

## Good teachers? Voices of High School Students in Marginal Urban Settings

### ¿Buenos profesores? La voz de los estudiantes de escuelas secundarias en contextos urbanos marginales

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#### Abstract

This article explores the attributes of “good” teachers working at high schools serving disadvantaged populations in the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The research methodology used is “pupil’s voice” (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). Through an empirical study of 5 urban high schools and 167 students, this paper investigates: What characteristics do urban high school students mention when they describe “good” teachers in high schools in marginal urban areas? The study describes the importance of relational attributes in shaping teacher ability. Interestingly, the relational sphere remains absent in Argentine national curricular guidelines. Hence, exploring ways to foster relational attributes of prospective teachers would seem to be a relevant issue to promote learning.

**Keywords:** teachers, urban schools, teaching aptitude, students, low income contexts

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## Resumen

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El presente artículo indaga sobre los atributos de los «buenos profesores» que enseñan en escuelas secundarias que atienden a poblaciones desfavorecidas en la Provincia de Buenos Aires. La metodología de la investigación sigue el enfoque *pupil's voice* (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). A través de un estudio empírico realizado en cinco escuelas secundarias que contó con la participación de 167 estudiantes, la investigación interroga: ¿qué características señalan los estudiantes al momento de describir los «buenos» profesores en escuelas secundarias de urbes marginales? El estudio señala la importancia que adquieren los atributos relacionales en la percepción que los estudiantes tienen de los buenos profesores. Llama la atención que dicha dimensión no se encuentre presente en los lineamientos curriculares para la formación docente inicial en Argentina. Por ello, explorar estrategias para desarrollar atributos relacionales en los futuros docentes parecería ser una cuestión pertinente para promover el aprendizaje en el aula.

**Palabras clave:** profesores, escuela secundaria, idoneidad docente, estudiantes, contextos desfavorables

### Teacher Identity and Good Teachers in Argentina

A number of studies have underlined the key role of the teacher in the success or failure of any education reform (Cochran-Smith, 2012). It is therefore essential for education policies to consider teachers and the quality of their teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Education reforms in the last 30 years have demonstrated that the impact on student learning has to be the yardstick in assessing the effectiveness of any educational innovation (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010). However, as the perception of the importance of the teacher as an agent of improvement has grown, the boundaries of what it means to be a teacher have become blurred. For that reason teacher identity and the skills needed to be a good teacher in the 21st century are a subject under constant debate (Friedrich, 2014).

Argentina is no stranger to the global processes regarding the transformation of the role of the teacher. After the transfer of national teacher training institutions to the provinces in 1992, the need to reunify educational policy led to the foundation of the National Teacher Training Institute (INFD by the Spanish acronym) in 2006 under the National Education Act (LNE by the Spanish acronym). This started a process of reform of initial and continuing teacher training. The educational reform policies implemented since 2008 include the new curriculum proposal, which covers four years of initial training and common content for the whole country.

As regards teacher identity, the LNE maintains that teachers have the obligation of carrying out their work in an «appropriate and responsible manner» (art. 67d). However, the law does not state what characteristics or teaching performances are appropriate. Both the LNE and the lines of work of the INFD assume that the «ideal» teacher is a person that is recognizable to all and there is a high degree of consensus regarding their constituent elements. However, the notion of suitability is a polygenic notion that has many connotations. For example, in international speeches, the expert teacher is usually referred to as «successful teacher» or «effective teacher». On beginning this investigation, it became clear from the outset that the term *ideal* was not present in the discourse in the schools studied. Neither the students nor parents mentioned the term and only one director of the five schools referred to suitability as a 'quality'. For this reason, this research uses the term *good teacher*, which appears in the narratives of the schools analyzed as an umbrella term that defines a certain positive assessment of teachers. The term *good teacher* is used by middle school students in the Province of Buenos Aires to connote positively the work of certain teachers.

The use of the specific term in each group and area of analysis is no coincidence and has as its aim to examine the logical and analytical concepts of marginal urban settings. In this framework, the article problematizes the nature of claims about what it means to be a good teacher in schools in marginal urban settings. Research seeks to «transform the familiar [the good teacher] into the unknown» (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 19) to analyze and reconstruct the way in which good teachers teach in schools that serve disadvantaged populations. The research recognizes the complexity of the analysis because of the

specificity of each perspective on characterizing the traits of an expert teacher. Therefore, we recognize that the specific adjectives for a *good* teacher reflect one view among other possibilities.

There is an extensive literature in English-speaking countries on expert teachers (Ashton, 1984; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Husbands, 2016). Ladson-Billings (1995), in her article «But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy», which researches a group of schools that primarily served the Afro-American population, is an example of work that collects the opinions of directors, teachers, and parents. However, her valuable study does not look at the perspective of the students.

In Latin America, and particularly in Argentina, there are few research that moves away from the deficit paradigm and collection of empirical data at the micro-level on the strengths of the education system, schools, and teachers, although there is a consensus in Argentina on the importance of implementing reforms to improve initial and continuing teacher training (Rivas, Mezzadra, & Veleda, 2015). However, many of the recommended reform policies focused on the macro level of the school system are based on the deficit paradigm. For example, to increase the reflective capacity of teachers, research should be promoted in national teacher training institutes and a qualifying examination should be established to enter the profession in order to improve the exit-level of teachers. Based on this rationale, numerous international texts propose strategies to improve the quality of teachers and learning. After pointing out the difficulties experienced by teachers, these texts pose specific measures to recruit, train, and motivate them. One example can be seen in the World Bank document entitled *Great teachers: how to raise student learning in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Bruns & Luque, 2014). The paper identifies three objectives: to benchmark the performance of Latin American teachers; to share emerging evidence on reforms of teacher policy being implemented in Latin American and Caribbean countries; and to analyze the room for further reform.

The present study is part of the tradition of *subaltern studies* (Apple & Buras, 2006), focused on the struggle of dominant and subaltern groups in defining what knowledge is valid, who speaks and who should remain silent or not have a voice in the public sphere. This perspective values knowledge from the professional experience of stakeholders over the technical knowledge of international organizations (Tröhler, 2015).

Without falling into a dichotomous approach of the macro space over the micro space, prior discussion of teacher suitability would seem to be necessary. A number of questions arise on this point: what does it mean to be an expert teacher in Latin America? Is there a universal category of expert teachers, or do schools serving disadvantaged populations in Latin America require teachers with specific characteristics? The first step in answering these questions is to investigate the perception of students about who expert teachers are and what characteristics they have.

Thus far, no empirical studies have been found that state who are the expert teachers and what they do in Latin American schools. In Argentina, there is little empirical research at the micro level that outlines the strengths, experiences, and successes of expert teachers. The study *Más allá de la crisis* by Inés Dussel (2010) explores the qualities of «good» teachers and «good» schools through surveys and focus groups that include teachers and students. In order to go deeper into studies of this nature, our research focuses on the perceptions of students. On the other hand, research made by Fanfani (2010) has the merit of providing quantitative data on the education system by exploring the perceptions of students and teachers at teacher training institutions. His study highlights that, at present, the idea that the teacher «must assist and facilitate student learning» (p. 26) is part of educational common sense. The specific contribution of this work comes from the investigation of expert teachers in schools in marginal urban settings.

The scarcity of studies of this kind results interesting if, as Fullan (2002) argues, it is neither moral exhortations nor mountains of data that «convince» teachers, but solid experience and positive results. The value of this paper lies in making the voice of the stakeholders heard—students in schools in marginal urban settings—and adding their perceptions to the debate on teacher identity.

The study also seeks to contribute to the debate on who good teachers working at schools in disadvantaged schools of the Province of Buenos Aires are and what they do from the point of view of the students, or pupil voice. In Argentina, high school students attending schools in marginal urban settings are generally classed as «violent» (Di Napoli, 2012, p. 26) and they are attributed characteristics related to

juvenile delinquency. They are quickly associated with discriminatory stereotypes such as «thieving kids» or «fucking mestizos» (Míguez, 2004), who are not «made» to be at school and are not noted for their social or cognitive skills. For this reason, the perceptions of these students about who good are teachers are not included in the debate on teacher identity in Argentina.

The main takeaway from this study is the opinion of students from high schools in marginal urban areas, who prioritize the personality attributes and relational skills of teachers when they describe the characteristics of a «good» teacher. Through an empirical study conducted in 5 high schools and among 167 students, in a first stage the study examines the characteristics that the students identify when describing «good» teachers in high schools in marginal urban areas. In a second stage, the research compares the characteristics of good teachers described by the students with descriptions of educational suitability present in the curriculum guidelines for initial teacher training in Argentina.

### **Methodological Approach**

This research begins on the premise that there is no category of a good teacher that is ahistorical and stable. The notion of a good teacher is in constant motion, as it interacts in a defined space and historical period. Through the interpretation of the stakeholders themselves, the study analyzes how the characterization of good teachers is constructed in schools serving disadvantaged populations. Thus, it seeks to problematize the traditional distinction pointed to by the researcher as the owner of knowledge and the «other» as a passive person who solely awaits the recommendations of the foreign expert.

This is the time to make a methodological and conceptual clarification. It is known that people's opinions do not transparently reflect reality. However, the discourse about good teachers refers to representations that the stakeholders have of them and which then impact the construction of social action that the same actors perform (Dussel, Brito, & Núñez, 2007, p. 24). In short, the study is based on the epistemological premise that there is no radical separation between theory and practice.

The tradition of academic research called *pupil voice* is mainly developed in English-speaking countries. The exponents of this approach include McIntyre (2006), Pedder (2006), and Rudduck (2004), and the arguments in their favor have various levels. On the one hand, the arguments are based on legal considerations of the rights of children, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Article 12 of this convention states that the child has the right to express their views freely and form their own opinion in all aspects that may affect them, in accordance with their age and maturity. Currently, many international agencies are interested in this current of thought in order to customize teaching and topics related to education for the citizenship. On the other hand, based on a pragmatic rationale related to school reform, various educational actors underline the transformative potential of this perspective. They claim that, after decades of educational reforms have failed, it is time to listen to the main stakeholders: the students. This proposal is rooted in the need to involve students in school improvement, because the success of reform efforts depends on them and their involvement in the school experience. Finally, there are researchers who problematize the absolute validity of this approach and emphasize the importance of recognizing and accepting the silence of students (Lewis, 2010), as well as the implications of listening to voices and being unable to provide appropriate responses.

The study was carried out in five high schools (four publicly-managed and one privately-run with 100% subsidization) that serve disadvantaged populations in marginal urban settings. In summary, research into the discursive practices of students who attend schools in marginal urban areas is the first step in listening to the system of ideas that allows the characterization of good teachers in classifications that are constructed historically. In this regard, the notions of «good» teachers were analyzed as a result of systems of ideas that, in turn, have normalizing effects in schools.

### **Context of the Study and Analysis of Students' Perceptions**

In recent decades, Argentina has become a paradigmatic case in terms of the privatization of education (Narodowski, Moschetti, & Lamb, 2015). For various reasons, in the last few years public schools in Argentina have lost middle-class and upper middle-class students, who have moved to private schools that

have gained social prestige. There is evidence that the public sector serves the poorest sectors of society (Gasparini et al., 2011). Therefore, the study selected mostly schools under public management (four of five). The public sector currently serves 65% of total school enrollment in the Province of Buenos Aires (Unicef, 2011).

The term *marginal urban settings* include neighborhoods of recent migrants, traditional working class neighborhoods, heterogeneous working class neighborhoods, and urban ghettos (Katzman, 2001). To select the schools, the study combines the criterion of geographic location with the criteria used by PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) to identify disadvantaged schools<sup>1</sup> in its international assessments. Schools serving disadvantaged populations are understood to be «those where the typical student in the school, or the socio-economic profile of the school, is below the socio-economic status of the typical student in the country» (PISA, 2012, vol.2, p.49).

Table 1  
*Schools selected and students participating*

School	District	Mixed	Management	Number of questionnaires applied	Gender M - F	
Santo Domingo Savio	San Isidro	Yes	Private with 100% state subsidization	28	16	12
Escuela de Enseñanza Secundaria n.º 8	Pilar	Yes	Public	67	35	32
Escuela de Enseñanza Secundaria n.º 11	San Isidro	Yes	Public	19	11	8
Escuela de Enseñanza Secundaria n.º 13	San Miguel	Yes	Public	23	12	11
Escuela de Enseñanza Secundaria n.º 18	Pilar	Yes	Public	40	16	14

As these are high schools in disadvantaged settings, they have a particular history and record of accomplishment. For example, Escuela de Enseñanza Secundaria n.º 13 was known as The Prison, and the General Directorate of Culture and Education<sup>2</sup> of the Province of Buenos Aires intervened in Escuela de Enseñanza Secundaria n.º 8 in the recent past. The actions of the inspector who intervened in this school were justified on the basis of serious «administrative problems», including high levels of teacher absenteeism and low student enrollment. The only privately-run school used in this study is a parochial school run by the Diocese of San Isidro, which is located in the La Cava slum in the Buenos Aires urban area.

In one of the schools included in this study, a pilot test of the instruments used was done in the final days of the school year in December 2014. During a meeting convened by the directors, interviews were conducted with parents and school students. They were asked to answer the questionnaire and the process was recorded. The difficulties and questions that arose were inputs used to adapt the instrument. The pilot test proved useful in adapting the vocabulary used in the questionnaires. These adjustments allowed vocabulary to be used in the questionnaires that was more intelligible to the students<sup>3</sup> and enabled more direct questions to be asked of parents. The fieldwork was carried out during the 2015 school year, which runs from February to December in the Province of Buenos Aires.

<sup>1</sup> Although PISA identifies disadvantaged schools based on the criterion of the socio-economic level, it claims that there is no single way to define disadvantaged schools for all countries. In fact, it proposes a series of general factors to conceptualize the phenomenon that each country in particular should consider, namely: results of the students (academic, progress); infrastructure and human resources; characteristics of the origin of the student population served; school context (for example, violence); geographic location; historic considerations, such as serving an ethnic group considered to be vulnerable. For more information regarding this topic see OECD (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Since 1817, the General Directorate of Culture and Education has been the body that administers the education system in the Province of Buenos Aires.

<sup>3</sup> In the questionnaire applied to the students, the preliminary question was: «We would like you to tell us, in your experience at school, what three *qualities* does a good teacher have?» and the final question was: «We would like you to tell us, in your experience at school, what three *characteristics* does a good teacher have?».

Prior to the start of the school year (February-April), the schools were visited in order to start finding out about the narratives on good teachers and to create trust with the stakeholders. The researcher was generally located in the monitors' or secretaries' offices to participate in the daily routines of the schools: in their recesses, changes of classes, the entrances and exits of the teachers, and at school events, etc. In addition to meeting the various teachers and school directors, a bond of trust was established with the institutions to begin the questionnaires among the students.

A total of 177 questionnaires were applied to students in the last few grades of each of the schools. The upper grades were chosen because these were students who had had access to a greater number of teachers and, therefore, knew a large proportion of the schools' teachers. The questionnaires were answered anonymously during school time in classrooms. In every case, there was a prior talk with students about the purposes of the study. The students frequently asked questions about the scope of the research. In addition, four or five classroom observations were also conducted of teachers that students identified as good teachers.

The questionnaire included four questions: «We would like you to tell us, in your experience at school, what three characteristics does a good teacher have?»; «Describe the teacher from whom you learned most»; «Do you think there is anyone at your school who is a good teacher?», and, finally, «Who are good teachers and why do you think they are?». In an effort to explore the students' perceptions in more depth, an option of open questions was included to make the questionnaire as neutral as possible. Therefore, there was no limit to the possible answers or an ordinal sequence that expressed a hierarchy between teacher characteristics. Students showed great willingness to answer the questionnaire. In fact, all of the students completed it, and only one of them did not complete all of the questions asked.

The responses of the students were transcribed and included in a base document. That document was entered into the Atlas.ti platform, a program for analysis and processing of qualitative data. This program was used to analyze the frequencies of the terms used in the base document and the teacher characteristics most valued by the students were established by inductive reasoning. Once the key words were identified, two dimensions of analysis were codified; on the one hand, the relational and affective aspects and, on the other, the pedagogical-didactic aspects that the students summarized as «knowing how to teach» a subject.

### **Description of Results**

One of the first factors to consider is that all of the students stated that there were good students at their schools. In the five schools selected, 65% of the students said there was more than one good teacher at school. While it can be considered that good teachers are a minority (two or three per school), the result is important, as it confirms the existence of narratives among the students that shape notions about good teachers. In future research it would be interesting to compare this proportion of good teachers identified by the students with the proportions in schools serving other populations.

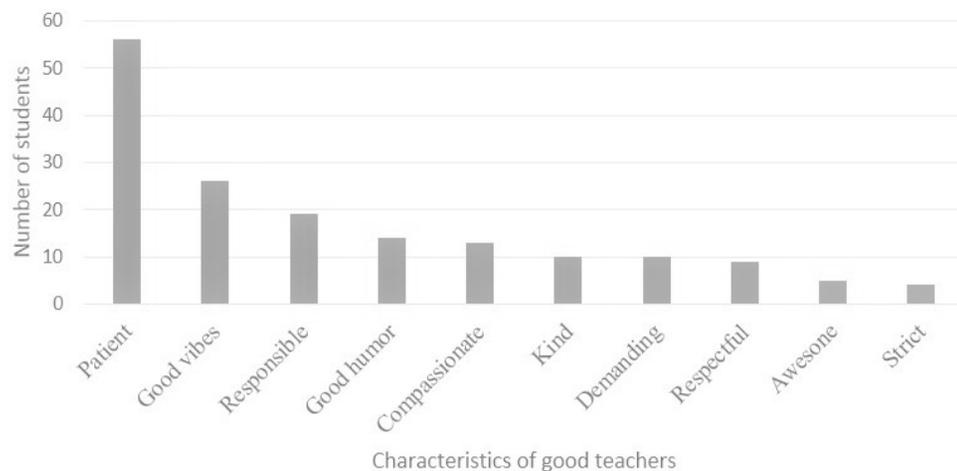


Figure 1. Relational attributes of good teachers

Figure 1 shows the responses to the question: «We would like you to tell us, in your experience at school, what three characteristics does a good teacher have?»

One of the first conclusions from the analysis of the surveys is the proportion of relational attributes used to describe good teachers compared to the attributes traditionally linked to the teaching profession. By relational attributes we understand the «concept of the social relations that circulate in learning and teaching environments, and include the affective connection between teacher and student» (Kriewaldt, 2015, p. 85). The students list various relational attributes of the teachers. Among the attributes linked to personal qualities, the one that is most prominent is «they are patient» or «patience» (56 times), followed by «being nice» (40 times) and «responsible» (19 times). Being nice is understood as the skill that enables an amenable atmosphere during classes and it is a key factor in students' narratives. During the observations, the teachers chosen by the students established personal relationships with them. For example, when entering the classroom, they asked them about some family member they knew, they made eye contact, and often made some physical contact, such as placing a hand on the shoulder. It should be noted that this does not refer to a «laissez-faire» attitude, but rather the skill of establishing a climate of learning based on respect. From the perspective of students, the ability to relate to them positively is a key factor in the set of attributes in the makeup of a good high school teacher. This appreciation is consistent with the findings of Bryk and Schneider (2002), who highlighted that, based on a study conducted in a school district of Chicago, trust between parents and authorities, teachers, with their peers, and between teachers and students is the key catalyst to enhance learning in schools. Good teachers at schools that serve young people from disadvantaged settings are experts in relating to adolescents. That is, these teachers manage to relate to the students and manage that relationship or bond during learning.

As regards the attributes traditionally linked to the teaching profession, students say that good teachers «know how to teach» (61 times). Knowing how to teach is described by students as «knowing how to explain» or «knowing how to explain the activity». One thing that emerged in the observations is that the teachers used the first few minutes of classes to prepare the context for learning. For example, they usually moved the seating so they could move around the classroom during the class and some students were moved elsewhere. The responses clearly show the ability of students to distinguish between the subject knowledge of the teacher and their didactic pedagogical skills. Although it is necessary for the teacher to «know», it is also indispensable for them to manage to transmit that knowledge to the students. It is not enough for the teacher to have knowledge of the subject, but a particular knowhow based on that knowledge is essential. These findings are related to the communicational skills of teachers in the transmission of specific content on the subject. No other significant responses emerge concerning teachers' attributes. At first glance, it is interesting that no other attributes emerge linked to planning classes or the strategies used by the teacher. In the ability to explain, students may be summarizing specific attributes of the profession of a good teacher.

From the perspective of the students, teacher suitability is not solely related to the knowledge of the subject content. More importantly than subject knowledge and communication skills, the students point out that a good teacher does not treat them «as students, but as people». It is striking that there is a negative connotation of being a student to this group of young people who attend schools in marginal urban areas. Being a person is juxtaposed with being a student. From the viewpoint of the students, the relational dimension is fundamental. A good teacher is capable of «conveying trust». The interesting thing about this aspect is that it reshapes the limits and possibilities of teacher identity. A good teacher is someone who effectively combines a broad range of personal attributes that generate a positive climate of learning, such as patience and being nice, with specific attributes of the teaching profession, such as knowing how to explain the subject material. In the words of the students, a good teacher: «knows how to explain, is patient and if they have to repeat things so we all understand they do it»; has «patience to explain», «explains well and explains again if necessary»; «explains the topics whenever necessary, and does it well». Patience and the ability to explain content as many times as necessary are recurrent factors in the comments of students about good teachers at high schools.

When delimiting a specific field of possibilities, others are excluded. For example, the construction of the rural student shapes the profile of the student in urban settings (Popkewitz, 2008). Similarly, through the creation of good teachers the opposite is established: those teachers who are not perceived as exemplary by students. Based on the responses of students we can state that a bad high school teacher would be impatient, not nice, irresponsible, and would not know how to explain their subject material.

Lastly, although the large majority of the students answered the questions by describing positive aspects of the teacher, there is an exception: teacher absenteeism. Although the questionnaire explores the representations of teachers from positive aspects, they included negative attributes of teachers related to teacher absenteeism: «the missing teachers» or those that «arrive late» (14 times) was a recurring theme. Good teachers «are never absent» and «set the example by arriving on time and not being absent», according to the students. Teacher absenteeism is a clear limit when defining good teachers. From the answers, we can state that attendance and punctuality are factors that would be included in the narratives that define the good teacher.

### **National curriculum guidelines for teacher training and relational attributes**

After identifying the perceptions of students about the importance of teachers' relational attributes, it would be wise to investigate the importance of this dimension in initial teacher training. Conducting a comprehensive study for this purpose is beyond the scope of this paper. However, an initial approach looking at the discourses referring to initial teacher training could be useful to verify whether student' perspectives are included in national policy documents on teacher identity.

In 2007, the Federal Education Board approved the National Curriculum Guidelines for teacher training. The aim of the guidelines was to find a certain level of integration, complementarity, and equivalent results (CFE 24/07, p. 3) in a highly fragmented training system with approximately 1,300 teacher training institutes. In addition to these are the 91 universities that provide teacher qualification degrees. The document is intended to be indicative, as it outlines general guidelines that should be carried out at the provincial and institutional level.

The guidelines represent a standard of what the «ideal» should be in the best of cases. Similarly, it is one of the narratives that shape the limits and possibilities of what it means to be a good teacher in Argentina. The institutional contributions of the guidelines include extending teacher training to four years and the importance attributed to professional practice. The text defines three fields of knowledge in teacher training: general training, specific training aimed at the knowledge of subjects, and training in professional practice.

In these guidelines, teaching is defined as «a practice focused on teaching [which] implies skill for a series of 16 tasks. The skills listed range from «mastering the knowledge to be taught» to «participating in conversations with families»» (CFE 24/07, p. 9). It could be assumed that the emotional and relational dimensions of teachers are implied in certain skills, such as when it is stated that teachers should possess the ability to «identify the learning characteristics and needs of students» or «assist students» progress

in learning». However, these implied references are not consistent with the blunt expressions of the students. Nevertheless, the fact that the guidelines do not mention a dimension of emotionally positive links with students does not confirm that the training system fails to pay attention to the emotional dimension of future teachers. However, the responses from the students about the characteristics of good teachers indicate that it is necessary to go into greater depth regarding training the emotional aspects of future teachers. The large number of leaves of absence in schools (Mezzadra & Veleza, 2014) reveal the importance of this aspect in high school education. The absence of the words *emotion*, *feeling*, *dispositions*, or *attitudes* in the national curriculum guidelines is significant.

It is an interesting fact that teaching is still described from the point of view of teaching or the person who teaches: the teacher. At present there are international approaches that suggest the need for a Copernican Revolution. The key issue should be learning. The person who teaches is moved into the background and the emphasis is placed on the importance of creating learning systems, schools that learn, and teachers who generate learning (Aguerrondo & Valliant, 2015).

### Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore the characteristics of good teachers in marginal urban settings. The results demonstrate the relevance of relational attributes in shaping good teachers in such schools. Through analysis of the perspectives of students, relational attributes such as patience and a positive disposition towards students are indicative of good teachers. The participating students emphasize that learning is only possible when there is a positive relationship between two or more people.

In the debate on teacher identity and improving teaching in schools in marginal urban settings, the initial findings indicate the importance of the relational skills of teachers. Students want a teacher who gives priority to the personal relationship with students and is able to convey trust. However, since the reduction of the curriculum for initial teacher training, it cannot be expected that the relational aspects of teachers will be addressed when describing the characteristics of «good» teachers.

The encyclopedic tradition that gave rise to the Argentine education system probably explains the resistance to include the relational aspect in the main attributes of teacher identity. The new demands of students, in reference to teacher identity, are also expressed in new expectations about the school and its framework of possibilities. In this group of students, the promise that the modern school was a key lever in upward mobility has lost validity. In this regard, the teachers and the school must reach out to students to regain their subjectivity. Research indicates that this task will be more effective if there are schools and people who are able to establish emotionally positive and meaningful bonds for students and teachers.

In the United States, Alverno College is well known for its teacher-training program and it promotes the practice of mindfulness<sup>4</sup> among its students with the aim of working on the emotional attitudes of future teachers<sup>5</sup>. Mindfulness in Schools Project, a non-profit organization in England, provides courses for teachers and educational leaders in London. Meanwhile, Patricia Jennings, Associate Professor of Education at the University of Virginia, conducted a study in the city of New York and states that stress-reducing strategies increase teachers' abilities to cope with the demands of the career (cited in Breen, 2016).

In the case of Argentina, where stress levels in the teaching profession are high<sup>6</sup>, the emotional strength of teachers is key (Fox, 2014). For that reason, relational training for teacher would not only benefit student learning, but also teachers' degree of satisfaction with their work. In Argentina there have been interesting studies in the field of medicine with clinical pediatric medical residents subject to high levels of stress. Costa et al. (2013) describe how the regular practice of mindfulness contributed to the greater

<sup>4</sup> Mindfulness «has been translated [into Spanish] as 'conscience' or 'full attention' and defines the capacity to intentionally pay attention to what is happening at the present time, without judging» (Costa et al., 2013, p.1). Mindfulness is considered to be a personal practice, the origins of which lie in Buddhist tradition.

<sup>5</sup> Desiree Pointer Mace, Associate Dean of the Education Department, leads the experience at Alverno College. For more information, see <http://www.alverno.edu/magazine/our-college/education-students-receive-lessons-in-mindfulness/>

<sup>6</sup> Teacher malaise is not exclusive to Argentina. In fact, it is a concept that emerged in Spain with José Manuel Esteve during the 1980s. José Manuel Esteve was professor of Education Theory at the Universidad de Málaga, and is the author of titles such as *Profesores en conflicto* (1984) and *El malestar docente* (1987, 1994).

personal well-being of the resident physician by reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, and increasing the capacity for empathy towards patients. It is certainly not the objective of this study to explore the importance of relational aspects in student learning or to compare the emotional education strategies conducted by teacher training institutions. However, this research recommends reflection on what types of teacher suitability are requested by the voices that are traditionally ignored in discussions on improving teacher training.

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