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Personalization and competition in elite schools in Buenos Aires: school strategies for the production and legitimization of dominant groups

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the strategies found in two elite secondary institutions in Buenos Aires designed to legitimise the selection of students aspiring to become members of the elite. The first are personalization strategies where teachers and students work together with the aim of facilitating success in examinations. The second are strategies that promote competition between students, which have the effect of the students being responsible for their success. Field work took place in two schools, where interviews were conducted with the principals, teachers of different subjects and parents. Both schools use examinations as a mechanism for justifying their students' merits, but develop different pedagogies to achieve this. The private school which recruits the children of the economic elite implements strategies to maximise students' results by grouping them according to individual performance and facilitating the development of supportive relationships with teachers. At the public school, individual competition is fostered, where students find themselves in large classes and pupils appear to be an 'anonymous' mass. In this school, where mostly the cultural and intellectual elite send their children, merit is also justified through performance, but it is emphasised that young people have attained high results as a result of their, hard work.

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1. Introduction

Studies of the relationship between education and elites are relatively recent in Argentina (Tiramonti, 2004; Ziegler 2004; Tiramonti and Ziegler 2008; Villa 2012; Del Cueto 2007; Gessaghi 2013; Rodríguez Moyano 2012; Méndez 2013; Prosser 2015; among others). The issue is part of a broader concern in international social sciences in recent years, which has revisited understandings of the formation of dominant groups (Howard and Gaztambide-Fernández 2010; Kahn 2011; Kenway, Johannah, and Koh 2013; Ball, van Zanten, and Darchy-Koechlin 2015; Maxwell and Aggleton 2015; Weis, Cipollone, and Jenkins 2014; Resnik 2008; and others).

One aspect of the study of elites is their heterogeneous composition. Often drawing on the pioneering works of Bourdieu, which focused on understanding processes of reproduction of different types of capital (economic, cultural, social), and their subsequent conversion (Saint Martin 2005), there have been numerous studies that have analysed the make-up of the different fractions within the elites in

different parts of the world (Kenway and McCarthy 2014; Ball, van Zanten, and Darchy-Koechlin 2015; Maxwell and Aggleton 2015; Gunter, Hall, and Apple 2016; Koh and Kenway 2016).

The purpose of this paper is to examine how the processes of schooling can vary across different fractions of the elite, through a close focus on Argentina, and more specifically Buenos Aires. Our work aims at understanding the different ways schools seek to produce and reproduce different elite groups. It analyses how schools themselves prioritise the selection of particular social groups, and subsequently how processes of cultivation through education and other kinds of activities within the schools appear to develop or extend within their student bodies particular dispositions to become or remain part of the elite with Argentine society. Examining the schools' pedagogical approaches provides a way of examining how the young are prepared for positions of power and also the different dispositions that are viewed as signalling entitlement to being part of the elite by the different fractions. This paper is particularly concerned with the role played by teachers as symbolic operators in this process of reproduction of privilege as well as the pedagogies defined by the elite schools to select their students. Such selection is the starting point in the process of building an individual elite position for those students. This paper shows the differences between the strategies that each of these schools deploy in order to select 'those who have the merit to belong'. In both cases the selection is a result of a combined collective and an individual effort.

In Argentina, as well as other countries, various approaches have been developed for understanding practices around 'school choice' (Whitty, Power, and Halpin 1998; Ball 2003; Crozier 2008; Van Zanten 2009; Windle 2009; Weis, Cipollone, and Jenkins 2014). Braslavsky (1985) was the first researcher to analyse school choice in Argentina. The research found differences across socio-economic groups in the take-up of educational provision. These findings were extended in the early 2000s by other scholars in Argentina. Tiramonti and Ziegler (2008) examined the way in which families play an active role in establishing and maintaining segregation between schools by the kinds of institutions they favour and avoid. Schools, too, are part of this process, by playing a role in shaping which groups of families they orient themselves to and in the subtle ways they manage processes of selection.

Although there have been some studies on Argentine elite schools, these have focused on selection processes and why certain families appear to be enticed by particular institutions (Ziegler 2004; Fuentes 2012; Rodríguez Moyano 2012; Villa 2012; Gessaghi 2013). However, to date, no studies in this area of research have focused on the curriculum within elite schools, processes of cultivation within these organisations, and how these may be linked to the preference of certain fractions of the elites to choose particular elite schools (for an exception see Prosser 2015). There are no studies either that inquire into the processes through which the schools select their students from the diverse elite fractions. It is therefore our interest to contribute to the analysis of the pedagogies that elite schools develop to promote and legitimise their students as those who are better placed to access future elite positions.

2. National context and methodology

Processes of inequality have changed in recent years largely driven by changes in the Argentine economy and those groups who have benefitted from the economic crises it has experienced (Svampa 2005; Kessler 2014). According to official data from the Permanent Survey of Households by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses for the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, the ratio of per capita family income between the highest- and lowest-income groups rose 46-fold between 1992 and 2002. Even following a period of economic growth since 2003, where poverty levels have decreased somewhat, trends in income distribution have not been reversed. Important to note too is that there is a wide heterogeneity in the distribution among those occupying the top 10% of the income pyramid due to the fact that the income distribution within this category has further expanded, with the top 1% earning significantly more than the rest of the 10%.

This fragmentation of income distribution and which social groups can be found within the various income brackets has been mirrored in the educational field (Tiramonti 2004). One group of

studies have shown that family and institutional strategies around education vary across different elite groups (Rodríguez Moyano 2012; Villa 2012; Méndez 2013). These studies have identified different institutional configurations serving different groups of families. In Ziegler (2004) we observed that there are schools that 'educate for a global, cosmopolite world', schools that 'educate for the conservation of Christian values' and schools that educate for 'intellectual distinction'. The first two types of schools include private institutions, while the last refers only state-funded schools, the so-called 'university schools'. As Gessaghi and Méndez point out (2014, 45), it must be noted that in Argentina, contrary to other countries, the dividing line is not between private and state schools but between state and private schools for the poor, and those, state or private, that target the narrow strip of the most privileged social sectors.

Private education is not exclusively aimed at the higher-income sectors; there are private schools for the middle and even lower classes. Nevertheless, if we analyse students attending private schools as a percentage of the total school population, the highest rates are found in the wealthier and more centralised neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires. Moreover, the private schools sector has been growing in recent years. In 2014 29.1% of students were attending private schools nationally, while in Buenos Aires it stood at 51% and at 35.7% in Buenos Aires Province.¹ In Buenos Aires Province this rate is higher in the richest municipalities. Geographic concentration aside, the socio-economic make-up of students attending private schools is associated with the wealthier sections of society. In 2011 57% of secondary-school students attending private schools were from the top quintile of households in the Metropolitan Area (Buenos Aires and its suburbs).²

It must also be stressed that in Argentina the teaching of students from elite families takes place mostly in the private sector – in elite independent schools with high fee levels, which means that only families on a certain income scale can afford to send their children to them (Prosser 2016). This is largely because there are very few schools that belong to national universities (i.e. that are non-fee-paying) and considered academically elite. These latter schools are very prestigious and are mostly attended by children from more well resourced families, usually those involved in politics, academia or cultural sectors.

In summary, the schooling of elites at the secondary level in Argentina is concentrated mainly in the wealthiest urban spaces, mostly in private schools where access is not initially granted by students' academic attainment but by their economic potential to pay the high school fees. As Prosser (2016) points out, attendance of these schools is a status symbol that is seen as a keystone of these groups' identities. Meanwhile, the public university secondary schools select their students through stringent academic selection criteria which are evidenced by successfully completing an entrance examination. Students who graduate from these university secondary schools generally go on to degrees programmes in the most prestigious public universities in Argentina, while the top students from elite private schools tend to choose to attend elite private universities (Fuentes 2015) or to pursue high-prestige degrees (e.g. 'hard sciences', medicine and law) in leading public universities.

While the university state schools follow an independent curriculum that allows them to teach a different syllabus from national curriculum, that must be followed by other state secondary schools, elite private schools teach both the national curriculum and international syllabuses (often the International Baccalaureate – IB). It can therefore be argued that both types of institutions present an 'enriched curriculum' compared to Argentina's secondary school sector as a whole. Provision of the IB is a specific attempt by schools to position themselves as high status institutions, looking outward and preparing students for an international career, as it is not widely recognised by local universities in their admissions process. The IB- programme was offered by 45 private schools and 13 state schools in Buenos Aires and Buenos Aires Province at the time of the study (2014–2015).

This article is based on a study conducted in two secondary schools,³ one located in Buenos Aires itself, the most prosperous city in the country, and the other in northern Greater Buenos Aires, in one of its highest income neighbourhoods. Both schools have long histories and could be defined as 'traditional' institutions of 'academic excellence'. The choice of schools was led by our intention to select two quite different types of schools within the category of 'elite' schools in Argentina. The school in Greater Buenos Aires is private and one of the five schools in this province with the highest tuition

fees, therefore mainly recruiting families from the economic elites. The other school – in Buenos Aires central – is a public university school, with a long history of educating the elite, mainly political and intellectual groups. The institutions were selected because they openly strive to prepare their students for positions of power and privilege (i.e. highly economically, socially and culturally resourced). These institutions take in the children of businesspeople, intellectuals, high-ranking officials, people in the entertainment industry, bankers, those in the liberal professions, landowners and merchants.

The field-work lasted two years, and in-depth interviews were conducted with school principals, twenty-five teachers who taught a variety of subjects, and a total of sixteen parents. Schools' informal spaces (the playground and social spaces used by the students during break times, as well as the staff-room) were observed and detailed notes taken. Printed and promotional materials were also reviewed.

3. A visible legitimacy: examinations as mechanisms for school success

Tiramonti and Ziegler (2008) analysed processes of selection that facilitated upward mobility and social promotion in Argentina during the twentieth century. They found that access to positions of power via examination were fairly limited in number – important only for the upper echelons of the judiciary, those embarking on a diplomatic career or seeking to become university lecturers. For historical and cultural reasons there has instead been a commitment to the idea of the 'equality' of all citizens (Grimson 2011), which has meant no processes of selection via examination has been permitted as a way of managing access to either secondary or university education (Tiramonti and Suasnabar 2001). Only the exclusive university secondary schools have historically been allowed to have selective, exclusive examinations. Though, more recently, some private schools have also adopted the use of examinations as part of their selection to IB- programmes.

In other parts of the world there is often an association made between examinations and meritocracy, see for instance Van Zanten and Maxwell's (2015) discussion of the importance of *concours* as a form of legitimacy for those accessing elite education and later on positions of power in France. Yet in Argentina this form of selection and legitimisation of selection is rare. The country neither has, nor promotes an established circuit to access elite positions. Individuals and some educational institutions take responsibility and compete in an unstructured path to prepare those who will be part of the elite. It is therefore significant that in the two schools involved in our research, exams play an important role and are in fact key to understanding processes of cultivation within these settings. However, the ways in which examinations are used within these two schools are different, and this is explored in greater detail below.

3.1. Personalization as a strategy for school success

Our first school, a private secondary school, is located in northern Greater Buenos Aires. It was established in the mid-nineteenth century with the purpose of providing high-quality bilingual education to the children of English-speaking immigrant families. Today it is known as a prestigious institution, which aims to provide a bilingual education, a highly academic curriculum and foster an international outlook among its students. The school follows a dual curriculum: the national curriculum and the International Baccalaureate Diploma. The institutional approach of the school seeks to combine a link to its historic traditions with an acknowledgement that the increasingly globalised world creates different possibilities and places new expectations on young people and their preparation for the future (Resnik 2008).

Families, too, expect the school to prepare their children to compete for higher education places elsewhere in the world, and future work opportunities in the international field. The families who send their children to this school include those connected to the most dynamic sectors of the Argentine economy. Parents hold high-level executive positions in business, while others are entrepreneurs. Families usually make the decision to send their children to this school early on, and often other family members or close friends also send their children to the same institution. Most families tend to live close to the

school. Being able to afford the high tuition fees is the main criterion for selection. The monthly tuition fees for the school are US\$1000; which has to be understood in the context that in 2010 only 1% of the Argentine population had a salary above US\$2000 per month.

The education of students in school is uniquely organised – with each subject being offered at three levels and students grouped accordingly to attainment and effort in one of these three tiers. This is uncommon in Argentina, and also among elite schools. Such groupings occur across all subjects and years.

Teacher: 'It was decided here many years ago that students should be grouped by performance and sit for exams in different subjects across the varying levels of difficulty offered by the IB.'

Interviewer: Why are groups homogeneous?

T: So that they can have a better performance, so that more advantaged students don't have to move at a slower pace and so those who need more help can secure it'. (Physics teacher)

This kind of arrangement promotes an awareness, as well as acceptance, of individual differences, which we argue creates a particular kind of socialisation for the students as they do not belong to a stable grouping in each subject, but one that is subject to change as they make individual progress. The continuous ranking of students' efforts clearly alerts them (and others) to their academic standing within their peer group. The only stable group the students belong to at school is their mentoring group. Such a process of moving groups regularly also facilitates the development of a variety of relationships within the student body as they move relatively fluidly between groups and classes.

The school aims to retain its students, and one way in which this can be done is by ensuring each young person reaches the highest attainment possible for them. The school's commitment to this is evidenced through its flexible streaming system. The success of this approach is dependent on how well it can support students to progress, as well as ensuring it retains its best teachers. Facilitating the progress of each student requires them to foster the close working relationships between teachers and individual students. This is felt subsequently to be professionally fulfilling for the teacher.

At our research school we observed and heard about sentiments amongst its teachers – who were actively and apparently enthusiastically engaged with their students. The development of what we have termed 'personalization strategies' in the education and support of students is critical to fostering such energy and commitment in our view.

By 'personalization' we are describing a strategy that allows the institution significant control over the education pathways followed by students. This consequently minimises any 'deviations' students can pursue. A personalization strategy is synonymous with relatively constant support for students' learning, as well as attempt to offer broader extra-curricular experiences within the school (Ziegler and Nobile 2014). The reference here to 'support' is understood both around the academic content of the curriculum, but also in developing the discipline for studying and opportunities to forge bonds with peers and teachers. This support takes on different forms – extra lessons provided to students who need them, mentoring, the writing of reports to families about progress and engagement, and facilitation of access to various (educational) activities. Teachers view themselves, as do their students, as being very available and highly committed to their pupils. Such an approach is seen to guarantee student attainment, support teachers' satisfaction with their work, all of which should have a positive effect on the school's enrolment figures.

Among the teaching staff such a continuous and close system of support could be suggestive of Foucault's (1990) concept of *pastoral power*, where specific techniques allow for students to be ruled. Through the focus on the individual, the shepherd (i.e. the teacher and/or school) works to guide and lead their herd unconditionally to ensure their salvation. Thus, the school define strategies to control their students to ensure they do not deviate from the expected path. The schools utilise a series of active technological, governing and control mechanisms in order to obtain their successful results. The model adopted by this school is strongly connected to the institution's English roots, adapting school strategies widely established in the UK and the USA.

During interviews teachers mentioned the role they play as their students' mentors and the responsibility they take on to foster student attainment as they view their students' performance as a yardstick of their own worth. This in turn fosters a strong, perhaps exaggerated sense of commitment and concern for their students. For example a history teacher had interrupted their holiday to check their students' examination results: 'I came down from the mountains to check my e-mail almost every day to see how the kids had done.' In another interview, a biology teacher explained how personally affected she was by students' engagement and attainment.

I had students that studied like crazy, and it was a pleasure to be with them during their training; then there were others who don't care or are exhausted by the time the test week arrives and then don't perform as well.

Some teachers described themselves as 'coaches', almost akin to trainers for high-performance athletes. Where teachers are both the evaluators of students' abilities (through the regular changes to the groupings that take place for each subject), their professional worth is also measured by their students' performance. Through such mechanisms both teachers and students are bound together in a way, as both become subjected to inspection by an external assessment system. This further fosters the intense working relationships we observed between teachers and students at this school, and the personalisation strategies developed for each young person.

Although some teachers commented that the pressure to succeed meant that the environment to promote academic attainment could be seen as extreme or 'excessive', as 'these kids have everything served on a silver platter', the overall effect of this particular pedagogical and institutional approach to streaming and relationship-building within the school has been to create an environment that was unique and successful in demanding high standards from both its students and teachers. We would suggest further that the offer of the IB-programme and its link to externally-set, marked and therefore universally-recognised examinations embed a sense of prestige, and the imperative for all members of the school community to work closely together to succeed. It is therefore through hard work, academic success, and a sense of an inter-dependent community that the school professed its elite nature.

The success of students in this school is made possible through a personalised approach, aimed at ensuring that all students in the school reach the expected goals. Merit is therefore not just the product of an isolated performance of the individual, but success is in fact the result of a collective effort that contributes to the success of that individual while at the same time having the effect of strengthening the prestige of the whole group. The students belong to, and are recruited from, a selected social segment, and the schools develop an active and collaborative strategy to obtain outstanding performances in order to convert their external resources into cultural capital acquired as part of the schooling process. The strategy of personalization contributes to legitimise those groups through demonstrating that, beyond their extra-school resources, the individuals have the personal skills that ensure their success in school. Furthermore, the collective efforts help to reinforce bonds of solidarity within this group and should have benefits later on in life as well, for networking and other forms of collaboration.

3.2. Competition as a way of selection in public schools

In this section we consider the pedagogical and institutional approaches found in the university public school that formed part of our study. This school has historically been identified as producing elites, with alumni in leading positions in science, art and politics. This is a school with a long history of producing the very best of Argentina's enlightened cultural elites.

As a state school, it is both secular and free to attend, but it does have an entrance examination, thereby guaranteeing highly academic students and a strong intellectual cohesion (in the way the private school discussed above demonstrated strong social cohesion due to its high tuition fees and geographical location). Of course, at our second focus school, entry is not only based on (academic) 'merit' but on the privileges many of these students already have due to their families' cultural, financial and social capital. It is worth reiterating that no other Argentine secondary schools have entrance examinations, except for the five public university schools. Young people wishing to apply therefore require a particular kind of 'training' (knowledge and skills) to not only pass the entrance exam but

also cope with what the teachers describe as a highly demanding classical curriculum. Students know before applying that there are annual exams they must pass in this school if they hope to continue into the next academic year. According to one language teacher, *Here kids value knowledge but don't get to pass subjects easily because the school is ultra-demanding*. This structure is an early reproduction of the university evaluation system for which this school is training its students. The school creates the university habitus. This model dates back to its origins, since this institution was originally founded as a pre-University of Buenos Aires high school. Teachers at this school explain that the system contributes to preparing students for the demands of university life.

Since the university requires an autonomous performance, the school promotes rigour and thoroughness as the best means of socialisation for these students. In this case, the strategy of personalization is disregarded, as it is perceived to be a model that provides excessive support and does not promote individually secured achievements.

A little like the *concours* to enter France's *Grandes Écoles*, the entrance examination is in fact a year-long course which is taken by students at the school they wish to apply to during their final year of primary school. Four subjects are taught in this class: Spanish Language, Mathematics, Geography and History, with students taking classes and sitting examinations over the course of the year. It is also common for families to enlist the help of private tutors to supplement this training. Entrance into this elite university school therefore requires students to attend an obligatory year-long intensive training course. Interviewees highlighted the effort students make during the entrance classes and, above all, during their examinations, in order to gain a place at the university school. In several teachers' view, the year-long selection processes enables them to choose those students best suited and most highly motivated towards academic work. The year-long course also signals to potential students the expectations and rigours of the university school regime. Thus the entrance exam and training period required before it are both methods of selection but also a process of socialisation for future students in this school.

This admission process means that in theory there is open competition for a place at the school. For many of the young applicants this is often the first time they have to entertain the idea of competing for the right to occupy a particular social space. As Méndez (2013) suggests, the entrance class operates as an act of segregation from the rest (i.e. their other Argentine peers). It is as important that 'some' can gain admission as it is for 'others' to be excluded. As Bourdieu and Passeron argue:

the mechanisms of elimination are the privileged place of relations between the working of the education system and the perpetuation of the structure of class relations. There is nothing better than an examination to elicit from others the recognition of the legitimacy of school verdicts and of the social hierarchies legitimized by them, for it leads those who are eliminated to assimilate to those who fail, while those who are chosen from the limited number of applicants see their selection as a recognition of a merit or 'gift' that would in any case have made them preferable to the rest. (Bourdieu and Passeron 1981, 218)

Important too is that the students do not have to undergo just one examination in order to be admitted to the school, but that they need to continually prove themselves and justify their position annually through examination. Thus, the entrance examination is just the beginning of a continuous series of tests, where students are competing against one another to maintain their position in this highly selective and demanding environment. Once the entrance requirements have been met, where competition arises from the limited number of places available, the competitive dynamic continues within the school's culture, as students are constantly comparing themselves with each other in relation to their grades and academic performance. The entrance examination acts as a gateway, but the real threat of expulsion is ever-present throughout the rest of the students' schooling career. The following letter was taken from a student blog⁴:

Dear Teachers, Parents and Members of the educational community,

We are writing to you because we are worried by the high number of students who have failed subjects in recent years. We understand this is a very serious problem affecting our school and that we need to come up with in-depth solutions and make any reforms necessary in order to ensure the academic level keeps improving and students and teachers alike have the necessary resources to attain this. This is why we are sharing information and proposals, and are calling upon you to think with us.

Firstly, here are some figures to grasp the scope of the problem. The number of students failing in 2009 was a record 230. This amount has been growing uninterrupted in recent years: while the number in 2006 was 80, it grew to 188 in 2008 and the following year a further 42 students failed. Estimating the number of students in our school to be 2,000, an extremely high percentage of students are being lost. We should remember that these are not just figures; we are talking about students from every year who are missing out on the opportunity of an education that the school must provide them.

The ever-present threat of expulsion is central to defining students' school careers. However, unlike the private elite school discussed above, the impetus to feature examinations as a central pedagogic pillar is led by the school itself and implemented by the teachers, rather than being imposed by an external body (such as the IB-programme). In this school the teachers' influence is definitive as they decide what is to be taught (as they operate outside the national curriculum), set the examinations, mark them and therefore determine the fate of students.

The teachers of this school also have a strong commitment because they are members of the university faculty. While they do not have a close relationship with the students (as was in the previous case we described), the prestige of the school is somehow bestowed upon them because of its reputations for an academically elite school and one that produces Argentina's rulers.

Unlike the private elite school, students are not streamed or ranked by their performance. In the state-funded university school there is little attention to the individual (the school has proportionately more students), but each young person is expected to find a way to navigate and succeed in this highly competitive, demanding and pressurised environment. Here there are not personalised strategies to ensure the students' trajectories. The nature of the relationship between student and teacher is therefore significantly different, which has implications for the learning environment created and how pupils understand their academic success.

Students at the university school are expected to demonstrate a significant capacity for autonomy for their own learning. This may seem like a fairly extreme example, but this has become normalised practice – as a literature teacher whose daughter attends the university school explains:

Here there are what are called workshops. These are instances, where a guide to the exercises is provided in advance so students know what they'll be expected to do. They involve lab tasks in chemistry, biology and geography. Students have to attend the lab outside school hours, and the relevant information is posted on a sign on the department door, with dates and times (lately it's also being posted online). If you don't go, you get an F, and if you don't pass the workshops, you need to sit for an exam on the entire subject at the end of the year. My daughter, who's very absent-minded, had a very high grade in geography in her first year but arrived twenty minutes late for the workshop and failed everything because she didn't get the necessary grade.

At the private school, a system of collaboration has been established, where teachers are 'at the service' of their students (perhaps mirroring the other groups of people who service their families and their various needs), providing the necessary help to negotiate the hurdles students encounter in their everyday education. Meanwhile, at the university school students are expected to develop the skills to self-manage the everyday and must take responsibility for their learning. One English teacher at the school stated: *Anyone who is not very responsible and alert won't survive at this school.*

A language teacher we interviewed works for both a private elite school and the university school that is the focus of this study. They summarised the difference like this:

In both schools the curriculum is complex and the level is high. I am demanding at both places, but the differences are more to do with the organization and number of teaching points. What it takes kids one year to cover at the private school, it takes three months to cover at the public one. The private school provides more windows of opportunity for work. If you can't fully grasp a point, you get an extra class with the teacher. Those opportunities don't exist at the state school. They don't exist as alternatives provided by the school. At the private school, if a teacher doesn't do it, he or she is reprimanded.

This quote captures the very different approach pursued in each of these school systems. On the one hand, the private school offers more opportunities for learning and personalised support in ensuring the acquisition of the requisite knowledge by its students. Meanwhile, in the public school external and internal competition pervades the everyday, with those not able to keep up, forced to retire from the race.

4. Conclusion

In this article we have described the selection processes, curriculum management and pedagogical approaches found in two elite Argentine schools, serving quite different constituencies. In the private elite school, serving largely families of the economic elite, we found that personalization strategies are employed which engender close ties between teachers and students. Here teachers forge a strong bond with each student, characterised by a steadfast alliance that together they can negotiate the hurdles presented by a system of external examinations (as required by the IB-programmes) and the need to prove to families and the outside world that the education being provided and the future positions they will take up are merited. These mechanisms create the conditions for academic success with minimal risk of student failure. In this school serving the economic elite, the struggle for access and retaining one's place is not as competitive as it is at the public university school.

Both types of school use examinations as a mechanism for regulating and ultimately justifying their members' successes, but do so using quite different pedagogical approaches. The private school seeks to ensure students' results by grouping them according to individual performance and ensuring they receive the necessary support from teachers. Although the school produces a ranking of its students and does not allow students to continue if they are not achieving the levels of attainment which are expected, merit is obtained with the support of a network of teachers.

Meanwhile, individual competition is the main principle underlying the pedagogical approach used at the university school, in which we find very large classes of students who are not classified by performance. Here teaching occurs in massive classes where the students are to some extent 'anonymous'. Merit in this context is justified more strongly through individual performance secured without support.

Our study suggests that in the cases analysed for this paper, private school students are socialised via a pedagogy that legitimises them as an elite through an examination system but implements strategies designed to protect its members in their quest to take up positions of influence later on. Meanwhile, in the university school, while it has a more open recruitment policy (anyone can theoretically apply to enter), a more individualised, solitary form of competition is engendered, thus reinforcing the idea of merit achieved by students 'on their own'. In both cases examinations fulfil the role of validating and legitimising these students' future successes.

The strategies of personalization found in the private school reflect a collective effort to consolidate elites by organising a series of internal solidarities. Despite the fact that success is personal, it is also the result of a joint effort during which the teachers and their collaboration with the students play a central role. In the case of the university school, the model of effort and success that is rewarded is personal, and the teachers are referees who decide from an outsider perspective who are the students that hold enough talent to belong to the elites. While in the first model, the teacher plays the role of a coach, in the second he or she is a judge.

Both the selection mechanisms and their attendant pedagogy differently shape the subjectivities and solidarities found within each of these groups (as do their differently privileged and located families of origin). This latter point is the focus for our next paper. What our paper suggests is that these different institutions attract and educate Argentine elite groups using different mechanisms which not only affects the types of families that choose these particular schools, but also build on and extend in different ways the patterns of socialisation shaping young Argentine men and women from the elite.

Notes

1. Source: Compilation based on the annual survey by Argentina's National Directorate for Information on and Assessment of the Quality of Education (DiNIECE).
2. 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.
3. Secondary school in Argentina is attended by students from 13 to 17 years of age.
4. April 2010.

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Notes on contributor

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