and pedagogic organization of modern schooling (Dubet & Martucelli, 1998).

Disciplines such as psychology, social psychology, sociology, anthropology and philosophy have offered analytic tools to define identities. To study teachers' identities, diverse theoretical standpoints have been mobilized (symbolic interactionism and post-structuralist feminism have been particularly fertile). Unpacking their features, differences and nuances is beyond the reach of this article. Suffice it to say that although they attach different centrality to individuals' agency, they all recognize the historical, situated and negotiated nature of the process of construction of teachers' identities and pay attention to teachers' perceptions of their work. Furthermore, they all address the significance of the interaction between the individual and the social context to unpack teachers' identities. As indicated by Ball and Goodson (1985: 2) 'any attempt to portray the contemporary situation of teachers' work and teachers' careers must inevitably begin by recognizing the changing context within which this work is undertaken and careers constructed'.

Two main research strands on teachers' identities may be identified: that which focuses on teachers' professional identity formation and that which examines specific aspects of teachers' identities (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). These studies mainly concentrate on mainstream primary and secondary schooling. The first strand encompasses the greatest number of studies. It explores how identities are shaped and changed over time. Numerous research studies have focused on the ways educational reforms threaten, empower or challenge teachers' identities. They explore 'what it feels like to be a teacher in today's schools' (Beijaard et al, 2004). In Western post-industrial societies, for instance, studies have looked at how accountability and performativity in educational regimes dramatically alter official expectations and demands on teachers' work.

Analyses have identified tensions, conflicts and disagreements between what teachers 'personally desire and experience as good' and what is expected from them. The second collection of studies encompasses examinations on teachers' self-image, commitment, political and ethical views, emotions and/or work orientations. Although the studies are located in specific contexts (such as educational reforms), their attention is particularly oriented to explore components of teachers' identities. For instance, several studies focus on emotions teachers associate with their work (which greatly vary according to the socio-historical, educational and institutional contexts), such as happiness, hope, vulnerability and anxiety.

With regard to SCS, only a few studies pay attention to teachers' identities in countries such as Australia, Argentina or the United Kingdom (Ashcroft, 1999; Morgan, 2017; Arroyo & Nobile, 2011). This piece contributes to this body of research. In so doing, a relational, negotiated and historic perspective on teachers' identities is assumed. Following Southwell and Vassiliades (2014), the authors use the notion of 'teacher's position', which is anchored in a post-structuralist and discursive understanding of teachers' identities. 'Teacher's position' refers to an understanding of teaching as linked to unstable knowledge and specific ways of teaching, whose transformations are promoted by the creation of and search for meanings of schooling. This notion allows us to interpret teaching as an open and non-predetermined process that it is embedded in specific contexts, relations and interactions. Following Ball and Goodson (1985), we see teachers as involved in the development of creative, strategical and situated responses to societal and institutional constraints. This assumes a relationship with culture based on multiple links to knowledge and ways of teaching that are never fully

stabilized, as they need to build up specific responses to particular processes and subjects of schooling. From this perspective, teaching is defined as a political act of making available to new generations a cultural heritage that lets them engage with contemporary questions about the world and allows them to formulate their own questions. Furthermore, teaching implies relationships with others, an understanding of what needs to be done with new generations and what kinds of rights they have to access cultural heritage, which is also historic and changing. In other words, teaching is linked to wider conceptions of the role of schooling in society and its relationships with work and politics.

The construction of a 'teacher's position' thus refers to the ways in which teachers are interpellated by particular situations and 'others' with whom they work. As argued by Nias (1985) reference groups are fundamental to the establishment of teachers' identities. It also refers to the ways in which teachers make themselves available to others, perform their jobs and forge unanticipated new relationships with colleagues, students and authorities. According to this perspective, the concept of 'teacher's position' refers to relational, affective and ethical dimensions and an understanding of what teachers' work could and should achieve. This concept helps trace teachers' work complexities, tensions and difficulties in social discourses and face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, it recognizes the disputed nature of the symbolic and material territory teachers take part in. 'Teacher's position' refers to the social and historic construction of perspectives on educational problems faced by teachers on a daily basis, as well as the role of teaching in their solution. It also involves provisional and disputed meanings around fairness, equality and inclusion. Teachers' positions are neither coherent nor homogeneous. They encompass a variety of general and specific discourses, voids,

gaps, silences and tensions. The notion of 'teacher's position' attempts to address the paradoxes, contradictions, conflicts and historicity that featured the construction of teachers' identities. This concept allows recognition of the articulation of different elements around what constitutes a good school, a good teacher and a good student, which could be contradictory or even antagonistic.

Mainstream and second chance schooling in the cities of Buenos Aires and Barcelona

Since the 1990s, different tides of educational reforms have altered central aspect of the governance of schools, the curriculum, teachers´ working conditions and training in Argentina and Spain. Even if there are differences in the educational policies and politics of both countries, their policy landscapes share some key aspects (Verger, Novelli & Kosar-Altinyelken, 2012): the decentralisation of the administration, funding and running of schools to provincial governments; the greater curricular and financial school autonomy (with varying degrees and levels across jurisdictions); greater levels of intensification and flexibilisation of teachers´ work; the consolidation and expansion of circuits of schooling (which relates to higher levels of privatisation and internal differentiation of the state and private sector); and the persistence of relatively high levels of "educational failure" (repetition and drop out).

Before examining the cases under study and our research methods, this section describes key features of the Argentinean and Spanish mainstream education systems, as well as SCS in the localities where the studies were carried out. We present evidence of the persistent failure of mainstream secondary schooling to include every child, as

well as the recent emergence of SCS created to deal with those who have been left behind. We also offer evidence of their central differences and their distinctive features.

With regard to basic education, in Argentina, education is compulsory from age four to 17/18 and encompasses at least 13 school years: two for early childhood education, six or seven for primary education and five or six for secondary schooling (see Figure 1). Access to non-university institutions and state universities is open, which means that any secondary school graduate is able to enrol in any degree without any further entrance requirements.

[FIGURE 1]

Although secondary schooling has rapidly grown from a net school rate of 32.8% in 1970 to 51.3% in 1991, 71.5% in 2001, and to 85.4% in 2013 (Rivas et al, 2010); there are persistently high levels of repetition and drop out. Similarly to other Latin American countries, if pupils do not achieve the expected educational standards for a school year in primary or secondary education, they must repeat the year. During the period from 2000 to 2014, nearly 50% of young people who began secondary schooling dropped out. Furthermore, according to official statistics, in 2015 one student out of ten repeated at least one school year. Despite the myriad of national and local policy initiatives to alter some aspects of secondary schooling (such as the curriculum, pedagogy and teachers' working conditions), the increase of state funding for basic education and the centrality of 'inclusion' in the policy agenda, levels of dropping out and repetition remain stable.

With regard to SCS, different provincial states (such as Cordoba, Neuquen and the province and city of Buenos Aires) have prompted the creation of state secondary schools mainly targeted at students excluded from mainstream schooling (due to a variety of reasons such as illness, repetition or drop out). Although their pedagogic and academic organization is very different from that of mainstream schools, they have similar aims and offer equivalent educational credentials. Unlike mainstream schools, repetition does not exist in SCS. In the city of Buenos Aires, six SCS were created in 2004 and two in 2006 as part of a wider local inclusive policy strategy. SCS aimed to guarantee the return, attendance and graduation of young people between the ages of 16 and 18 who had dropped out for (at least) one school year. Unlike mainstream schooling, in SCS educational trajectories are personalized and every pupil receives a bursary. The curriculum of SCS is shorter than that of ordinary schools and is split into compulsory modules and optional workshops. SCS have a higher percentage of teachers who are paid for non-contact teaching time than ordinary schools. At the time of their creation, SCS were a policy priority in the city; they had their own school inspector, specific technical assistance, higher funding per pupil and more professional support and training than mainstream schools. Since the arrival of the current educational administration in 2007, SCS have received less resources and support and are currently at risk of losing their secondary school status.

In the case of Spain, education is compulsory from age six to 16 and encompasses 10 years of schooling: six for primary education (ages six to 11) and four for lower secondary education (ages 12 to 16) (see Figure 2).

[FIGURE 2]

In formal terms, lower secondary schooling in Spain is comprehensive, meaning that all students are subjected to common curricular standards with no internal differentiation beyond age parameters (only in upper secondary schooling are two different tracks provided: one academic and one vocational). However, the non-differentiated structure of lower secondary education in Spain runs alongside high levels of grade retention and multiple forms of streaming and ability grouping (Tarabini et al, 2018). According to PISA 2015, 31.3% of 15-year-old Spanish students had repeated a grade at least once during their compulsory schooling, whilst the OECD average is 11.3%. Simultaneously, and according to the same data, only 39.92% of 15-year-old students in Spain were enrolled in schools where students were not grouped by ability into different classes (the OECD average is 54.2%). Furthermore, both grade retention and ability grouping had been identified by previous research as critical elements in stimulating and producing dropping out among young people (Tarabini et al, 2018). Indeed, Spain has one of the highest levels of early school leaving among European countries: 18.3% in 2016 in comparison to the EU average of 10.6% (EUROSTAT data).

In this context, several forms of SCS have been implemented across Spain. Although there are different modalities, they are mostly non-for-profit private foundations created at the margins of mainstream schooling. Their funding relies on state subsidies and/or private companies' donations. Consequently, although some of them have a long and consolidated trajectory (such as the case under study in this article), they all share a precarious financial situation. They offer an official certificate of SCS and target young people aged 15 to 29 without a secondary education degree and/or employment and in situations of high social and personal vulnerability.

Similar to that observed in the Argentinean case, the Spanish SCS differ from mainstream schooling in their organization of curricular and pedagogical practices. Repetition does not exist, educational trajectories are personalized and curriculum provision is more flexible and adapted to students' characteristics and needs. Simultaneously, the teacher-student ratio is lower than in mainstream secondary schooling; dominant mechanisms of discipline and surveillance are drastically reduced and substituted by other practices addressed to achieve students' commitment and trust.

Argentina and Spain, following the same trend as many other 'modern' education systems around the globe, have been experiencing the rapid expansion of education systems, together with the progressive inclusion of social groups traditionally excluded from mainstream education, and have not been able to substantially reduce the social inequalities between social groups in terms of learning (evidenced by relative higher levels of drop out, lower academic achievement and lower graduation rates of young people from working class families). Furthermore, institutional fragmentation has increased, contributing to the amplification of social inequalities with regard to school provision, educational experiences and outcomes. Despite numerous educational reforms in both countries, dominant forms of schooling have failed to include all students, damaging them in different symbolic and material ways (Francis & Mills, 2012).

The schools and the research methods

The authors of this paper carried out qualitative research in two SCS: SCS1 for the case of Buenos Aires and SCS2 for the case of Barcelona (see Table 1). Both schools were created in 2004 and are well known at provincial and national levels. They have

struggled (in different ways) for the recognition of the legitimacy of their novel approach to schooling in their specific contexts. Similar research methods were followed in both studies: individual and group interviews[1] with school actors (students were also interviewed in the Spanish case), participant observations and documentary analysis of public and semi-public documents. Fieldwork in Argentina took place from December 2010 to March 2013 and in Spain during the academic years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. The following table summarizes key aspects of the schools.

[TABLE 1]

The original studies explored different dimensions of SCS by unpacking teachers' perspectives. In the Spanish case, attention to students' perspectives was also paramount. After the completion of their individual studies in 2018, the authors decided to compare and contrast their findings and evidence. Analyses were organized around key themes such as the socio-historical configuration of each local education system and the relative position of SCS; the historical development of alternative schooling; staffing; material resources available; social intakes; the organization of the curriculum; educational credentials; and authorities', teachers' and students' views about mainstream and second chance schooling. These comparisons allowed us to identify striking similarities in the ways in which teachers present their jobs, concerns and everyday priorities, as well as their views on students' social and educational needs. This analytic trajectory has allowed us to problematize teachers' narratives in new ways. The notions of teachers' identities and positions, together with care, personalization of learning and collective work, have served us in reinterpreting our

[1] In both case studies we developed semi-structured interviews with a length between an hour and an hour of a half. Questions were oriented to obtain information about the features of SCS, the profile of the students and the role and identity of teachers. Questions were also addressed to compare and contrast mainstream schooling and SCS in term of pedagogic practices and teachers' work.

original findings (Meo 2011; Meo 2013; Meo 2015; Tarabini 2018). Furthermore, our analyses shed light on the conditions fostering similar types of identities in SCS in different socio-historical and educational scenarios.

Traces of a similar teacher's position in the city of Buenos Aires and Barcelona

Despite the particularities of the socio-educational contexts in which SCS1 and SCS2 operate, the comparison of their teachers' narratives about their jobs, students and the role of secondary schooling has allowed us to identify three core common elements of their positions and identities: the centrality of the ethics of care, the personalization of teaching and the conception and practice of teaching as a collective endeavour.

The centrality of the ethics of care

To analyse key aspects of the narratives and teachers' dominant position in the two cases under study, we use the concept of 'ethic of care' coined by feminist researchers. We use this concept to refer to a collection of moral orientations, sentiments and emotions. A feminist ethic of care highlights 'connection' as being fundamental in human life (Gilligan, 1982). In this sense, people (male and female) live in connection with one another. Care involves interpersonal relationships and special obligations. Previous research has shown that teachers view caring as an integral part of elementary and primary school teaching and flexible secondary schooling, although its meaning varies (Vogt, 2002; Te Riele et al, 2017; Taggart, 2011).

For instance, Nias (1999) recognises different aspects of care: care as responsibility for learners; care as affectivity; care as responsibility for the relationships in the school; care as over-consciousness; care as identity; and care as self-sacrifice. Vogt (2002), on

the other hand, infers similar categories of care from her empirical research on primary teachers: caring as relatedness; caring as commitment; caring as physical care; caring as expressing affection, such as giving a cuddle; caring as parenting; and caring as mothering. In flexible schools, Renshaw (2017) highlights the relevance of an ethic of care and affective labour for teachers and teacher education. According to Renshaw, these features tend to be misrecognized by dominant professional teaching standards (not only in Australia where he based this study, but also in other Western post-industrialized and developing countries).

Teachers interviewed both in SCS1 and SCS2 expressed the centrality of connections and relationships (with students, teachers, school authorities and pastoral staff) in their everyday attempts to respond to what they interpreted as their students' needs. Building trusting relationships, feeling affect and being affected by their students' lives and recognizing them as individuals emerge as key elements that are articulated within what we call a dominant teacher's position (Lasky, 2005; Renshaw. 2017; Te Riele et al, 2017). The great majority of teachers interviewed believed their students could learn and achieve good results. They believed the students needed to feel recognized and valued in order to develop self-esteem, to deconstruct the negative views about their abilities and to cope with school and teachers' academic and social demands and expectations. In both countries, teachers, school authorities and pedagogic staff agreed that this type of school should contribute to the transformation of young people into learners and students. For instance, an SCS1 teacher stated, 'they need time to become students again' and 'they need to understand that they can learn, that they are able to learn, that they have abilities of different sorts' (Language and Literature teacher, SCS1). In SCS2, similar narratives emerged: 'they have to re-learn to be students, to

tolerate learning, to reconcile with themselves as learners' (Principal, SCS2); 'we cannot assume that the students are properly students, we need them to consent to be students, to give us permission to be teachers' (Pedagogic coordinator, SCS2); and 'my job here is that they [young people] see they have valuable knowledge, that they can do it well' (Tutor, SCS2).

Teachers from both schools agreed that this endeavour demands time and patience. Expressions such as 'we bet for them', 'we believe in them' and 'we are here to be with them' or 'to assist them' were common in teachers' narratives. Teaching was understood as a complex job that involved emotional, relational and academic aims, as the following extracts from both schools illustrate:

> In this type of school, teachers get deeply involved, including your body. We have students who have many problems with drug addictions, girls who are mothers at a very young age, and students who have been abused. The role of many teachers who are tutors is to help them out…We have to help them out and try to identify the ways in which the school could support them or help them in some way (Maths teacher and tutor, SCS1).

> Our students have very difficult lives. Some of them are in a very, fragile and precarious social situation…When they arrive here they need to see that we are available, but available means fully available, we are here for them, to support them in anything they need. Most of the time, following the protocols is not enough; you need to go further beyond, to really stay available in the broadest sense of the word (Tutor, SCS2).

These extracts delineate key elements of this 'caring' aspect of the dominant teacher's position in SCS. Here, caring is associated with being deeply involved with and fully available for young people, including mentally and physically. This involvement and availability is based on a deep awareness and consciousness of the students' social, family and schooling trajectories and how they have affected students' sense of selves – as individuals and as students. It is not only to be aware of these trajectories and social contexts, but also to recognize their value and legitimacy. In this sense, teachers in both schools recognize the material and emotional conditions necessary for learning and they are committed to develop them as far as they can. In their view, SCS should be 'safety nets' not only in physical and material terms, but also, and above all, in emotional terms, as spaces where young people feel respected and represented and where they feel they belong.

> We work with young people from unprivileged backgrounds. If we could help them to discover that they can achieve and that they have potential, we are doing great. Before entering this school, everybody had told this young boy that he wasn't worth it, that he couldn't, that he wasn't clever enough, and that he deserved to be in a shitty place. We are here for them and we try to convince them that they could search for something different in life (Teacher, SCS1).

> For these kids the time they spend here is a time to be truly accompanied. It is a time to learn where they are, to know their position, their role in this world, to stop feeling what they have been feeling for years and entering a new place, a new space, from the opportunity. The fact of them being able to open up to the world, to trust someone, to see they can achieve something, they are capable, this is crucial. They need to know that they can do it (Tutor, SCS2).

This commitment, relatedness and responsibility for learners are crucial parts of the professional identity of these teachers. In line with other studies focusing on emotions and teaching in this type of flexible schools (Nobile 2015), our studies show that teachers identified building trusting and caring relationships with students as central to their sense of who they were as teachers. Teachers' narratives referred to joy, empathy and hope when they talked about their work, students and colleagues. Only a few of them mentioned exhaustion, despair and lack of patience. Although these emotions were part and parcel of their jobs, they preferred to highlight positive emotions. They drew upon valued discourses about what a good teacher should be in SCS and in so doing, they were mobilizing a specific teacher's position, which departs from that associated with traditional secondary schooling. Unlike mainstream schools in both countries and in line with research on teaching in SCS (Nobile, 2015), teachers' sense of worth in SCS1 and SCS2 is articulated around their ability to make connections, to care for pupils and to be able to become emotionally involved. In teachers' words:

> To be a teacher here you have to be committed. Your job is to accompany students, to open up doors…To accompany them in their learning of not only the official curriculum but also in their cognitive process, linked to their social context, to things they learn and to their dreams too…That is the role of the school (Teacher of the radio workshop, SCS1).

> As a teacher in this school, I identify myself as a counsellor, as a person who should guide young people in finding themselves, their motivations and their trajectories. Our role is to help our students to find something positive about themselves and about studying…they have had very bad experiences in their

> educational trajectories and we need them to rebuild trust, in the system, in themselves, in us. (Tutor, SCS2).

Moreover, the high number of pupils' per teacher, the increasing bureaucratization of teacher's work or the strong segmentation of the curriculum in mainstream secondary schooling were seen by SCS teachers as key elements hindering the articulation of this ethics of care in traditional schools.

> This kind of school represents the future. This modality of schooling does not stereotype, does not standardize. It is flexible and adaptable to students' times and needs. This has to be the basis for any kind of educational reform. It is precisely for these features that SCS enrol every day more and more pupils and traditional schools loose more and more of them. Students don't have the same learning pace and we give students time (Teacher, SCS1)

> I do believe that this school can adapt to its students much more than ordinary schools. It has flexibility in time, spaces, schedules, curriculum, which allows the students to enter into a learning dynamic, in a kind of learning wheel. If you have this structure, you can teach quietly, you can stop, go ahead and back, give yourself time…And that's why it works! It is the big difference perceived by the students. This is a school *for them* while regular schooling is perceived as built *against them* (Principal, SCS2).

The personalization of teaching

A second element present in the narratives of the interviewed teachers and linked to teachers' ethic of care was their recognition of students as individuals who, unlike in mainstream schooling, 'are not numbers'. In fact, the dominant teacher's position in both schools was articulated with a conception of teaching as a personalized matter. In line with this, teachers stated that they 'knew' their students, their first names and their life histories. They wanted to respect their identities, produced by different ways of presenting themselves that tend to be devalued or condemned in ordinary schools. For instance, in SCS1, a chemistry teacher asserted: 'many boys wear hoodies and caps in the classroom. We allow that. They are also part of who they are. You have to respect that'. Previous research has shown that personalization of teaching and learning is a central concern in SCS (Ziegler & Nobile, 2014). These schools share a concern for recognizing individuals' circumstances, needs and pace of learning when defining their pedagogic approaches. Distant from the traditional teacher-centred pedagogy, these schools and their teachers emphasize the need to develop new pedagogic approaches, wherein students' trajectories assume centrality. In this sense, personalization and flexibility are two crucial elements across the organization of SCS, including the configuration of students' pathways, the curriculum and the pedagogy.

With regard to the configuration of educational pathways, both schools provide a variety of options for the students that can be adaptable. In the case of SCS1, this adaptation is based on the selection of optional courses and workshops (such as radio, music, physical education and drama lessons) and in the provision of compulsory topics that, according to teachers, include basic and foundational knowledge expected at mainstream secondary schooling. In the case of SCS2, it is mainly based on the duration, depth and pace of each module, which are organized around students' needs

and circumstances. Expressions such as ‘tailored suit’ and ‘flexibility’ encapsulate key aspects of how teachers’ and authorities’ narratives depict their schools and how they differ from mainstream institutions.

> This school is like a tailored suit. It’s like you measure each young person and we try to adapt the school to that measure. Here you can enrol in one module. This allows us to see which subject the young person likes more and, if they cannot continue with other modules, at least they can go on to that one. We also prioritize attendance at (non-compulsory) workshops. If we see a student who has a talent or is interested in doing a workshop, we try to stimulate that first and then we widen their options…These are strategies we keep creating with young people and, sometimes, with parents in order to see how we can adjust the school so students can keep coming (Pedagogic Assistant, SCS1).

> For us the crucial word is flexibility. My hypothesis is that if we build flexible and personalized pathways, with their specific *tempos* for specific needs, this will allow our youth to achieve a personal construction of success (Head teacher, SCS2).

Concerning the curriculum, it is very important to notice that in both schools, teachers participated in the selection of knowledge. Some made a collective effort to select content, sequence teaching and devise assessment tools in an attempt to be responsible for their students’ lives and variable school engagement. Others made these kinds of decisions by themselves. In both cases, teachers expressed that their decisions attempted to recognize students’ previous knowledge, pace of learning and social and family circumstances. The following extracts illustrate these views:

> We have the freedom to think about what we can do to improve…This year we've made changes to the Maths curriculum, based on our experiences last year…We've realized that for students it was very difficult to start working with whole numbers, positive and negative ones…Before, we began the school year with whole numbers and this demands a degree of abstraction…We think that young people, although they are 15 or 16 years old, they don't have that kind of abstract thinking. Hence we've decided to start with geometry, which we always taught at the end of the year and many times we didn't even teach it…Now we revise content taught in primary schooling in order to help students…to immerse in Maths…I also organize games, try to work with problems, things that are interesting to them. Some of them really like that. With others it is more difficult (Maths teacher and tutor, SCS1).

> We have to teach social and personal competences. We have to teach to be, to relate, to respect. We do not only teach specific skills or subjects, we teach to be full citizens. This is our task. And you cannot learn this only from theory. If you want to teach to work in a team you have to work as a team in the classroom. You have to guarantee a structure that gives real meaning to these competences (Tutor, SCS2).

According to teachers, the rationale of the selection and organization of knowledge is based on an understanding of students as a distinct social group, whose cultural traits, social background and previous academic knowledge demands localized pedagogic approaches. As a result, this interest in addressing students' particularities is also reflected in the organization of pedagogy. Both in SCS1 and SCS2, different groups of

teachers produced pedagogic materials, which were made up of a collection of exercises with different degrees of difficulty that students could complete during and/or after lesson time, following their own pace. In SCS1, the use of this material was also a key strategy to deal with students who were unable to regularly attend lessons during the last school year (due to a variety of reasons such as pregnancy, illness and/or work). In these cases, subject teachers liaised with tutors or the pedagogic assistant to create customized homework that the teachers would send students by e-mail. This type of homework involved monitoring, communication and negotiation between teachers, tutors and students.

Moreover, in the specific case of SCS2, one of the crucial elements of its pedagogic practice is the articulation between 'theory' and 'practice' in daily activities. This school confers the same importance on 'intellectual' and 'manual' knowledge, breaking the longstanding prejudices regarding the value of practical knowledge and attributing the same space, value and acknowledgement to the 'head' and to the 'hands' in the learning process (Lahelma, 2009). This is highly relevant because in most cases, the mainstream organization of schooling gives centrality to abstract and intellectual knowledge in the organization of curricular and pedagogical activities, relegating specific knowledge and abilities of unprivileged young people. The consequence of this process is that working class young people do not feel represented in formal schooling, and their specific knowledge and abilities are neither acknowledged nor valued; this is one of the key elements explaining why they drop out (Tarabini, 2019). This particularity of SCS2 could be interpreted as a result of the disparities between both schools in terms of their general aims, the provision of their educational credentials and their location within the mainstream education system. As seen in previous sections, the

Argentinean SCS1 mainly addresses students' re-entry into the formal academic education system, whilst the Spanish SCS2 also prepares students for vocational courses and access to the labour market.

Teaching as a collective endeavour

The third constitutive element of the teacher's positions is the conception and practice of teaching as a collective endeavour. In the two case studies, teachers' narratives identified 'working with others' as a crucial strategy to deal with the complexities and challenges involved in teaching and learning at SCS. This dominant subject position integrates visions of teaching as a collective endeavour that takes place beyond the walls of the classroom. Working with others is key to supporting students as well as teachers' work. As indicated by these teachers working in both SCS:

> Teamwork is good…We shouldn't work alone. We shouldn't lock ourselves in the classroom because, when you close yourself, you cannot deal with everything, you cannot. There are so many overwhelming things. It's good to have a supportive pastoral staff, a school authority who listens to you…and you have to make decisions and to contemplate students' needs…if you are in a team it is easier… In traditional secondary schools, there are many teachers. It's difficult to create teams…You hardly have the opportunity to meet your own colleagues (Language and Literature teacher, SCS1).

> We work together in multiple senses, we are a team…we dedicate a lot of time to speaking and coordinating with one another, but also to talk about the students, to share our impressions, our routines, and also our frustrations and our

> despairs, this is very important…We feel that we are all responsible for our students, all of us as a group (Pedagogic coordinator, SCS2).

These teachers emphasize the centrality of not locking themselves in the classroom, highlighting differences with traditional secondary schools where working with others is hampered by teachers' working conditions. In Argentina, for example, the majority of teachers get paid only for lesson time. Despite new legislation creating new teachers´ posts which pays for teaching contact and non-contact time (including time for institutional meetings) in the City of Buenos Aires, its implementation has been patchy and highly criticised by unions. In Spain, both teacher-students' ratio in secondary schooling (30-36 students per classroom) and the high weight of lesson time within teachers' weekly schedule (19 hours of a total of 37,5 per week) significantly hamper collaboration amongst them. The individualization of teachers' work has indeed been a crucial element in the institutional transmission of schooling. Teachers interviewed in SCS1 and SCS2 illustrate a dominant teacher's position in which teamwork is understood as crucial to deal with students' everyday social and pedagogic challenges and problems. Moreover, this position involves a blurring of the historical boundary between what went on in and outside the classroom. At the same time, their narratives allow identification of the conditions for this teacher's position to be potentially developed. Beyond teachers' individual willingness, there is a need for particular material and temporal and human conditions to articulate a collaborative work atmosphere and SCS are in an exceptional position in this regard compared to mainstream secondary schools.

> Accompanying students, supporting them, well...you also get all that...being part of a group [referring to teachers] is part of an identity, right? It's not just me who

> enters the classroom and I just do what I can. It's me and the group. I am with others (Head teacher, SCS1).
>
> One of the big problems of traditional secondary schools is time. We, as teachers, do not have time for anything. And the budget cuts in recent years have worsen the situation. We spend many hours within the classroom, alone, we have no support from our peers, we have no time to coordinate, to evaluate our work, even to think. Instead of that, in this school [the Second Chance School] we organise time in a very different way. We collaborate in everything, in the planning, in the teaching, in student's pastoral support. We really work as a team and we run the school in order to make this possible (Principal, SCS2).

It is also important to highlight that collective work in both schools took place in institutional and non-institutional meetings. Among the former, the majority of teachers participated in several kinds of institutional sessions in order to have time to discuss the specificities and necessities of their students, as well as the challenges of their pedagogic practice. Topics such as students' trajectories, school acts, school projects and activities were discussed in these gatherings in order to create a 'sense' and a 'practice' of unity within the schools. In this sense, some of these meetings involved opportunities to voice opinions and to participate in the decision-making process of different aspects of everyday schooling. In addition to this, meeting up in the staff room, the corridors and in the head teacher and secretary's office was part and parcel of what teachers did; in these encounters, teachers aired students' stories, their concerns, anxieties and fears and their ways of dealing with certain students. As indicated by the pedagogic coordinator of SCS2, '[a]ll the spaces in the school are spaces for meeting,

both among teachers and among teachers and students. You can assist a student in the corridor, you can chat with your mate at the coffee machine…All the spaces have educational value (Pedagogic coordinator, SCS2).

Teachers valued the opportunity to share in order to make sense of their own experiences request advice, which was part of this ongoing and collective conversation that did not rule out differences, conflicts and disagreements. School authorities and some teachers pointed out that, despite the centrality of these spaces, it was still necessary to do more, in particular concerning pedagogy. They argued that a more systematic and institutional approach was needed. However, lack of time and resources in a context of pressing circumstances work against attempts in that direction. Schooling in the age of neo-liberalism, in McGregor's (2009) terms, involves high pressures to institute educational reform that work against the kind of democratic and student-centred approaches developed by SCS.

Discussion and final remarks

As seen above, the studied SCS share numerous key social, educational and organizational attributes: i) their teacher-student ratio and class size are smaller than those of mainstream schools; ii) their teachers state that they have high levels of professional and personal satisfaction and are committed to their schools' educational and social projects; iii) they were created as a reaction to the inability of secondary schooling to include vast groups of students, mainly coming from the working classes and marginalized social groups; iv) they redefine key aspects of traditional schooling (such as setting institutional arrangements to highlight students' individual educational trajectories, offer more flexible curricular options and attempt to integrate students'

interests and knowledge into the curriculum); and, finally, v) they have similar positions in their school systems (they are valued by educational and school authorities and their operation and continuity are constantly threatened, whether by local education reforms in the city of Buenos Aires or by lack of regular funding in Barcelona).

However, these SCS also have particularities and specificities. As shown before, they are entangled within their specific socio-educational contexts. Their governance, management and funding arrangements are different. Their institutional goals are also distinctive. In the city of Buenos Aires, educational inclusion (understood as the effective integration of young people in secondary schooling) has been the policy goal orienting the creation of SCS and the completion of secondary schooling has been their central goal. In Barcelona, on the other hand, the social and occupational inclusion of young people are also institutional priorities. Furthermore, curricular priorities (basic common school curricula in SCS1 and vocational curricula in SCS2) and the schools' institutional networks (their scope and nature) are diverse.

In previous sections, we argued that there is a dominant teacher's position in the studied SCS in the city of Buenos Aires and Barcelona revolving around three key elements: an ethic of care, the mandate of personalizing learning and recognizing students as individuals and the collective and collaborative nature of their work. The configuration of this common dominant discourse in schools from different socio-historical and institutional contexts that share some specific traits needs to be explained. The emergence of this common discursive teaching position could be interpreted as the result of the crisis of traditional modern secondary schooling. Following Dubet (2010), the crisis of modern schooling serves as fertile ground for the creation of discourses of

secondary schooling and the production of a specific teacher's position that have been historically neglected by traditional mainstream schooling in Argentina and Spain. This discursive subject position is being produced in opposition to key elements of the educational discourse of modern schooling, such as teaching as an institutional role with pedagogic authority, a 'one size fits all' pedagogy and teaching as a mainly classroom and individualized endeavour.

SCS (such as the ones in this study) have the particularity of targeting socially disadvantaged groups and of being created as responses to the failure of compulsory mainstream schooling to effectively include every young person (McGregor & Mills, 2011). These organizations evidence the crisis of the modern secondary schooling and represent attempts to respond to its challenges in teaching and learning. Alternative models of education have deployed artefacts, narratives, organization of time and space and meanings of schooling that demarcate boundaries between themselves and modern secondary schools that, despite recent educational reforms, continued sharing a "grammar" and a "format" that promoted educational failure of those who "do not fit in".

Our paper has offered evidence of the configuration of a common subject position of teachers working in SCS. Teachers' narratives refer to how they must construct pedagogic authority and relationships with students (through the ethic of care and personalization of teaching) and define teaching as a collective and collaborative endeavour rather than a solitary one. They do so by distancing themselves from their own work in mainstream schools and/or from the social ideas around how ordinary schools and ordinary teachers should and could operate (due to its organisation of time

and space, and its conceptions of learning and teaching). These narratives and the creation of flexible schools show not only the crisis of modern schooling, but also the existence of a competing 'alternative' policy and educational discourse, which in a previous work we called the 'inclusion and personalization' discourse (Meo, 2015). This discourse, together with its vocabulary, meanings and conditions to operate, seems to be a fertile terrain to counteract the effects of neo-liberalism in education and to foster social justice (Mills et al, 2015).

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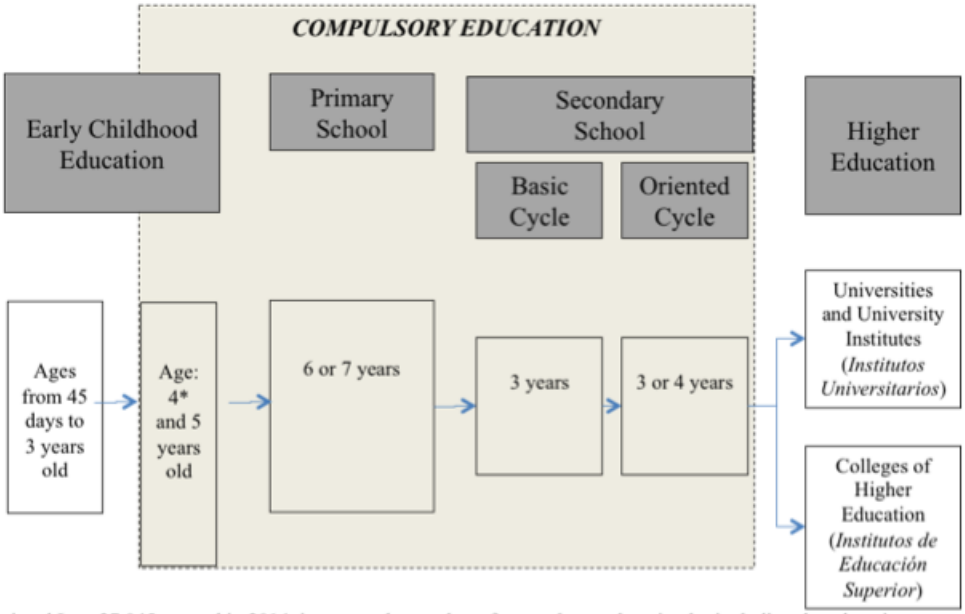
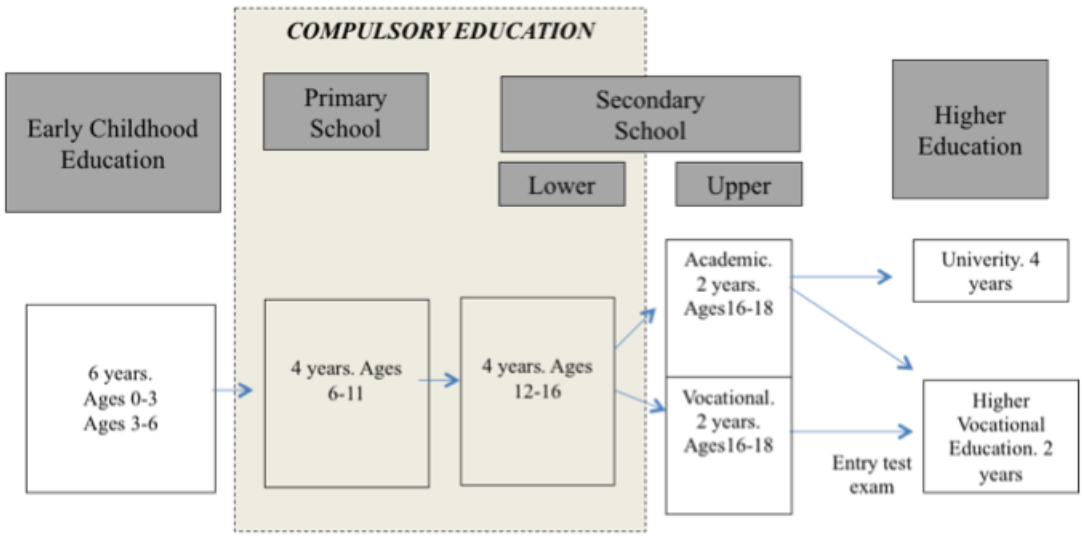
Figure 1. Structure of the Argentinean Education System



* The National Law 27.045, passed in 2014, increases the number of compulsory education by including the education for 4 years old.

Figure 2. Structure of the Spanish Education System



* Removed under the new National Law num. 295, 10/12/2013

Source: Tarabini, et al (2018)

Table 1. Main features of the selected schools

School	SCS1 Buenos Aires	SCS2 Barcelona
Year of its creation	2004	2004
Enrolment	Almost 500 students	Approximately 400 students
Students' ages	From 16 up to 20	From 14 to 25, most of them from 16 to 18
Social intake	Working class/non-formal occupations. A quarter of the girls were mothers and/or were pregnant.	More than half of students' families were unskilled workers in industry or services, some in informal employment and one out of ten in structural unemployment.
School staff	45 professionals. Half of the teachers had traditional teaching training. Staff from other institutions (such as a hospital, the Ministry of Economy and one union) also ran activities at the school.	40 professionals. A multidisciplinary team, with professionals coming from the educational sector (psychologists, pedagogues and teachers) plus workshop teacher specializing in their professions and voluntary workers.

Educational certificates	Secondary school certificate	Secondary school certificate and/or specific vocational certificates
Main goal	Educational inclusion	Educational, labour and social inclusion
Funding	Mostly public	Mostly private foundations or state subsidies
School position in the system	Valued by other SCS and local mainstream schools and high visibility and recognition at national level.	One of the main promoters of the National Association of SCS. High visibility and recognition at national level.