

Elite schools and institutional *ethos*: differential options and profiles in the education of privileged sectors in Argentina at the present time

Sandra Ziegler¹, Victoria Gessaghi² and Sebastián Fuentes³

1. Introduction

The relationship between education and elites belongs to a relatively new field of study in Argentina. The topic is associated with an interest in the formation of dominant groups in our societies, which has grown in the last years in social sciences (Ball, 2003; van Zanten, 2009; Karabel, 2006; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009; Khan, 2011; Maxwell and Aggleton, 2013; Weis, Cipollone, and Jenkins (2014), among others). Local studies lacked information on privileged groups, among other matters, due to their focus on the poor and disadvantaged. This was done with the aim of accounting for the dynamics of inequality. However, looking into the dynamics of inequality and the processes of formation and legitimation of class difference, as well as the establishment of material and symbolic distances between social sectors make us also question the relational nature of inequality (Tilly, 2000). Hence the interest of revisiting the process of formation of those dominant groups.

This article introduces an issue which is at the intersection of two fields of study which have scarcely been explored together: the processes of formation of elites (through schools) and the analysis of the curricular and institutional organization of a group of schools aimed at educating those groups. The article seeks to document the way in which schools structure their offering, in tandem with the expectations of families which either are privileged or aspire to be. Given that these schools cater to different groups, studying them can contribute to understanding the part they play in the education of those who aspire to occupy positions of power or leadership in society. Moreover, these studies allow us to understand the way in which these schools take part in establishing social and cultural distances, which in turn allow for the creation of boundaries between these groups and the rest of society, and how this contributes to the creation of positions of privilege. In short, analyzing the pedagogic work these schools carry out is key to interpret the way in which they contribute to the processes of socialization and reproduction of these sectors in our country presently.

Among the studies associated to these issues, there has been ample research on the process of school selection of these groups. There's a body of work which, in the last years, has brought forth the active role taken on by the families of upper-middle and upper classes and their involvement in choosing schools for their children. A non-exhaustive list of available studies would include the contributions of Jay (2002) in Switzerland, Aguiar (2012) in Belo Horizonte, Waters (2007) and Kenway, et al.

¹ Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO/Argentina). Research Group on Elites and Socio-educational Inequalities Professor, Universidad de Buenos Aires

² CONICET/Universidad de Buenos Aires. FLACSO. Study Core on Elites and Socio-educational Inequalities

³ CONICET/FLACSO. Study Core on Elites and Socio-educational Inequalities Researcher, UNTREF.

(2013), in Hong Kong. They have characterized the processes displayed by families choosing schools in Canada and the UK, respectively. The recent study by Weis, Cipollone, and Jenkins (2014) in the US, tells of the strong involvement of families in these processes of school selection. However, there are still few studies of curricula in elite schools. Some previous works delved into the effects of the socialization facilitated by these schools through their students' immersion in a structure where alumni feel their schools' imperative in a particularly strong fashion. (Kahn, 2011; Goodson, Cookson and Persell, 2000; Cookson and Persell, 2010).

This work explores the different curricular and extracurricular proposals, location and infrastructure, and the general organization of the teaching offering in those schools, and how they connect with the perceptions of the actors who are part of the schools. These elements contribute to the formation of an "institutional ethos", which builds an "identity" (presented as defined and fixed) of the school as part of a process of differentiation and hierarchical segmentation of institutions. However, it is the result of the interactions between the school, the educational system at a local/jurisdictional level, the schools educational "tradition", and the changing relations with the several family groups they serve. This institutional ethos entails a unique relationship between schools and the families of privileged classes (Hunter, 1998).

The study has focused on the emphasis and centrality given to different disciplines and activities, as well as the role played by the schoolwork fostered and promoted by these schools. Thus, curriculum similarities and differences in outlook are analyzed, defining "curriculum" in a broad way. The focus is on the configuration of teaching offerings, and a curriculum structure that lets us identify its history (from how the offering is structured) and the experience of the actors involved, in an ethos that is identifiable as it relates to other schools in the education circuit. It also accounts for institutional configurations, taken as the way in which resources are deployed to structure schoolwork for the intended population actually recruited.

It is our contention that to focus on the differences between these schools' goals allows for a more complete understanding of the perspectives, profiles, and aspirations of the different elite groups that they cater to. This approach also allows us to see the role that schooling takes in these groups' reproduction strategies. In short, the paper sheds light on the processes that allow the conformation and differentiation of the expectations associated to these schools in terms of the education required by the elites, and their preferences and options at the time of training their offspring.

The research that originated this work took place in five schools, which define themselves as educators of the elite, and are located in the City and Province of Buenos Aires. This is a qualitative work which involved 50 in-depth interviews carried out with principals, teachers, parents, and alumni, as well as observations in schools and analysis of secondary documents⁴. All these schools are recognized for their institutional prestige and extensive history. Most of them say they are "traditional schools" of "academic excellence". The selection of schools was a combination of several variables. Four of them are private; three are religious and one secular. A public school was also included, one whose selection devices for admission and history in the education of

⁴We do not make class observations, only activities and routines which take place in schools not limited to what takes place in the classroom, such as parent-teacher conferences, going to and from school, sporting activities, and charities, among others.

political leadership account for it being an institution that has educated elite groups (political and intellectual in particular). In this work we have chosen institutions whose explicit goal is to educate their students for the exercise of positions of power and privilege. For "positions of privilege" we understand belonging to groups which are favored in matters economical, social, and cultural. Thus, the selected institutions admit the children of businesspeople, intellectuals, and high state officials, members of the *show business*, bankers, liberal professions, landowners, and mid-size merchants.

The current work is based on a study carried out in secondary schools⁵ located in the City of Buenos Aires and the north side of the Gran Buenos Aires⁶. The latter is an urban part of suburbia which concentrates high-income population; it is located in the largest province of the country both in land and demographics. The Gran Buenos Aires concentrates over 60% of the population of the Province of Buenos Aires; it is a densely populated area. According to the latest Census in 2010, almost 25% of the country's population lives in this region, as well as 24.6% of the country's students. Buenos Aires, in turn, is one of the most prosperous cities in the country, and even if its demographic weight is only 7.2% of the country's population, it is the place where political, cultural, and economic power is concentrated. 6.4% of the country's students live there.

Moreover, it must be pointed out that in Argentina the education of elite groups takes place fundamentally in the private sector. If we analyze students who attend private schools over the total of school population, the highest rates of privatization occur in the more well-to-do and prosperous areas. Towards the end of the 2000s, against a national average of 25% of students in private schools in the whole country, in the City of Buenos Aires the figure was 48%, and in the Province 30,5%. In the latter, the level of privatization was the highest in the richest municipalities. For instance, Vicente López (62%) and San Isidro (58%) are the municipalities with the highest percentages of Basic Education students (1st to 9th year) in private establishments in the Province of Buenos Aires (Veleda, 2012). Besides the geographic concentration, the socio-economic composition of private education enrolment also accounts for their growing association with the wealthiest sectors. In 2011, 57% of secondary school students attended private schools in the top quintile of households in the Metropolitan Area (City of Buenos Aires and suburbs).⁷ Public secondary education which is free and aims to educate elites is only represented by a reduced group of five schools, which belong to the university.

In short, the concentration in the schooling of the elites at the secondary level in Argentina takes place in the most advantaged urban spaces and mostly in private schools where access is not initially granted by the academic skills of students but by the economic possibilities of their families. In the case of most university public schools geared towards the education of elites, access is decided through meritocratic criteria in

⁵ In Argentina, secondary school is attended by students from 13 to 17 years of age.

⁶ This is the context where FLACSO's research project "The New Configuration of Discrimination in Education in Argentina" took place, directed by Guillermina Tiramonti. The current chapter was written based on in-depth interviews with 20 parents, 24 students and principals of 3 schools of the City and Province of Buenos Aires dedicated to the education of elites.

⁷ Source: Compilation based on data of the 2011 Permanent Survey of Households by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses. The top quintile is the wealthiest 20% of the population.

the shape of a very academically demanding admission exam. These institutions are free.

2. Presentation of cases

Escuela Santa Elena⁸

Santa Elena was founded by an order of Irish nuns in the 1930s, at the initiative of the local bishop, who wanted to impart Catholic, disciplined education to the children of the families in Bella Vista, a municipality 20 miles away from the City of Buenos Aires. This municipality became the residence of professionals and technical experts, and had the weekend homes of immigrants of British, Irish, and French descent.

Santa Elena initially admitted boys and girls, the offspring of immigrant families and their descendants, and the children of merchants and businesspeople of the area. In the mid-20th century it became an all-girls school. Initially, the hallmark of the school was discipline, and the care that nuns gave girls and their families. This "good education" allowed their alumni to be admitted in higher learning institutions, and so they created a "community" based on the choice they had of also sending their daughters to the same school.

The development of Bella Vista turned it into a residential area for university sectors, linked to the world of law and the judiciary, and also to conservative Catholicism. In this context, and faced with the conciliary renovation of the Irish congregation, Santa Elena made the transition to a "progressive" school because of their distancing from teaching dogma, their caring about the student experience, and their engagement in social causes. This was reflected in the tale of social and militant commitment the nuns and school teachers undertook during the last military dictatorship and also in the deepening of the concern for the poor on the part of the congregation.

During the 1990s two institutional changes happened: the school went back to being co-ed, at the request of the alumnae, who wanted their male children to attend; and it stopped receiving a subsidy from the state, which was used to pay teachers' salaries. This drove up the cost of tuition.

Because on the curriculum reforms of secondary schools that happened in Argentina in the 1990s, Santa Elena changed their curriculum offering so that it was based on their available resources, and the preferences of the families and its history. From these elements they chose to offer plans with three different orientations: Natural Sciences, Economics, and Humanities specialized in social work. These orientations were still being offered while this field work took place.

In all of these orientations, a hallmark of the school is the development of pedagogical projects implemented as social intervention, such as road safety education, recycling and tutoring or academic support for poor children. They also take part in competitions such as Science Olympics. The school is not particularly sports oriented, with the exception of taking part in some inter-school competitions of football (soccer),

⁸ We will use assumed names to refer to the institutions.

rugby, hockey, or volleyball. Most of the girls practice hockey and the boys rugby in institutions near the school. In Buenos Aires rugby is a sport associated to the cultural hierarchy of British immigrants at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, and the "local" families which established links with them. Since then, and even if there is a gradual process of professionalization (Fuentes, 2012), rugby is still associated to families with a strong university/professional background, and of middle and upper-middle classes which every week attend (male) rugby games.⁹

Beyond each orientation, the school has put together its curriculum interweaving it with its charity history. Teachers and students organized projects of social intervention together with the department of Pastoral Community. Their goal was to produce an activity of knowledge and help in the context of the school: besides the traditional residential area of Bella Vista, the last two decades this was expanded to gated communities where high-income population resides, and to slums, where the poorest are. Santa Elena expanded their charity work in this last area.

The school took advantage of their Irish background in the teaching of English, but the school does not bill itself as a bilingual school. Rather, it teaches English extra-curricularly outside regular school hours to students who are training to take international exams such as First Certificate and International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE).¹⁰ Belonging to a network of schools who are part of the same congregation in the US has allowed them to, every year, have an exchange program for students.

The humanistic nature of the curriculum and a tradition of keeping "discipline" underwent a change, until it got to a place where each student's uniqueness is noticed, and there is an emphasis on educational work on conviviality. The first one meant that the school positioned itself as an *inclusive* school: this term shows the attention and support given to children with cognitive difficulties, physical handicaps, etc. The second was developed through a program of mediation and peaceful resolution of conflicts; both adults and students take part in it, and is the arbiter for the resolution of school conflicts. It also offers a program of Life in Nature, which coordinates the organization of camping trips and educational-convivial outings.

The school is perceived by local families as a school where "the person matters" beyond "what they learn". On the other hand, community orientation and the emphasis on inclusion and singularity are reinforced through mentoring: extra hours are paid to teachers who dedicate part of their time to support and advise students.

Finally, we find two dimensions which are connected in the school curriculum: catechism and pastoral community. The school teaches catechism outside the official curriculum. The selection of catechism teachers does not follow a pattern in which the most important element knowledge of theology, but "spirituality" and "charisma", "open mindedness" about dogma, and a style that highlights the religious "experience", and

⁹For these social classes, rugby is a sport with "values", as opposed to the massively popularized "lucrative" male football (soccer), which in Argentina is the most popular multi-class sport. (Alabarces, 2013.) This values differentiation is still powerful for different social actors, elite or otherwise. This is a sport whose goal is to shape the dominant masculinity, and where time and resources are invested for the reproduction of social capital, the establishment of lifelong "friends", and a strong sense of "community".

¹⁰ Both are international programs that delivered certificates for end of secondary school.

not so much the "truths" of catechism. Pastoral Community, besides connecting their work with curricular and catechism teachers, organizes collections for community centers or kindergartens in the poor areas around the school; coordinates extra lessons for students; attends the local public hospital with students to provide support for patients, among other activities.

The school is organized in the following areas: social sciences, natural sciences and mathematics, economics, language, physical education and life in nature, catechism, pastoral, and technologies. There are programs such as Mediation and Conviviality, career guidance, and internships, among others.

The aforementioned processes of curricular transformation and the change of direction of nuns towards community laypersons entailed a process of change not devoid of conflict. Thus, as opposed to many schools that chose mottos such as "excellence" or "education in values", Santa Elena chose this one: "we know how to educate with commitment, freedom, and solidarity", which tried to summarize a great part of the "tradition" inherited from the nuns with a strong choice for conviviality, the "openness" of students to the community needs, and respect for singularity.

Besides offering an education centered in the person, Santa Elena stands out for their ample and comfortable facilities, and its great parks. When giving reasons for their choice of school, the families point out that as well as being beautiful, the school is a place that is both distinguished and different. A humanistic curriculum, a personalized education, and several add-ons to the curriculum according to the orientation chosen make up for a teaching offering based on the concern for their students singularities, and the creation of a community of solidarity and responsibility towards its environment.

St Paul- St Mark

Cardinal St. Paul and St Mark School are two educational institutions founded in 1947 and 1926, respectively. St Paul is a boys school, while St Mark is a girls school. Both institutions are located in the Gran Buenos Aires area. Even if initially St Paul was located in the center of the City of Buenos Aires, in 1971 it moved to a sizeable building complex in the north of the Gran Buenos Aires area. Even if some families reside in the residential area around the schools, most students who attend these institutions live in the center of the City of Buenos Aires, and "commute" every day to the north side of the Greater Buenos Aires area, across the City-Province line.

Both schools were founded answering a need of the more well-to-do classes to have an offering of selective institutions located near the center of the City, privately owned, and with a strong emphasis of Catholicism in their educational ideals. Two Irish orders were in charge of the management of these institutions up to the mid-1990s, when (as happened in most privately managed schools in Argentina) the orders transferred the administration of the school to parents' foundations. Of course, the orders did not abandon their roles in religion education and student orientation. Parents who choose them point out that they are not the most expensive schools, and that their exclusive nature is not linked to a restrictive cost of tuition. Admission links families related to agricultural business, liberal professions, and traditional ones such as law and medicine, as well as the children of well-to-do businesspeople. Parents are university

graduates. Most mothers work outside the home, in activities that, even if they have been redefined through time, are traditionally feminine. They work part-time, or with schedules that allow them flexibility to prioritize the care and upbringing of children.

The families who choose these institutions prioritize a specific form of education for boys and another for girls. It is common that sons attend St. Paul, while daughters attend St. Mark. There are links between both institutions, fostered by parents, teachers and students, who plan activities together. The institutions prioritize the admission of children or relatives of alumni, which is why we find that the schools are generally integrated to "the family tradition". It is common to find grandparents, parents, and children who have attended the same institution.

Both institutions are presented as spaces where academic and intellectual activities have a relevant place, but not as important as "values formation" for children. The institutions point out that it is not the quality of formal education that is what makes them worthwhile, but their interest in educating "family people; good people." The relevance of "values formation" is present in the mission statement of both schools, and is materialized in two activities that parents deem key in the curriculum: charity work for the girls and rugby in the case of boys. In St Mark girls dedicate a great part of their time at the school (and outside) to charity activities devised in subjects such as "Community Access" and "Bridge of Solidarity". In the case of the boys school, the learning of these values is done through sports. Thus, in both cases activities are started in the schools that will probably persist in time after school has been completed. For instance, playing sports in clubs or being part of the alumnae association.

Even if "values education" is more appreciated, these schools haven't stopped adapting their offering to a curriculum that embraces globalization from a bilingual secondary education, and I.G.C.S.E exams and A Levels. They also offer internationally-oriented curricular and extracurricular activities. The continuity of a classical education happens at the same time as we find possibilities of traveling to other countries, and the adaptation to competitions such as debate, arts, new technologies, and analysis of contemporary culture.

Both schools are organized around a departmental structure (which is in charge of the academic offering) and is organized along classical lines: language, math, natural sciences, and social sciences. There is also a wide offering of extracurricular activities: Workshops and special projects, career guidance, math Olympics, Creative Writing Competition, sporting competitions, Drama Concert, choir, Spiritual retreats and conviviality, educational guidance, music instrument school, and Scottish Dancing. The offering is competed with mentoring sessions, designed to provide follow-up of students.

The teaching staff carries out joint training sessions (often in coordination with teachers of San Esteban and Nacional), as it embraces new ways of teaching which incorporate new technologies. Both schools have an IT presence in each classroom, as well as computer labs. The arts have grown in importance in the last fifteen years, as their contents have been linked to the media and the use of new technologies. School buildings have classrooms for music and arts; a workshop of radio and video; music room; extensive libraries and video libraries. Lastly, both schools have a chapel and a

sizeable sports field with regulation rugby (St Paul) and hockey (St. Mark) pitches, among a long list of other facilities.

The adaptation to the rules of competitiveness coexists with a classic curriculum and keeping their schools' ancient traditions. Every student, regardless of the year they are attending, is grouped into *a house* (fraternities) or a Color, and as part of such they take part in internal competitions of all the activities they school offers (from academic to sporting). Membership of *a house or color* is inherited, from parents to children, like lineage.

Parents that demand this school offering make it clear that the importance of these schools is threefold: they build relationships of mutual recognition among the families that choose them; they educate in family values; and they "provide a certain outlook" from the construction of an "ethos" or "Spirit" from the institution, which produces "a community of peers".

San Esteban

The institution is currently located in the northern part of the Gran Buenos Aires. It was created in the mid-19th century, and is originally the result of a need to provide bilingual education of high quality to the children of Anglo-Saxon immigrant families. It is a private institution which receives students of all religions. It is run by laypeople, but includes in its curriculum religious education. It is co-ed, and tuition is expensive for the average standards of private secondary education, in fact it is among those that charge the most in our country's market.¹¹ Among its students there are both families with long histories in the school (there are plenty of children and grandchildren of alumni) and "newcomers". The vast majority of parents holds university degrees and has different jobs (liberal professions, high state officials, and businesspeople, among others.)

It is an institution of recognized prestige and among its goals is to provide bilingual education of high academic level and an international outlook. Indeed, parents mention the high academic demands their children have to satisfy, in the form of training to take a series of external exams for which they are prepared. The school follows a double curriculum: the national one and the International Baccalaureate Diploma¹². Interviewed parents pointed out that their children receive outstanding school education at this institution, and they frequently remind their children to take advantage of attending it.

The institutional approach combines an appeal to ancient traditions and certain renewed ones, which allows schools to adapt to the demands of more internationalized, competitive societies. In this case, the school combines centenary traditions from British institutions and other devices in its academic curriculum and institutional organization. These are more directly linked with the new social demands. In short, this school shows

¹¹ When we conducted our field work, monthly tuition fees were approximately US\$ 1,000.

¹² The International Baccalaureate is an international educational program managed by an organization (IBO) based in Geneva that coordinates educational programs at international level, with the academic sponsorship of Cardiff University. See www.ibo.org

a series of inventions which seek to combine their most ancient traditions and their renovation, as a strategy of educating youths in a globalized, highly competitive world. The curricular and organizational proposal could be connected to the need of providing education that will allow them to perform according to the demands which are required to work in globalized societies (Resnik, 2008).

The school is organized around a departmental structure (whose job is to produce the academic offering), and a mentoring structure. This latter one will follow up students individually and in groups. Departments are organized according to the following structure: Individuals and Society (Geography, History, Business; Theory of Knowledge); Creativity & Performance (Art, Music, Film, Drama); Math & Numeracy; Technology & Innovation; Language - Literacy – Culture (Spanish, English, Modern Foreign Languages); Science. Extracurricular activities are very wide (chess, theater, fencing, Community Service, hockey, study trips, debating, sailing, art, music, among others.)

The adaptation to the demands of competitiveness coexists with keeping the schools' ancient traditions. Among them, the histories of their founders are notorious. As an example, one of the practices is to group students in different *houses* (fraternities), which are four groups in which all students are divided into, regardless of the year they are attending. These groups take part in internal competitions in every kind of activity the school offers (from academic to sports). The *houses* bear the names of the school's founding fathers, and each of them has a color that students include as part of their attire, in plain sight. In the case of alumni, membership of a *house* is inherited; new students are draw lots. These devices, among others, elicit from students strong institutional identification, and they recreate a tradition in which we can see a combination of the value of competition and inclusion for work, and competition in teams.

The school presents an original organizational structure for the grouping of students. Each subject is divided in three levels, according to the students' performance. Thus, each of them goes to his corresponding group for the subject according to performance, and these groupings are flexible depending on subject and year. This organization promotes strong identification of individual differences at the same time it creates a special sort of socialization, for students are part of a class but not of a stable group. This arrangement's ideal academic learning is division in homogeneous groups. Therefore, the goal is to sort students in order to maximize the possibilities of individual progress.

As a counterpart, the only stable group to be consolidated is mentoring (which sorts students according to year and including in each group students from different levels of performance). Multiple integrations are sought within peer groups. On the one hand, membership of a *house* integrates students of every year; on the other, there are variable groupings according to performance, which promotes multiple relationships between students. This organizational model allows for the combination of individual capacities and for the contribution of each student to a group of peers in order to contribute to their own benefit and that of the teams they belong to. Beyond the

importance of competitions, another side of this organization is their contribution to forging wide social relationships (an aspect that is key in the acquisition of social capital).

Families expect that the school will prepare their children to perform at the highest international level. These families include professionals connected to the most dynamic sectors of the economy, with a great number of mothers who also work full-time in commercial activities or at liberal professions. Among parents we have interviewed we have identified high executives in small and big companies, as well as entrepreneurs. The choice of this school happened at an early stage in their children's life. Often, family members or friends also send their children to the same institution. Another feature is that almost every family lives in the area close to the school, which contributes to socialization that takes place at levels in which geography plays a role in defining social uniformity.

These families value the fact that this is a "full time" school, where the socialization and control of their children can be delegated to the institution. Therefore, the school produces a strong sense of belonging, which facilitates obtaining of social capital, and offers a space inhabited by peers who belong to a similar status group as far as they are like-minded consumers, have access to certain places, and adhere to certain behavioral traits such as partaking in exclusive sports, foreign trips, etc. Studying at these schools places these elites in a space that cannot be reached by academic merit or by taking and passing rigorous entrance exams.

As opposed to the previous group, here we can identify a combination of the socialization process which is consolidated by the model of more traditional British schools, and the updates the elites have done in order to achieve satisfactory inclusion in globalized competitive societies. Indeed, the combination of an education whose goal it is to prepare students for competitions and processes of socialization already established in the past would seem to be the formula these families and institutions are choosing to implement.

National School

The last case is a secondary school founded in the 19th century and which belongs to the University of Buenos Aires. It is located in the City of Buenos Aires and has a long history in the education of leaders in the intellectual, political, scientific, and cultural fields of the country. Because of the demanding process of admission, which takes the form of an entrance examination, there is a highly selective process to become a student, which guarantees outstanding intellectual performances. Therefore, the school admits youths with skills to successfully navigate a very demanding curriculum.

As in other cases shown, the institution elicits a strong feeling of affiliation in its students. This feeling is shown in the motto of its alumni association: "*Brothers in the classroom and in life.*"

The weight of its more-than-centenary tradition is highlighted in the description the very institution does when showcasing its leading role at different times of the national history. Thus, the school appeals to history in order to associate its students with this tradition. Students know the history of its foundation and progress from the time they are training to take the entrance examination, and even then they have to learn about the leading figures who have attended the school, and the idea is suggested that they themselves will be the future leaders.

The school has sizeable and comfortable facilities and diverse equipment (labs, astronomy observatory, assembly hall, library, indoor swimming pool, Movie Theater, etc.) Like in other cases, the extracurricular offering is wide and also produces full-time students, even if ordinary classes are only one shift. Among those we can mention: volunteer work, choir, drama, tango music and dancing, fencing, chess, swimming, rap, pottery, yoga, debate, Japanese, history of film, photography, sailing, piano, etc. There are also exchange programs with schools in Argentina, Paris, and Rome.

Even if in this case this is not a bilingual school, and is secular in outlook, the curriculum shows some similarities with the others. The structure is subjects organized in eighteen departments: biology, Spanish and Literature, Social Sciences, Astronomy, Physical Education, French, Geography, History, Art History, IT, English, Latin, Math, Music, Art, Psychology and Philosophy, and Chemistry, each one run by a chair and coordinator chosen by teachers themselves. The school seeks to impart education with a broad outlook, which is deemed "humanistic" at the institution, and is closely linked to the traditional training of intellectual elites. It combines an education versed in languages, humanities, and hard sciences. As opposed to the previous schools, foreign languages are included in the subjects taught at schools but students are not prepared to take international exams.

Unlike other institutions, throughout our interviews and observations it became evident that politics played a major role in ordinary school life. At the National School, politics as a formative experience often becomes visible because teachers, staff, and students are members of different political parties and groups. The school also has a space for students to participate in some part of the institution's government. They are chosen for these through votes and an election process, and they have a voice and they can vote on some aspects of institutional life. In many cases, candidates who run and are elected are also connected to national political parties. Thus, this space of representation represents powerful learning about the political culture, and socializes everyone in the exercise and mastering of public life.

Families who were interviewed point out that their choice is based on the fact that they value the tradition of public education. They recognize that their children have the privilege of attending a school of this sort. Among parents there are professionals and employees who work in different sectors of the economy. As opposed to the families included in the two previous groups, the economic and social backgrounds here are more heterogeneous. Also, families reside in neighborhoods not adjacent to the school.

As opposed to schools previously analyzed, where all the schooling takes place in the private sector, in this case there is a group of youths that have attended public school in their primary level, and then opted for this school. Here we can find the

rhetoric associated to the tradition of public school. One aspect to be taken into account is that parents who were interviewed whose children attended a public primary school belong to families where the history of schooling is more recent, both in connection to higher studies and exclusive institutions. When delving into these families' educational histories, we can find lower educational levels attained in previous generations (as opposed to the other schools of the sample), and their grandparents show job histories of more modest backgrounds (such as shop assistants, workers in factories, and small businesses). Even if in some interviews parents recognize that the school is attended basically by upper-middle and upper class, their families' education histories show that they often are middle class groups in which access to higher levels of education has been the family strategy for ascendant social mobility. Even if this institution explicitly informs of its goal of educating elite sectors, their student body shows a more heterogeneous geographic, social, and economic background than in private schools. The condition of belonging their students have is the tendency or disposition to access cultural capital, and the school quickly provides preparation in that field.

3. Common aspects in the patterns of formation of elite schools

On the official curriculum and the role of school knowledge in these schools

In Argentina, although the education system was decentralized by the government in 1994, the drafting of the curriculum is still centralized. It is defined from the National Ministry of Education, through the prescription of a series of contents for all the schools of the country, together with the drafting of a curriculum in each of the twenty four provinces.¹³ The official curriculum sets the minimum contents for all the schools of the country. The education system is financed with the economic resources that come both from the national and the provincial budgets. These resources are allotted to the maintenance of state schools, and some resources are also given to private schools, in different proportions. All these resources are allotted with a first priority for the salaries of all teachers and principals, by virtue of the mandatory curriculum established both by the national and the provincial state.

From this structure, common to all schools, stems an important difference between the institutions. State schools have less autonomy than private ones to make decisions and intervene on curriculum structure (this can be seen mainly in the possibility of choosing their teachers and intervening on their work organization.) The possibilities of state schools to broaden their teaching offerings, such as English as a second language, extracurricular work, or others, are limited to the securing of resources. In general terms, extracurricular activities take place when extra resources can be obtained from the State through plans that are occasionally offered, or through voluntary economic contributions on the parts of families. In short, state schools' resources are more limited and unstable, and they have fewer margins of autonomy to intervene on the official curriculum.

¹³ National and provincial instances coordinate the agreements on the established curriculum at the Council of Ministers (Federal Council of Education).

Unlike them, private schools (even if a part of their financing comes from state funds and is supervised by the State itself) have additional economic resources because of the direct payment that their students' families carry out, and have both legal and economic possibilities of enacting changes in their curricular offering. Therefore, they tend to have longer school days, more intensive teaching of foreign languages,¹⁴ and sports, cultural, and artistic activities that other schools do not generally have the possibility of offering. Faced with these facts, maybe the hallmark of the schools we studied is how systematic and regular their curricular and extracurricular offerings are, and that they are "holistic" (which means not only more schooling hours but also contents associated to education tradition or innovation, as the case might be). In our work we have seen that even if the official curriculum is present at almost every school analyzed (with the exception of the national school), they develop an additional series of different programs in each institution, and they contribute to forging ways of differentiation in their educational offering. Thus, it is possible to identify the overlap of the official curriculum and the training for international exams and other extracurricular activities present in the schools studied, and which contribute to define schools that are remarkably different from the rest (be them private or public) according to the kind of educational experience they offer.

Unlike private schools, the institution which belongs to the university is not legally bound to teach the National Education Ministry curriculum, or the provincial one. This is because of the autonomy that all universities have of choosing their curriculum and teaching contents. Therefore, this institution develops their own plans defined by the teachers of each department.

From this description it is possible to see that institutions that cater to elites add a multiplicity of complementary offerings to the official curriculum that is mandatory for the whole country. These offerings make up an "enriched" curriculum. Formally, all these institutions that cater to elites are different from the rest of the schools because they have defined their own curriculum (like the university school), or because they have opted for a double curriculum (the national and the international one) in the cases where private schools are part of a system of external exams as a source that defines an important *quantum* of the school work. However, the curriculum also satisfies other expectations of families with devices associated to conviviality and school sociability: houses, sports, days of conviviality, study trips and/or programs of international exchange. Through these activities, for instance, the younger generations can make their "friends for life", and add to their families' social capital.

The importance of this enriched curriculum is that from it (though not only from it)¹⁵ families and schools build the *ethos* that provides uniqueness and success to each institution. Eminence is configured from the different focuses these schools drive, not only in terms of formal learning but, in a broader fashion, from the educational experiences that define them as subjects. The emphasis in the teaching of foreign languages; the addition of a set of extracurricular activities that show, according to each

¹⁴ Even when this offering is not sufficient, in the case of schools chosen by families of lower-middle and middle income levels, they have to supplement the teaching of English attending (generally, and when their economic situation allows it) private English institutes.

¹⁵ The institution's ethos is configured from the combination of curricular offering, the type of family that sends their children to each school, the school's history, the traditions that are part of it, etc. See Fuentes 2015; Gessaghi, 2013; Ziegler, 2015.

institution, a different bias based on preferences; the ways in which free time is configured, the cultural consumption of the groups attending them, the development of activities for the community, which convey different messages depending on the school (some are associated to the value of religious charity, others to philanthropy and/or political activity), etc. All of these are central elements of this expanded curriculum. In other words, having their own contents and working strategies shape these institutions' own *ethos*. Thus, the curriculum seems to contribute to the configuration of ways of educational inequality which are not new, but haven't yet been tackled by education research in Argentina, and collaborate shaping particular ways of seeing and interpreting the world. These ways exist in accordance to an elite status.

In a revision of their classic article on curriculum in elite boarding schools in the US, Cookson and Persell (2010) highlight that the historic evolution of elite schools can be thought of as the blending of three different sociological theories: a status culture model of educational change; a Marxist theory of educational change and a rational functionalistic conception of stratification and educational change (Cookson and Persell, 2010:27). However, the authors highlight that twenty five years later, American elite institutions remain a pipeline to selective colleges and their cultural lives are continuous from the past. They therefore claim that the status-culture model is what has greater explanatory power because the elites still seek to maintain their cultural distinctions and rites of belonging, and they set limits between themselves and the rest. In other words, the moral and the educational cores of elite schools in US remained remarkably stable twenty-five years later (2010).

Our work does not yet show evidence on the genealogy of the way of structuring the curriculum at researched schools and their successive reform processes; however, it would be promising to raise the issue of an approach to the ways in which these locally adopted models for the formation of elites were established and gained legitimacy. For the time being, we can posit that the configuration of the curriculum in the schools we have examined is the result of the convergence of multiple elements such as: the history and traditions of how elites are formed; the local reception and adaptation of international trends for the preparation of these groups; the connection of these families and schools, and their mutual expectations towards the education of these youths, among other matters.

The relative role of school knowledge in the formation of elites

Unlike Europe, where (as noted by Weber and deepened by Bourdieu) there is an ideal of "cultivated man", which rests on an implicit recognition of the cultural superiority of elites over masses, privileged groups in our countries do not completely justify their distinction with "scholarly knowledge", meritocracy, or through knowledge linked to high or low culture (Gessaghi, 2015). The schools these groups choose are another factor among many that allows them to consolidate a position of privilege in accordance to their membership of a certain social group. School options must be understood as one of the multiple spaces relevant for the production and dispute of dominant/gravitating positions. Membership of the circuit of private education that caters to the elites is therefore explained through the economic possibility of family access, and not through the possession of a number of acknowledged academic facts that favor bequeathing to your offspring. Delving deeper into this circuit of institutions it is possible to identify some that, to a big extent, carry out the transmission and

possession of school knowledge -such as San Esteban- , but in the context of these private schools, the formation of elites is not contingent to gaining school knowledge as a criteria of distinction sought, or has a starring role in becoming students in them. This does not mean that they do not consider learning and school knowledge relevant: all the schools bill themselves as "with academic excellence". However, beyond this institutional strategy and the perception the families themselves build and spread on the schools of their choice, the academic dimension does not appear as a structuring element in the career path that is expected to be achieved or reproduced.

In our analysis, we take as counterpoint the university public school, for it is a case that differs from this type of dynamics. This institution, whose pattern is closer to the way of education and selection of European elites, through the academic way-centers its approach around the principles of meritocracy and its concurrent way of acquisition of knowledge associated to the wisdom of high culture. We think that the subsidiary place generally given to school knowledge in the educational approach of these groups, within the narrative of construction and justification of their place of privilege, is closely associated to the structure of the local education system, which avoids an early selection of the students' educational destinations by offering a formally "unique" school, which does not limit access to higher education. The absence of national intermediate exams, as well as exams of school completion, coupled with the scarce presence of formal selection devices to the access to higher education, result in elites not being able to build differences from a unique school capital. The institutions they choose become relevant to the reinforcement of social capital¹⁶ or the building of moral boundaries (Fuentes, 2015; Gessaghi, 2015) before becoming illustrated subjects in a position of competing in a meritocratic selection process not present in this educational system.

Owing to the labile institutionalization of elite circuits, (which characterize a country where the aspiration for equality was the result of and drove struggles which to a great extent explain the lack thereof) individual networks and informal relationships replace formalized career paths (Tiramonti and Ziegler, 2008). Faced with the fact that heterogeneous resources and career paths lead to the highest positions, the schools and families that belong to the most privileged sectors guarantee the adherence to a medium that allows them to become part of a stable network, which is potentially promising for the development of present and future social opportunities. Faced with these dynamics, schools widen and boost the more restricted circle that the family environment offers. There they have resources available to them such as community work, sports practice, exchange programs, which they can use to shape a future whose projection is uncertain, as there are no regulated devices to sort career paths and justify positions attained. This dynamic is present in all the schools that were analyzed.¹⁷

¹⁶The construction of proximity bonds that can be used as capital is produced at school, but not only there. School, neighborhood, sports clubs, family networks, and religious groups (among others) configure a social space where relationships between significant peers can become relevant support (Martucceli, 2007).

¹⁷Argentina was built, especially at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, as a strongly alluvial society, with an early political culture that was anti-oligarchic and equalitarian. Political parties, unions, anarchists and communists drove social struggles that originated a good part of our institutional establishment, and the imaginary that tended to impeach forms of segmentation that favored levels of privilege. Up to the beginnings of this new century the idea of progress was a central component of the social imaginary, and equality prevailed as a growing demand -more or less omnipresent according

Granted, the content and activities promoted by these schools are evidence of the different elite groups that are massively included in the institutions. Examples of the social and cultural space these schools, families, and students inhabit are the emphasis on languages with a preponderance of English; or the teaching of French and Latin at the university school; the choice of certain sports associated to the British tradition and appropriated locally by the upper-middle sectors such as masculine rugby and feminine hockey; and the choice of theater that is closer to local literary works or Broadway musicals. However, and despite all these distances, being part of the school's offerings would seem to provide some elements that one can resort to at any moment that is timely. We notice that we are in the presence of institutions that cover a wide and heterogeneous spectrum of activities, and which offer this kind of curriculum in order to achieve the insertion of students in this structure. They do so by offering opportunities of education in something useful in the present, and possibly also at some other time.

Configuration of elites and their relationship with "others"

Finally, an element that is part of the curriculum (in the broad sense) of all these schools is the group of activities geared towards the acquaintance and contact with "others", those which are not part of the elites. As we have seen in some previous works (Fuentes, 2013; Gessaghi, 2015, Ziegler, 2004) in elite schools "others" appear often in extracurricular programs in which they are the object of philanthropy or charity. In these institutions, forays into the land of poverty happen in different shades and with different contents, depending on a wide spectrum of principles that go from the social doctrine of the Catholic Church and/or postconciliar renewal to lay versions of philanthropy or the spirit of political fieldwork. Granted, these differences and their possible realizations are connected to the nuances and main features of each of the institutions.

Beyond all their substantial differences, in all of them we can see a commonality: they develop extracurricular programs that promote a vision of the "others" as "needy" subjects who, incapable of procuring their own material sustenance, require bonds of tutelage to help them because of their condition. These "others" can be visited through different activities that will enable a contact, through visits which will allow limited and temporary access to the remote world of poverty and squalor. These forays are a life experience for students of elite schools. The establishment of this type of bond, with a "needy" population as the target of charity and philanthropy is not an invention of these schools, but an extended way of intervention on these groups. However, it is curious that schools that educate elites develop a generalized activity of this sort, which puts them institutionally in the field outside and above "poverty", but intervening on it.

Schools work to collaborate in the production of moral boundaries from the activities their youths develop. The intensity in the conviviality of these schools, be it for their double shift, for their sociability activities and/or for the "harmony in values" between schools and families, is extended in the construction of a network connecting families, children, soup kitchens, and institutions in poverty contexts. They generate a

to the historical context- in the language of demands, and the lens through which they are interpreted, and different political situations are disputed (Kessler, 2014).

symbolic capital that allows for a public presentation and their identification as caring youths. The privilege takes here a moral face, a superiority that goes in unison with the aforementioned language of equality. If "we are all equal", then we "must do something for others" (a young graduate of Santa Elena). The difference lays in the possession of values, knowledge, and practices on poverty.

In the case of the university institution, carrying out these activities takes the form of two types of activity: work with groups of unfavorable economic conditions (they do trips and they take donations, like in the other schools), and intense "charity" work to provide extra tutoring to students who aspire to be admitted to the school, and who come from family backgrounds that cannot afford the economic cost of the private tutoring regularly required for the task. In this case, it is also possible to identify the way in which these students set themselves up as a select group which carries out a task that consolidates them in the position of "intellectual superiority" that is their hallmark.

With these tasks, we notice that these schools consolidate a sense about who "we" are (students of an elite school) as opposed to the "others". These charity tasks also help to forge a position of distinction and domination that is naturalized, on top of introducing students in practices of leadership over these "others", who are in a subordinate position.

4. Conclusions

In this work we have analyzed the structure of the curriculum of institutions which endeavor to educate the elites. We have looked into their differences, but especially into their similarities. We have identified an "enriched curriculum" which is configured from different contents which are common to elite schools, as well as features that distinguish orientations and the *ethos* in these schools. These differences allow us to recognize that the institutions are associated with different groups of elites, and therefore for their families the choice of certain schools is exclusionary. This means that choices are univocal, and it is uncommon that a school can be "replaced" by another in the preferences of the groups studied.

This scenario, in which the schools' differentiation strategies are combined with the family options, leads to a growing social and educational differentiation of actors and institutions. It is our contention that these processes are caused both by the decisions made by the schools' management and the practices and decisions of the families which belong to the higher social classes. This common area between what the schools offer and what the families expect and demand does not exist by chance or is unidirectional; rather, we believe it is a synthesis of multiple interactions in which families and schools seek prestige and status.

These processes contribute to the increase of educational fragmentation, particularly in urban areas, in which the opportunity of attending schools with different characteristics diversifies the expectations of families, and promote the insertion of elite members in environments which guarantee differentiation and union with their peers.

References

- Aguiar, A. (2012). Cuando la elección de la escuela es libre: el caso de las élites y clases medias brasileñas. In S. Ziegler, and V. Gessaghi, (Comps.), *Formación de las elites. Investigaciones y debates en Argentina, Brasil y Francia*. Buenos Aires: Manantial.
- Alabarces, P. (2013). Fútbol, leonas, rugbiers y patria. El nacionalismo deportivo y las mercancías. *Nueva Sociedad*, 248, 28-42.
- Ball, S. (2003). *Class strategies and the education market. The middle classes and social advantage*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Cookson, P. W. and Persell, C.H. (2010). Preparing for Power: twenty-five years later. In A. Howard and R. Gaztambide-Fernández, R., *Educating Elites. Class privilege and Educational Advantage*. Maryland: R&L Education.
- Fuentes, S. (2015). *Educación y sociabilidad de las elites en Buenos Aires*. Tesis de doctorado. Instituto de Altos Estudios Sociales, Universidad Nacional de San Martín. Buenos Aires.
- Fuentes, S. (2013). Elecciones escolares: moral y distinción en la relación escuela-familias. *Cadernos de Pesquisa*, 149, 43, 682-703.
- Fuentes, S. (2012). Los jóvenes y la “guita”: tensiones en torno a la profesionalización del rugby masculino en Buenos Aires. *Revista Esporte e Sociedade*, 20, 7, 23-49.
- Gasztambide-Fernández, R. (2009). *The Best of the Best: Becoming Elite at American Boarding School*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press.
- Gessaghi, V. (2015). “Ser sencillo, ser buena persona”: clasificaciones morales y procesos de distinción en las experiencias educativas de la “clase alta” argentina. *Revista PRO-POSIÇÕES*, 26, 2 (77), 33-50.
- Gessaghi, V. (2013). Familias y escuelas: construcción del sentido de la educación y de la escolarización en “la clase alta argentina”. *RUNA, Revista del Instituto de Ciencias Antropológicas*, 34, 1, 73-90.
- Goodson, I., Cookson, P y Persell, C. (2000). Distinción y destino: la importancia de la forma del curriculum en las escuelas privadas de elite estadounidenses. In I. Goodson, (Org.), *El cambio en el curriculum*. Barcelona: Octaedro.
- Hunter, I. (1998) *Repensando la escuela*. Barcelona: Pomares.
- Jay, E. (2002). As escolas da grande burguesia: o caso da Suíça. In A. M. Almeida, y M. A. Nogueira (org.), *A escolarização das elites. Um panorama Internacional da pesquisa*. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes.
- Karabel, J. (2006). *The chosen. The hidden history of admission and exclusión at Harvard, Yale and Princeton*. New York: Martiner Books.
- Kenway, J.; Fahey, J. & Koh, A. (2013). *The Libidinal Economy of the Globalising*

Elite School Market. In C. Maxwell & P. Aggleton, (2013), *Privilege, Agency and Affect: Understanding the Production and Effects of Action*. New York: Palgrave, Macmillan.

Khan, S. (2011). *Privilege: the making of an adolescent elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kessler, G. (2014). *Controversias sobre la desigualdad*. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Martucelli, D. (2007). *Gramáticas del individuo*. Buenos Aires: Losada.

Maxwell, C & Aggleton, P. (2013). *Privilege, Agency and Affect: Understanding the Production and Effect of Action*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Resnik, J. (2008). The construction of the global worker through international education. In J. Resnik (Ed.), *The production of educational knowledge in the global era*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Tilly, C. (2000). *La desigualdad persistente*. Buenos Aires: Manantial.

Tiramonti, G. y S. Ziegler, S. (2008). *La educación de las elites. Aspiraciones, estrategias y oportunidades*. Buenos Aires: Paidós.

Van Zanten, A. (2009). *Choisir son école. Stratégies familiales et médiations locales*. Paris: PUF.

Veleda, C. (2012). *La segregación educativa. Entre la fragmentación de las clases medias y la regulación atomizada*. –Buenos Aires: La Crujía -Ed. Stella.

Waters, J. (2007). Roundabout routes and sanctuary schools: the role of situated educational practices and habitus in the creation of transnational professionals . *Global Networks* 7(4): 477-497.

Weis, L., Cipollone, K., & Jenkins, H. (2014). *Class warfare: Class, race, and college admissions in top-tier secondary schools*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Ziegler, S. (2015). Schools and families: school choice and formation of elites in present-day Argentina. In J. Kenway & A. Koh Soon Lee, *Elite Schools: Multiple Geographies of Privilege*, New York: Routledge.

Ziegler, S. (2004). La escolarización de las elites: un acercamiento a la socialización de los jóvenes de sectores favorecidos en la Argentina actual. In G. Tiramonti, (comp.), *La trama de la desigualdad educativa. Mutaciones recientes de la escuela media*. Buenos Aires: Manantial.