

School No. 5 “Gral. Don Martín de Guemes”, Barracas, Autonomous City of Buenos Aires

Brief overview of the school

Introduction

School No. 5 is located in the neighborhood of Barracas, southwest of the City of Buenos Aires, capital of Argentina. It is a Normal¹ public primary school, with more than 600 students who are organized in 28 sections divided into morning and afternoon shifts. Students of this school come from heterogeneous backgrounds, from middle-class children to those who live in “villas²” or slums.



Context and location

The school first opened its doors as a Normal School in 1909 as a national teacher training institution, stated by the 1420 Act, which also established common, free and compulsory

¹ A normal school is a school created to train high school graduates to be teachers. It aims to establish teaching standards or norms. In Argentina, they were created during the period of constitution of the Nation.

² A villa is a type of shanty town or slum found in Argentina, mostly around the largest urban settlements.

education in the country. At that point, Barracas was an area of country houses and mansions where the capital's upper class resided (Puccia, 1998). However, during the twentieth century, it became an industrial and immigrant neighborhood, which has now deteriorated and degraded due to successive crises and waves of industrial dismantling (Rodriguez and Di Virgilio, 2013).

More than 55% of the population belongs to mid-low and low strata (33.8% and 21.9%, respectively) (Álvarez de Celiz, 2011). Unemployment in the area exceeds the jurisdiction's average reaching to 9.1% (Di Pietro and others, 2013). It is not surprising that the workforce in the area combines high rates of informality and precariousness. The commune where School No. 5 is located not only has the lowest family income per capita of the city of Buenos Aires, but also has high percentages of households suffering from critical overcrowding, lack of health coverage, and unqualified employed people. According to Di Pietro and others (2013) regarding the educational level, small population have completed secondary level.

In addition, according to the last census of Population and Housing (2010), the commune has the largest number of *villas* and precarious urbanizations throughout the city, which represent 17.2% of its population. In fact, between 2001 and 2010, the population growth living in that context has been intensified by 56% (Macció and Lepore, 2012).

While it is still possible to see the remnants of the Normal School in School No. 5, the reality of the population that traditionally attended the school has radically changed. Originally, the school worked under the framework of a modernist cosmopolitan speech that processed all the different backgrounds of students and teachers, and sought to impose a common thought with strong republican, positivist, and bourgeois elements. However, what prevails in this school today is the heterogeneity of its students.

Students not only come from adverse contexts, but also from different countries. Actually, In between 801 and 1200 Bolivian, Paraguayan and Peruvian students were registered at Commune 4 (Education Annual Survey, 2008). Thus, at this school is possible to find students from *villas* with vulnerable backgrounds, from medium class sectors, and kids from different countries who come from diverse cultures.

Institutional conditions

The building of School No. 5 is shared between primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Most levels work during morning and afternoon shifts.

The space assigned for each level is fairly limited, leaving a lack of a proper space for Sports, breaks, school events or workshops. These activities are conditioned due to the need of sharing certain areas with students from the other levels located in adjacent spaces and in order to avoid classes overlapping.

The building still has the structure of its original architecture. It counts with two pavilions connected by a long hall on a wide corridor that continues to the inner patio. The primary level is located at the left wing of the building. The first 3 grades use the ground floor, and the rest in the first floor. Here, classrooms surround a circular balcony, which looks towards the patio where the

breaks

take

place.



View of central inner patio where 1st to 3rd grade classrooms, the Library, Teachers Room and Principals office are located and hexagonal balcony on the top floor with 4th to 7th grade classes and the Music Room stand.

Although the school follows the guidelines and provisions of the Rectorate of the entire institution, it operates independently through a specific Directorate for primary level. The management team is made up of 3 persons Principal, Vice Principal and the Secretary. The latter coordinates the first cycle and the Vice, the second cycle while the Principal provides the general coordination with a global vision. The staff is formed by 28 teachers who instruct students on Language, Mathematics, Knowledge of the World, (1st, 2nd and 3rd grade) and Natural & Social Sciences plus Ethics at the upper grades. Special teachers are in charge of Sports, Music, Art, English and Technological Education. In addition to this, the school counts with human resources for students' pedagogical support, most of them depends on the Special Education Directorate or on each family's health insurance.

Recent history

The school was traditionally seen as an elite institution. The students were mostly children from the neighborhood of a mid-level socioeconomic class. However, as stated before, and more students come from the *villas* and vulnerable sectors. Diverse social processes such as inequality and cultural diversity coexist in complex ways in the school. Furthermore, the scarcity of materials combines with cultural and linguistic features which do not reconcile with the traditional school paradigm. These different and difficult educational situations, led by this gradual change, altered the elite school model that traditionally characterized School No. 5.

"We used to be different from the other schools in the neighborhood, but this situation suddenly changed." (3rd grade teacher)

Coping with this new social configuration was not an easy task for everyone. When the current Principal arrived in 2009, she faced all kinds of resistances. Being used to a certain kind of management, the teaching staff and the administrative body with an average of 20 years of

View of central inner patio where 1st to 3rd grade classrooms, the Library, Teachers Room and Principals office are located and hexagonal balcony on the top floor with 4th to 7th grade classes and the Music Room stand.

experience seemed highly reluctant to change all the practices that were entrenched to a previous model of school and society. The remnants of the Normal model were still visible in areas ranging from curricular content, the Principal's function and the role of teachers.

First, there were palpable social differences among students from the morning and afternoon shifts. Also, for everyday greeting or flying the flag ceremonies, the students would line up by gender, boys in different rows than girls. In times where sexual education and gender diversity teaching are legally accepted practices, these examples, as well as many others, showcased obsolete visions. In fact, teachers questioned and banned the use of accessories like piercings.

Moreover, traditional ways of treating students were anchored in the teaching methods. For example, it was common to send the students with bad behavior to the Principal's office. Whoever had problems of misconduct or disrupted class activities would immediately be expelled from the classroom.

"There was a general belief about teachers who were not able to handle the kids. They use to be seen as bad teachers. In case of trouble, everyone would look the other way, 'I cover myself, I take care of myself'; teachers would find themselves alone facing situations brought by the children to the school which they were not emotionally prepared to handle." (Principal)

These types of practices and trends of thought, rooted in the functioning of the traditional school, were the ones the Principal tried to gradually ease. Nowadays, there are practically no traces of them.

School management – frame for inclusion

Towards inclusive education

The direction that the new leadership established is full of high expectations on pupils. The vision of inclusion is based on the assumption that *"every child can learn; they are all equal within their own differences,"* and it is reflected in the decisions the management makes. The aim is to change the labeling of "bad students," since this practice affects negatively the students' ability to learn. The Principals believe that every situation can be reversed, and therefore, they seek to provide new opportunities for children who have more difficulties.

"Years before it was normal to say 'oh, poor boy, this is as far as he can go, he cannot learn any more. Now we ask ourselves: Why is the student not learning? Is it because of him, or because of us?"

The case of a pupil that repeated in several schools and started again at school n^o5 is quite eloquent. He did not manage to get through his 1st year successfully so the Principal received suggestions to change him again to a different institution. However, she did not allow it. She strongly believes on the need to find solutions within the school, and on the fact that students have the right to receive opportunities. Basing her decisions on these convictions she managed to make him stay and to continue his schooling there. In order to achieve this, tools and programs had to be developed for the student to be able to integrate effectively.

"This pupil went to many schools, yes, but not anymore. From now on he stays here. I always say that no student leaves the school unless someone shows me that the best thing for the kid is to leave." (Principal)

At School No. 5, inclusion is not limited to the access to vacancies, but to improve students' learning. Along with the management team, the Principal took the initiative to eradicate this conviction from the teachers through a chain work organization and leading by example. This is how the teachers got engaged with the new vision of education.

"If we face a disruptive situation of a child and rather than imposing sanctions, we propose a project to deal with the issue, then we are accepting the challenge." (Assistant Principal)

The commitment towards a more inclusive school can also be seen in the actions taken. The analyses of teaching practices, as well as the decisions they make, are constant guidelines in the management of the principals.

Leadership

At the beginning of this management, the team faced challenges of various kinds. The biggest one was to rebuild the bond with the teaching staff. They found difficulties to achieve consensus, especially when trying to modify structures that were deeply rooted, such as the segregation of students by shifts or the meaning of the role of teachers and ways of working with students with difficulties and differences. However, thanks to a policy of sustained dialogue, they managed to build a new path. According to the Principal, the management team started showing committed methods of working itself to transmit the message to the others. When teachers began to see the achievements and the changes, they started to respond positively.

While in many school managers acquire a central position, representing the "Head" of the institution, the Principals at School No. 5 positioned themselves as a part of the team. What is most important during the exchange of opinions is not the person's position in the institution, but the arguments presented during the conversations. A dialogical relationship is clearly evident (Aubert, et al, 2010.). The teachers assure that the school functions normally even when the Principal is not around; *"commitment is always there"*. This is how they have achieved horizontal relationships, where the Principal is open to all recommendations and suggestions. Everyone can get involved in every subject.

Under these circumstances, a general pattern was observed in their testimonies, which reflected the involvement of all teachers in the problems that arose with students even if they belonged to other teachers- classes. The aim is to share the responsibility for what happens to students. Justifying poor performance of students due to a lack of content from previous years is not accepted anymore, *"now the commitment belongs to everyone,"* (Principal)

To apply this working methodology, confidence and respect for teachers had to be restored. The Principals put efforts to get to know the staff in depth, and tried to highlight and make the most of what they all had to give. They looked together for ways of replacing sanctions with measures where the teacher promotes dialogue with the students, and a space where they find the courage to try alternative methods to tackle different issues. The Principals seek to rebuild the authority of teachers within the school and in the classroom, but adding a new element: teamwork. Given the diverse and complex situations that happen in the school, the work focused on the development of collective support strategies to reassure teachers that *"they are not alone and that their work is valued (Principal)*. In this way, bonds of solidarity are strengthened respecting teachers integrity, which according to Dubet (2005) promotes social integration within the school culture.

Thus, in light of cases of misconduct or episodes from students with difficulties, it is no longer the teacher on duty who should take care of the child she cannot deal with. Under the motto *"they are all our students,"* a protocol has been created where all teachers work together to support and help each other. Thanks to an organized distribution of tasks, the Principals were able to deal with situations of social vulnerability affecting the students by providing support to pupils, parents and children. With regards to the classes, they aimed to empower teachers to promote conflict resolution in the classroom through dialogue through "assemblies" format. In this way, they seek to avoid the logic of *"sending students outside,"* referring them to the Principal's office every time there was a problem. Teachers, in their view, should develop mechanisms and methods to integrate the student who presents problems both of conduct and learning.

"The Principal knows the staff very well; there is good dialogue, which is essential, an extensive knowledge of the different issues, and support. When you need to handle a situation with the father of the student, she lets you speak your mind; we go to her office and she supports you, it's always your voice that is heard." (Support Teacher³)

At School nº 5, the Principal's team leads by prioritizing the review and analysis of their own strategies and measures before putting the emphasis on the children and their family's problems. They notice that in many cases, poor student performance was justified by the lack of support from their parents or because of children fault. That is why she ensures that the first analysis should be focused on the school's position and its own practices. *"First we have to review what we're doing and how we are doing it."* (Principal)

Resource management

The way resources are managed accounts for the compromise the managers have with the students and the school's improvement. The constant search for external support and the creation of networks to achieve joint collaboration demonstrate that they never stand idle in front of situations they believe impossible to solve; they never remain inactive. *"We knock on every door,"* they claim.

In the course of the term, they requested for School Mediators⁴ who intervened to accompany managers in the changing process the school team was going through. Moreover, they took Zero Violence Group⁵ trainings, offered by the Ministry of Education of the City. As a result, new measures were implemented that improved the overall school environment.

"We didn't agree in everything at first, but thanks to the meetings and assistance of psychologists, discussions are now settled. Now everything is more consensual, things are talked through." (3rd grade teacher)

³ Companion Teacher of Educational Trajectories, or "Maestro Acompañante de Trayectorias Educativas" is the original version in Spanish. A teacher selected by management and supervisors who works as a support teacher.

⁴ The team of School Mediators was created by Act 3055 of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. The objective is to assist schools of the educational system promoting peaceful and cooperative methods of conflict resolution.

⁵ "Grupo de Violencia Cero" is the original version in Spanish.

Moreover, they have requested resources of support for school Support Teacher. Since Normal Schools did not count with this figure as other public schools did, they took the initiative and managed to do so. Nowadays, they count with 2 for the morning and afternoon shifts respectively. Something similar happened with a Training Program for teachers and principals provided by the national level. However, due to the school interest in the topic and willingness to receive training to improve management in their own institution, the Principal managed to get permission to get her teachers take part of the program as listeners.

Meanwhile, although the school is not equipped to receive students with motor skill problems, the Principal tries to integrate those with different capacities. One of the auxiliary members of the staff suffers from hearing loss. Since one of his functions was to mark the beginning and end of class time and breaks with a bell, the Principal received recommendations to change his duties because it was beyond the man's capacity. Instead, the Principal managed to get installed a light system instead of the traditional sound of the bell to alert him on time. Students have adapted to this and have learned to interact with him. Teachers invite him to participate in as many activities as they can with the children, and have even learned how to sing the happy birthday song in sign language for him.

Tools for pedagogical coordination

The management team performs its coordination practices with special importance in achieving consensus or agreement with the teachers through dialogue. Thus, the process of assigning teachers to the different grades starts three months before the end of the school year, to build a structure that benefits everyone. Although the choices of every teacher are respected, the final decision is always based on what is more favorable for the students' learning.

To ensure the pedagogical coordination, the school uses some very useful methods. While teachers' meetings do not take place so often, to keep teachers informed about their own grades, they use notebooks named "History of the group." Beginning in the 1st grade, teachers record all kinds of information, from the content of the classes, to contents that need reinforcement, meetings with families, group problems, progress and difficulties of those who need more attention, among other things. The following year, a new notebook of the history of the group is attached. This material allows teachers and managers to monitor the progress of each course.

In many cases, students do not perform as expected. However, the Principals believe fervently that this does not determine the skills or abilities of students. Their first reaction is to question the instrument, checking with teachers if the proposed evaluation was appropriate. In this sense, they work with teachers for the evaluation to be also a tool that allows them to reflect and monitor their own practices. At School No. 5, they reconsider the significance, what, why and when evaluations take place. Thus, institutional guidelines have been implemented on the diagnostic and process evaluations to eradicate the notion of the quarterly tests as the sole proof of the performance of the children.

Finally, to improve the teachers' work, both the Principal and the Assistant Principal highlighted the importance of classroom observations.. These observations are made at a specific time of the

year, and are agreed with the teachers. They are later registered in a performance book, where the management team analyzes the class to suggest the teacher what aspects they believe should be strengthened.

"The observation is not only a critic, a registry of what is seen, but also some suggestions, comments. We try to make emphasis on the successes first, and second on the aspects to be improved. I always try to contribute with something in each observation because I don't consider it as a critic but as a space of mutual learning" (Principal)

School environment

The integration of primary, secondary and tertiary levels in the same school offers a variety of advantages for students, teachers and their families. School No. 5 is no exception. Different generations of siblings attend each of the levels. Older children often visit the younger ones and greet their former teachers. In many cases, even parents and teachers have been students of the same institution. This characteristic of the school has created a family atmosphere where they all know each other, the teachers know the backgrounds of everyone, their problems, successes and failures, and this unites them. Many teachers have been trained in the same institution and are now colleagues of their former teachers or schoolmates.

"The school awakens this thing... we all want to come back to work here." (3rd grade teacher)

"For me this is the best characteristic they have. They are happy, they look happy here playing ... I even notice it on Monday mornings, which is usually the hardest day. They come full of energy, they have a great time here." (2nd grade teacher)

The children are well behaved and are close to their classmates and teachers. In spite of the great heterogeneity, there is no record of severe cases of discrimination. These issues are discussed between students and teachers, and the importance of integration and equality is highlighted. Students attend school with enthusiasm, and when teachers work hard and put more energy, they can tell, and show their happiness. Not only they attend classes during bad weather, but can also be seen in class during strike days. Teachers see this attitude reflected in the trust they show towards them, the way they open up, and in how they show them their grades if they do well in a test, and bring them pieces of cake on their birthdays, among other things.

"I like the school because I spend memorable days and I make new friends. We play, we fight, but the best thing is spending time with my classmates." (5th grade student)

The school's great atmosphere facilitates cooperation and teamwork, which allows them to share experiences, exchange knowledge and promote collaborative work. Among teachers and Principals there is a relationship of mutual support, which synergizes work and allows the team to work efficiently. If teachers are absent, they are easily replaced by other teachers, because all of them know very well the students, they feel that all the students are their own.

"When a teacher is absent, I can perfectly stay with students, even though they are not my students. ... We share feelings towards them " (3rd grade teacher)

Episodes of emotional outbreaks occur regularly. In such situations, teachers demonstrate their commitment to others. Collaboration is automatic, they all react naturally, and everyone knows what role to take to find a solution to the conflict. They protect each other; they know they are not alone.

"I think the good thing is knowing that you belong to a team. We agree we work as a team, but... if you do a good job, your colleagues acknowledge it and support you. When we need to, we share our problems during coffee breaks. They advise you, they help you." (1st grade teacher)



Decoration of the inner patio walls and artwork mural about tales that pupils read



Teachers – everyday models for inclusion



Decoration of entrance hall on Teachers Day

Pedagogical coordination

The pedagogical unity offered by the system of a Normal School, where all levels assist to the same institution, allows teachers to experiment, perform analyses and have an overall idea of the performance of the students. In recent years, teachers have worked hard to strengthen the transition from entry-level to primary and from primary to secondary. By knowing in depth the progress or setbacks the children might have, teachers are able to clearly see the articulation of knowledge and strategies from one grade to the other, as well as the content that has to be reinforced. Each area (special teachers, regular and principals) has a referent or delegate with whom teachers meet regularly to exchange information and share the needs of each team.

It has been agreed that one of the guidelines that needs reinforcement between the different levels as well as in all primary levels is working with teaching strategies that contemplate the heterogeneity of the students. While not all teachers are able to implement it, they have the coordinators who advise them. Others manage to accommodate the contents and methodologies to achieve it.

Motivation towards learning is the first challenge of the teachers, and is not a separate fact from the pedagogical relationship. Topics are dealt with from a more intuitive and contextual perspective. For example, in Math class the children are able to break down the numbers, they make the associations, but without labeling it as "mathematical properties". In Language, happens something similar. Spelling, cohesion, and coherence are not taught as subjects themselves but come up more specifically while drafting reports on germination in science subjects. Additionally, they work with news and with what they see on television or what newspapers say, and all topics that awaken some interest in the students are included in the activities of Language class. In an observation of the 3rd grade, the teacher proposes drafting a newspaper. They are arranged in groups of 5, depending on the topic of interest, and each one can decide on which subject they are going to work. This way, they try to make the children practice writing by motivating them with topics of their interest. Their testimonies reflect their joy with the contents and proposals.

"I learned to develop texts, to make useful calculations for everyday life." (6th grade student)

"What I like the most about school is working with the special teachers because they are very entertaining, including Methodology, English and Physical Education." (5th grade student)

To work on diversity in Social Sciences, for example, topics are addressed with emphasis on culture, tradition, and language of each region. Students of Paraguayan or Peruvian origin are given more time to tell where they come from and what their traditions are, in order to make them feel respected and valued. This acknowledgement is essential to ensure access to knowledge. Students from different backgrounds often live situations where their knowledge and

traditions are not respected or valued. This contributes to broaden the inequality gap, even in the classroom. Therefore, Veleda and others (2011) argue that recognizing each other's culture contributes to the generation of educational justice. Children feel different, they feel accepted, and that enables and facilitates access to learning.

More for those who need it the most

The commitment of teachers from School No. 5 is materialized in different ways. On the one hand, in the support they provide to the most vulnerable students in terms of basic and emotional needs and, on the second hand, in the educational support they provide to those who have learning difficulties. Most of the teachers' views are homogeneous; they share a path and try to encourage the same on others: all students can learn. To do this, support and customization of teaching is essential.

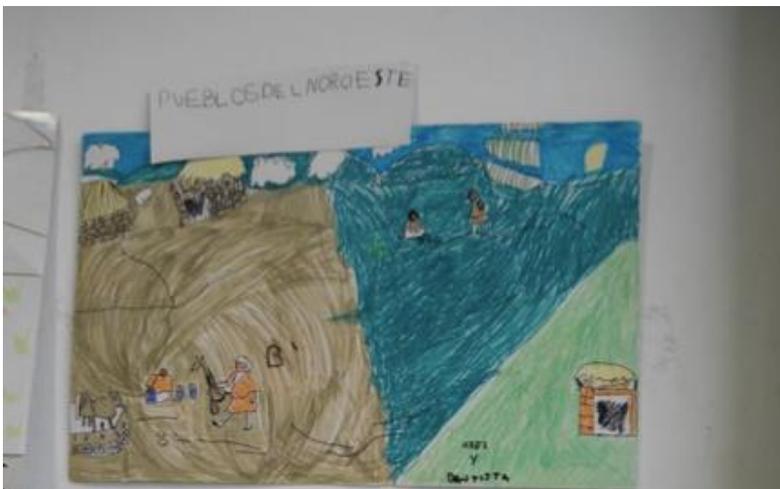
"The motto that everyone is equal has its complications. In reality we are not all equal, there are kids who need special attention to help their learning progress." (2nd grade teacher)

As mentioned before, the school counts with Support Teachers whose main task is to accompany students that most need in their schooling. They work with two lines of action, with the whole group and individually. In both spaces the aim is to reinforce learning and writing, avoiding the logic of "learning to pass." They try to connect knowledge with pleasure, and each child finds the exact point where they can connect with knowledge, and they achieve it naturally. The learning process takes place in an environment in which playing and fun are linked with knowledge.

In the group format, the Support Teacher encourages students to write by proposing them to make up stories about what happens in their daily lives, especially at school. She uses stickers of herself and other teachers for students to tell stories and imagine their adventures. The teacher who came up with this activity has already planned to put together a book with all the stories invented by her students. Through humor and games, she meets with success. Each week, students await cheerfully the new stickers to see which adventure they are going to write.

To address reading problems there are other resources. Students who could not even read a slogan in 2nd grade are now able to do it thanks to exercises with songs from their favorite movies. Thus, only by the desire to sing the song, or the willingness to participate in writing the book, students achieve progress by acquiring reading and writing skills. The teachers are amazed at the progress and enjoy together with them.

In the individual format, Support teachers divide the time of each class to devote one hour per day to each student referred by the teachers. The use of various resources like puppets, games, costumes, colors and building blocks is a key element in supporting these activities. Strategies and activities in this area are designed according to the needs of each student, so the work is fully personalized. When grade teachers have meetings with parents, Support Teacher is usually present, offering tips and exercises to practice reading and writing at home.



4th grade paintings on Native Communities at the entrance hall

Students in the focus

Commitment with the reality of the children

In spite of adverse situations that pupils deal with, teachers never give up. They engage and understand, they cannot separate the school activity from the life situations experienced by students on a daily basis. For each course, School nº 5 has pupils with dealing with social and emotional issues of high vulnerability.

The Principal's team's commitment is reflected in their actions. In all cases their aim is to defend children's rights, seeking for government agencies adequate intervention. For their part, teachers try to collaborate and to be alert and present no matter if the students attend their course or not. When families are facing a difficult situation, everyone gets involved. Some establish closer relationships or even friendships with those who go through tough situations, and sometimes even with children of other courses.

A 3rd grade teacher states that although the situation is tough and entails a permanent challenge they never give up. One of their students attended classes just one day a week. Once the team was alerted, they realized that he belonged to a family of five brothers and that they shared one pair of sneakers to attend classes one day each. The teachers raised money from donations of their own resources and, this way, they managed to replenish that material deprivation, which was beyond their tasks as teachers.

While aggression among students is not an issue there, children often evidence the problems they have in the form of disruptive and unexpected behavior, from disturbances in the classroom, anger outbreaks to isolation and even by causing material damage. That is why the classroom became the place where they can talk about what is happening, where the issues are socialized and conflicts are resolved; it became the space for apologies. Students are not expelled from the classroom anymore; problems are dealt with in the class. The idea is to engage the children and to talk about ways to help each other.

"Here we try our best to deal with any discouragement coming from the social situation that they are facing. It is not a matter of just showing that we are nice and we care for them. That's why we try to integrate parents to the school and why we have a close relationship with them." (2nd grade teacher)

The children recognize this commitment, both the support they give when teaching, and the constant encouragement and emotional support they provide them with. They trust them and no matter the situation, they always turn to their teachers. The testimony of a 6th grader is paradigmatic.

"(I would ask the teacher) to continue teaching the way she taught me, with a lot of affection and love." (6th grade student)

“I would ask teachers to keep helping me with the things I struggle with the most and I don’t understand. I would ask the Principals to help me and my family with the paperwork.”

“(The people I can talk to are) My teachers or the Principal and some classmates.” (6th grade student)



3rd grade classroom

High expectations on students

For teachers of School No. 5, there is no difference among the students who have more difficulties; they surprise them with their learning and accomplishments. The 2nd grade teacher presented his students and highlights the example of a boy comes from a very difficult context at the *villa* and despite this, he has put together a small band and along with his brothers and they travel around the country playing folk songs. The teacher also mentions the case of a girl, who comes from a farer *villa* and attends dancing and acting classes due to her impressive artistic skills. Their vulnerability is no constraint to learn and develop. At School nº5 pupils are not left alone with the struggles of their lives, and they are constantly motivated to improve. Their achievements are celebrated and emphasized.

"The key is not to think they are different, that neither the kid nor the others feel it. We will always ask them for what they can give. We understand the situation, but do not forgive them for being poor." (Support teacher)

"The key is to think that everyone is different and ask everyone always for all they can give. Understand the situation but trying to make them go beyond"

"The kids are not disabled, they struggle with emotional and social problems." (Support Teacher 2)

Teachers are convinced that school is for all children. Their goal is to give everyone what they need. As an example, the Principal quotes cases of inclusion of students with diagnosed disabilities for which the school has managed to get accompanying educational programs to support their schooling. Thus, thanks to that and the personalized work carried out by his teachers it was found out that despite the child's conditions he got remarkable abilities for Maths.

Emotional problems can also become a huge obstacle on children's learning. The case of a 1st grade student who used to be the "whirlwind" of the school is a clear example of that. He had a background with many family difficulties and for a long time he had issues integrating in his classmates group; he was always about to loose the year due to constant absences and learning difficulties. Nevertheless, with external support, the school worked hard not to loose him. Today he attends 3rd grade and accomplish the same goals as his peers. The Principal says this improvement was due to high levels of perseverance and because they believed in him.

The cases add up and reflect how much teachers believe in the children, how strong is their influence on children's performance and how much they have to do in providing them new opportunities and different alternatives. The words of the pupils are a proof of this, especially the way they see their future and how much they value the school.

"I feel that what I learned in these two years has changed primary a bit for me. I take a lot with me from these years. I learned a lot from the teachers I had. I have great friends. I take with me the love that Normal School 5 gave me and all the joy and excitement." (5th grade student)

"What I like is to learn and have fun. It is important to learn for tomorrow, to have a future; I know that all this is useful for my future job." (6th grade student)

"I like to learn new things every day. It can help me earn a degree in the future and obtain a job doing what I really like." (6th grade student)

"There is nothing of the school that I don't like, because it will help me be someone in the future." (6th grade student)



Drawings and artwork of pupils from 1st and 2nd grade at the main hall

School – parents – community relation

School nº 5 is a symbol of Barracas, and it has been part of its history for more than a century. While the context has changed, the bond with the families remains. Not only because generations of families have been educated there over the years, but because today it is considered as a benchmark institution, valued and respected by all. Although the school is not the same, the prestige still remains.

"The school is very well regarded in the neighborhood because of the teaching methods and education provided." (4th grader's father)

"Its a school that protects, comprehends and cares." (3rd grade's mother)

"The school is good because of the quality of learning, containment, and the different proposals." (6th and 4th graders' mother)

The heterogeneity of the students is reflected in the diversity of the bonds established between the families and the school. On the one hand, there are families that are part of the tradition of the school, who are committed and have an active role and a deep sense of belonging. They are the ones who usually form the School Cooperative and who propose the most important initiatives to strengthen the relationship between parents and the institution. Occasionally, on Saturdays they organize a festival where they share food, games and perform special missions like painting benches, or fixing school equipment. When it comes to involvement with activities inside the classroom, teachers organize open classes and offer workshops on literature, plastic art and dramatization.

Moreover, the testimonies of principals and teachers have another element in common: the approach of families to the school on their own. This occurs not necessarily due to an active policy of the school to attract them, but because this institution has become a role model in the neighborhood. Families count on the school for help and dialogue on various issues. Teachers try to understand and advise. Addressing the conflicts that are present in the most deprived families and tackling their difficulties are just some of the most time-consuming tasks the management team has. According to a 2nd grade teacher, 80% of the families resort to the school looking for containment.

"I thought my daughter was going to have problems because we are from another country, we have different skin color, yet she fit in perfectly, we are very happy." (2nd and 6th graders' mother)

Thanks to the response they receive from the school, parents support and value teachers. Whether there is a need to call a strike or any pedagogical innovation, teachers receive all the support from the parents of the students. Therefore, there is a relationship where teachers are there for the families, but they request their commitment as well. They ask them to encourage storytelling, to make sure their children do the homework and to be present.

Meanwhile, another common element in the testimonies of the teachers is the wide differences between the ways the parents were taught and the way children are taught today. In many cases

parents are not aware of new teaching methods and this limits their ability to help their children. Therefore, teachers make an extra effort to show those who are interested how to multiply, divide and read. However, as soon as they see the progress their children have made, they get more involved.

Bond with the community

Among the institutions that are part of the neighborhood and are more connected to the school we find the Argerich Hospital, which frequently organizes lectures on health care and childhood, and the Cultural Circuit Barracas⁶, a community art project that promotes the construction of citizenship, equity and social inclusion through art. The Circuit not only performs in-school activities, such as plays or workshops, but also invites students to participate in activities such as percussion, *murga*⁷, and drama showcases, among others. A large number of students and parents from School No. 5 engage in these activities.

"The community theater is so beneficial ... The best part of each one stands out, the best that everyone can put on the table. Every kid has something that, when highlighted, shows a different side of the kid. So when the kids do not understand something, you have to avoid the prejudice generated by the failure to learn." (Member of the Cultural Circuit Barracas)

Thus, from different voices, the school is gradually aligning towards an inclusive, containing vision that, above all, is focused on learning. This is especially important given that, based on the construction of learning and meaning, concepts are constructed from social interactions of individuals within their learning environment. The greater the possibilities of interaction are, the bigger the access to new knowledge is (Aubert and others, 2009).

⁶ "Circuito Cultural de Barracas" is the original version in Spanish.

⁷ T.N.: Spanish word for a traditional Argentinean dance usually performed at Carnival.