

Experiences when introducing new  
school climate practices:  
*The case of Mediación Escolar sin  
Mediadores in the west area of Buenos  
Aires and the Autonomous City of Buenos  
Aires*

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Experiences when introducing new school climate practices: The case of Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores in the west area of Buenos Aires and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires

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# Abstract

The aim of this research is to understand what are the experience of the practitioners trained by the program *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* obtain when applying the taught methodology. This is done by researching their perceptions on their preparation during the course, the new practices they employ in their classrooms, and the sources of support they count with in their institutions to improve their school climate. As such, the study's conceptual framework focuses on school climate, autonomy and authority, teacher training, conflict, and school mediation. To acquire these insights this qualitative research explores twenty interviews done to current students and recent alumni of the program, plus insights from its creator, professor Ana Prawda. The results found were grouped under the themes of personal transformations, school conflict, and program implications under the scope of school climate. The overall findings were that the program is effective when teaching its method, yet it could improve the transfer of skills into schools by increasing the support system among graduates.



# Preface

I want to express my deep gratitude to my new acquired global families who in the past years have made me feel at home and loved, and relentlessly asked me *so when are you finally settling down?* already knowing my answer.

To my parents, my brother, and my sister-in-law for being my foundation regardless of how many kilometers, countries, and cultures stand between us.

To mama Myrna and papa George. Every meet-up is always a coming back home.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Overview on mediation and its intake in Argentina

Alternative conflict resolution methods have been increasingly gaining interest in educational sectors since the 1990s. Governments and educational agencies have been pointing out the benefits of techniques such as negotiation, mediation, restorative justice, and redistributive justice as ways to improve learning outcomes, peace education, and ethical citizenship values (UNESCO, 2017). In this term, school mediation has been widely used for settlement of conflicts as it involves and empowers all members of the community with tools to communicate their needs and interests constructively. Racial, ethnic, religious, and gender discrimination and challenges can be mediated. Iberian America, México, Spain, Costa Rica, and Argentina have been trend setters in the matter. For example, all those countries have laws, programs, and trainings in place that guarantee the use of mediation in educational settings as well as promoting the training of mediators to encourage peace education (United Mexican States constitution art. 17, 1917; 7727, 1997; 27/2005, 2005; 2/2006, 2006; 26.206, 2006). These achievements have spread to the rest of the region where pilot programs and conferences in urban, rural, and indigenous settings have been taking place (UNESCO, 2017).

It is common in Argentinian news and newspapers to find references to mishandled school conflicts and bullying. Victimized students being requested by their schools to be changed, teachers and parents fighting due to racial discrimination or xenophobia, students bringing knives to school for self-defense, to institution to physical aggressions due to school uniform irregularities are some of the examples portrayed in local media (Vega, 2017; Ríos, 2017). Although the country has been celebrated for having laws and creating a national program, guidelines, and trainings on alternative resolution of conflicts the complaint from educational institutions is that the trainings are mainly for external mediators and most took place about a decade ago (Bonini, 2010). Thus, schools feel they do not have in-house skills to better handle daily conflicts that hinder the learning processes. Tackling this need, privately developed programs like *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* have emerged to train teachers with mediation tools and techniques to use in the classroom, and spread to the rest of the staff, students, parents, and the surrounding community.

*Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* was developed in 2000 by professor Ana Prawda and has been praised for its constructivist pedagogy which allows educational practitioners to safely and candidly challenge their values, personality, and actions for the bettering of communication and the mitigation of conflicts. However, there has not been external nor comprehensive research that has followed the outcomes of practitioners – a gap which this research intends to fulfill.

## 1.2 Purpose of the research

The objective of this research is to explore which are the experience of the practitioners trained by the program *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* when applying the taught methodology. That is why it intends to answer:

What are the experiences of education professionals in the West side of the Province of Buenos Aires and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires when introducing the program and the methodology of *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* to handle school conflicts and transform school climate?

## 1.3 Research questions

The specific objective of this research is to answer the following questions about the proposed methodology:

1. Does the program *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* offer preparation, according to the trained practitioners, to transform school conflict?
2. What are the tools taught by the study program that the students really use in their professional practice?
3. In what measure do practitioners report that they implement the tools taught by the program in their professional practices? What are their experiences when doing so?
4. In what measure do practitioners consider that the tools are beneficial?
5. What are the sources of support that practitioners count on when introducing the program and its tools in their work practices?

## 1.4 Concepts and theories of the research

The conceptual framework of this research has five interdependent variables: school climate, autonomy and authority, teacher training, conflict, and school mediation. School climate will mainly be evaluated using Thapas *et al.* research on the areas of focus and sub-domains contained in a flourishing and healthy educational ecosystem. Autonomy and authority are defined by the concept of pedagogical authority whose purpose is to engage students in cognitive conflicts to prompt learning; and the prescriptions on the effects of peer and student legitimation of teachers' autonomy and authority by Brawler and Lerner. The concept of teacher training demarks the conditions for the study as the researched case is an institutional program for the improvement of the practices of its graduates. The focus on it is provided by Davini and Lavalletto, two Argentinian academics, whose research present the conditions for what effective trainings program should include. Conflict and violence as related to schools are seen through the perspectives of Michel Wieviorka on the contextualization and historicity of conflicts and violence, as well as the definitions employed by Argentinian governmental agencies on these. Finally, for school mediation, the conceptualization is given by the author of the case being studied in this research, Ana Prawda whose views on it encompass a wide variety of methods and tools (e.g. paraphrasing, open-ended questions, dialoguing, and active listening) for the empowerment of teachers in their institutions.

## 1.5 Overview of research methodology

The qualitative methodology of this research has two main components. On one hand, interviews were done to two groups: alumni who have graduated in the past two years and recent graduates from its most recent edition. This summed up to 20 interviews (12 of alumni and 8 of recent graduates) done verbally through a phone call or in-person, or written in paper or email. The interviews included a questionnaire on their demographics and prior knowledge and experience with alternative conflict resolution methods, and a protocol that explored their perceptions of the program and the tools taught as well as the personal and professional changes they accredited to the course. On the other hand, to understand the background of the program and triangulate the answers obtained from the practitioners a review of books and journals about similar programs in Argentina was done plus an interview with the creator of *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*, professor Ana Prawda. This was not the original research plan, however, as political conditions in the country changed the official date of the current

program being evaluated making it impossible to perform initially intended in-class observations, face-to-face interviews, and a pre-course round of interviews. This is the reason why during the fieldwork it was added to have interviews with recent alumni who could provide a recent gauge on their learnings. The results obtained were later transcribed and coded accordingly to self-emerging themes of personal transformations, school conflict, and policy implications which supported answering the research questions.

## **1.6 Scope of the research**

This study focuses on the experience of the practitioners trained by the program in the past two years in any of its 20-hour or higher coursework modalities. As such, it does not include the impressions of their institutions, students, colleagues, community, or program trainers on what the program may have transform in or for them. Due to the limited number of interviews of alumni accessed, the program also does not differentiate on the effect the modality attended had on their perception (i.e. online, in-person, short-course, full-time course, mix of online and in-person). Likewise, it only accounts for courses where professor Ana Prawda has been the main instructor in the West side of Buenos Aires Province and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires to have some stability between all the cases being evaluated. As the units of study are each of the individuals interviewed, its results are not meant to be generalizable to other participants, other editions of the program not in the period being studied, or other teacher training programs tackling similar problematics in those regions or anywhere else.

## **1.7 Thesis Outline**

The present research first highlights the theoretical and conceptual framework that outlines the complexities of school climate, conflict, mediation, and teacher training. Then it describes the legal, programmatic, and socio-economic context of Argentina, the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, and the west side of the Province of Buenos Aires as related to mediation, teacher training programs, and school climate. This leads to a thorough explanation of the case study of *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* including its context, history, and methodology as well as who are the units of the study. The qualitative case study methodology employed for the research and its complexities is then defined, as explained in the sections above. Next are the results according which are structured by the final themes and sub-themes that emerged. Accordingly, the discussion section links the results with each of

the research questions and the concepts exposed in the literature review. Finally, the limitations of the study in its scope, fieldwork, and analysis are shared followed by the recommendations for improving the methodology in future studies which leads to the conclusion where proposals for other studies related to the inquiries of this research are highlighted. At the end, moreover, the appendices with the forms, protocols, and questionnaires employed can be found.

## 2 Literature Review

To better understand the experiences of the practitioners of *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*, two frames must be taken into consideration. On one hand, a conceptual framework that considers school climate, teacher training, conflict and school violence, and mediation; and, on the other hand, a review of the political and legislative environment surrounding teacher training in conflict resolution in the Province of Buenos Aires and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. This pairing allows for the formulation of a contextualized inquiry on the relevance of the researched program within the Argentinean case.

The literature review of this research has two particularities. First, it was done in Spanish, Portuguese, and English. Although the concepts of conflict, school violence, autonomy, authority, alternative resolution of conflicts, and mediation are equivalent in those languages, that was not the case for school climate and teacher training. The appropriate considerations are explained in those sections accordingly. It is important to highlight that the sources cited where describing similar or comparable concepts regardless of the terminologies employed. Second, this review focuses on teachers and other education practitioners and how they relate to each of the definitions below as opposed to students, parents, policymakers, and the surrounding community.

### 2.1 School Climate

School climate is a contested term as its most common use is as a synonym for a school's aim to be better. Initially, "climate" was seen as a property, a personality trait, or an organizational health feature of institutions which were somewhat stable (Hoy & Hannum, 1997). The reality of schools, however, highlights the diversity of "learning rates, abilities, interests, motivations, expectations, needs, and so on" which dismisses prior stability conceptions (Gonzalez-Gil et al, 2013, p.125). This makes school improvement a complex contextual task that requires the understanding of the whole institutional climate and its interdependent variables.

Currently, school climate is perceived as a quality measure of the academic, environmental, and sociological processes that are part of the daily experiences of educational institutions. It



is a compound of the aggregated experiences and outcomes of all the actors in the school community. There is yet to be consensus in academia on a definition or what comprises it. As Steffen, Recchia, and Viechtbauer (2012) note, there is a lack of taxonomies, quantitative studies, and common definitions hampering the empirical research on school environment. Nonetheless, there are traits which often repeat when trying to measure and study school life (Thapa, 2013). Governments such as Spain and Australia have developed and adapted indicators like the *Escala de Clima Escola* that aims to objectively measure the perception of norms, instruction and pedagogy, interpersonal relations among the school actors, and their hopes for what the school can become (D'Angelo & Fernández, 2011). Jonathan Cohen, co-founder and president of the National School Climate Center in the United States, describes it as the reflection of the patterns of “norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning, leadership practices, and organizational structures” (National Climate Council, 2007, p.4). Similarly, Rodriguez (2004, pp.1-2) adds that this mix of psychosocial characteristics “provide a peculiar style or tone to the institution, conditioning, at the same time, of all the different education products”.

School climate is usually assessed through learning and outcomes metrics, and the perceptions of the members of the school community. There are several studies that have surveyed students and teachers about their perceptions of their institutional climate and how they relate to it through observations, self-report surveys, and batteries of questionnaires that promise to take into account the most important domains mainly related to: student engagement and outcomes, the school's physical environment, teacher's support and resources, and socio-emotional safety (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Dobarro González, García Fernández, & Álvarez García, 2013; Bradhaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Lindstrom Johnson, 2014). The most relevant current study on school climate was a review by Thapa *et al.* (2013) which performed a review of more than 200 key academic references and interviews with experts on the topic. The goal of the study was to produce an integrative review that conceptually condenses school climate as well as experimentally tests the correlations presented in the citations used. They determined that school climate has five areas of focus which can be observed through its sub-domains.

Table 1 – Areas of focus and sub-domains of School Climate<sup>1</sup>

Area of focus	Sub-domains
Safety	Rules and norms; physical safety; socio-emotional safety
Relationships	Respect for diversity; school connectedness/engagement; social support; leadership; students’ race/ethnicity and their perceptions of school climate
Teaching and Learning	Social, emotional, ethical, and civic learning; service learning; support for academic learning; support for professional relationships; teachers’ and students’ perceptions of school climate
Institutional Environment	Physical surrounding, resources, supplies
School Improvement Process	Teachers’ perceived autonomy to develop and implement improvement programs

As it can be seen, the domains underscore that school climate affects and is affected by each aspect and actor of school life within and outside its walls (Fernandez, 2004). This means that their coexistence is a dynamic process which is constantly adapting and responding to each of the actors and factors in the system. For the purposes of this study, we will focus on the experiences of the education practitioners in the area of school improvement process partaking in the program *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*.

In the same study, Thapa *et al.* (2013, pp.359 & 365) described the relevance of school climate by summarizing the effects a positive one can have on actors and processes of educational institutions: “...social, emotional, intellectual, and physical safety; positive youth development, mental health, and healthy relationships; higher graduation rates, school connectedness and engagement; academic achievement; social, emotional, and civic learning; teacher retention; and effective school reform” as well as “cooperative learning, group cohesion, respect, and mutual trust”. Other studies they reviewed point out the effect of a positive school climate on lower school suspensions, psychiatric problems, lower absenteeism, and greater motivation in the whole school community (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Astor, Guerra, & Van Acker, 2010). Therefore, school climate is a crucial measure on the effectiveness and capacity of transformation education institutions have with their members.

<sup>1</sup> based from Thapa et al. (2013, p.358)

### **2.1.1 Relationship between school climate and school conflict**

Some authors have reflected that “new dynamics on school life” are emerging with more hostile and violent environments (Estrada, 2016). Yet educational institutions are both generators and reflectors of their environment making school conflict and violence a symptom of the external conditions and a result of their own actions (Prawda, 2008). A quantitative review by Steffen *et al.* (2012, p.308) of 145 quantitative studies on the relationship of school violence and school climate showed that even though it is hard to draw any conclusion, the relationship between school climate and violent behavior is only of moderate effect, “schools’ educational and social functions influence people’s development, and should, therefore, be a priority in violence prevention programs.”

The danger, in my opinion, is when school climates are categorized in a polarity of positive or negative as it has been done in many studies - like Estrada’s (2016) and Rodriguez’s (2004). This brands the complexities of institutional life as a dichotomy. The domains above highlighted how the academic environment encompasses a multiplicity of areas and sub-domains which should be given interdependent and contextualized attention. The interpretation of a specific school climate would then be done by understanding it as a possibility within a wide array of combinations where some are more desirable than others. This would allow for objective recommendations and improvements fed by their own limitations, strengths, and environment rather than comparing it to other climates which have been targeted as positive or negative. However, this can only be done if teachers and school administrators receive appropriate training “to meet the challenges of achieving success for all the students” and by providing them with specialized resources and support that would enhance positive interpersonal relations (Gonzalez-Gil *et al.*, 2013, p.125; Fernandez, 2005).

### **2.1.2 How do institutions handle school climates**

Two of the ways institutions choose to handle school climate enhancements is by improving interpersonal relations, and revising their norms and codes of conduct. García Sanchez and Ortiz Moline (2012) exposed that the most relevant relationship in the school is that of teachers with their principals as these are the ones that guide the institutions’ spaces, infrastructure, and the school ecosystem organization. Nonetheless, as Thapa *et al.* (2013) study demonstrated in their review, most researches focus on the perceptions and relations of students rather than the professionals in the schools. Likewise, they found that most

institutions talk about an education based on values to combat violence and conflict, yet there was no agreement on what these were, so they chose to focus on academic results as their success will be rated according to student outcomes. This is similar in the Argentinian case where a good school climate is equated with the achievement or peace education which is measured by the absence of direct or institutional violence from the spaces (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.). As it can be seen, peace education becomes a concept of the what should be absent rather than an agreement of what it should include.

If a code of conduct was to emerge or be revised be birth from the open dialogue and reflexive exchange that would consensually clarify what is the scope they consider a good school climate would adhere to (D'Angelo & Fernández, 2011). Moreover, the actors need to feel listened to by decision makers which requires a greater commitment from institutions besides the already institutionalized paths such as councils, committees, or end of the year surveys. This conflict is also supported by academics and governmental agencies who have discussed that even when explicit or implicit norms and codes of conduct are developed and revised, these tools could themselves be the causes of internal conflicts among groups that have different expectations on what the school should offer or stand for (Fernández, 2005; Ministerio de Educación, 2014; Álvarez; 2014). Governments and schools begin tackling school climate by revising their norms, sanctions, and alternative conflict resolution plans (Dobarro González, García Fernández, and Álvarez García; 2013). It is obvious that the perceptions the school community holds on if and how they have been listened to their values, traditions, and concerns is pivotal in this context.

## **2.2 Authority and autonomy**

The perceived power one has over the situations one is living is pivotal for the potential success one might have with the tasks related to it (López, Bilbao, Moya, & Morales, 2014). This is how levels and the perceptions teachers hold of their autonomy and authority in schools can impact school climate and conflict. Both of this can be directly controlled by the principal or overruling staff of the school. Thus, principals are responsible for motivating and trusting teachers, but develop a sense that are present, aware, and supportive of the conflicts and pressures they face (Hoy & Hannum, 1997). In this sense, autonomy is the perception of power one has to exercise agency over decisions concerning ones' person or tasks delegated to them, and authority is the perception others have on what one is capable of doing or inhibit

others from doing. However, as Tenti Fanini (2010, p.46) argued, in order to be autonomous one must “have the required resources para put words to their emotions as well as to their wishes, needs and demands”. Otherwise the person will depend on the knowledge and autonomy of others.

When it comes to teachers, there are different reasons why they can be considered figures of authority. For example, Bohoslavsky (as cited in Araujo, 1999) described that traditionally teachers are conferred authority because: they know more than their students, they must oversee students do not make mistakes, they can judge students, they can determine the legitimacy of the claims of others, and they can define the appropriate and allowed channels of communication. A more recent proposal on this topic comes from Davis & Luna (as cited in Araujo, 1999) who explained that the recognition of authority comes from the trust and mastery of the teacher to conduct and handle the classroom environment while creating a meaningful relationship with its students. These claims are sustained by researchers in Argentina who found that the once asymmetric relationship based on knowledge and age is now blurred, so teachers have had to find ways exert their authority by the deepening of interpersonal relations that make them a reliable source to their students (Feijó & Corbetta, 2004). The challenge is then two-folded as Siede argued (2007). On one hand, providing appropriate training to teachers on how to be a healthy authority figure in the classroom; and on the other hand, supporting them in the daily challenges that arise in their jobs that were not described in the official post of being an educator (e.g. being a mediator).

The ethics of being an authority encompass recognizing the norms and rules of the institution in accordance with the values one exposes, and the warranties one provides that one will follow them (Kaplan, & Berezán, 2014). This is what fuels the sense of institutional integrity (Hoy and Hannum, 1997). As students expressed in Brawler and Lerner’s (2014, p.224) research, they are more likely to follow a pedagogical authority than an institutional authority (i.e. who has been given a title), especially if they are perceived as “fair, coherent between what they do and what they say, respectful, demanding, knowledgeable in the course they teach, a guide, and be present”.

### **2.2.1 Teacher perceptions and relationships**

The most relevant piece when studying a school issue is teacher perception as their authority over others make their conducts, attitudes, and values the lens through which others might

also interpret reality (García Sánchez & Ortiz Molina, 2012). This perception is enhanced and affected by the collegiality among peers with whom the teacher can find support, eagerness to achieve common goals, and a possibility of shared growth (Hoy & Hannum, 1997). A positive school climate can also impact their perceptions as they feel they have had an impact in the development of their community (Thapa, *et al.* 2013). Furthermore, this aspect can also impact the quality of relationships formed with the school community. As several students point out student-teacher relationships are the main variable of school climates, student connectedness, and academic outcomes (Zullig, *et al.*, 2014).

Recognizing the autonomy of the other actors to act and be who they are in a framework of respect enhances autonomy as no or little supervision will be needed on the matters of other teachers and staff members. As Tenti Fanfini (2010, p.34) explained, to acknowledge another's autonomy means that one understands that the "consumerism styles, languages, and ways of seeing and living in the world" are unique and comprise one's identity which should be celebrated by the institutions one is integrating with. Siede (2007, p.256) expands on this by proposing and challenging the creation of schools with the conception of a collective of autonomous individuals, so that "it would not longer be possible to think of an institution ruled in a stable way, but in the formulation of rules for each situation". Such approach would not take place from an idealistic or utopic perspective, but from the commitment of understanding the causes, processes, and effects of each conflict that emerges in schools while keeping at heart the consensual norms that have been established by the community.

### **2.2.2 Difference between authority and authoritative**

There is a big difference between being an authority or being authoritative. Araújo (1999) explained that while an authority has the influence, prestige, or certifications to be figure of higher social status, being authoritative requires violence as the goal is to dominate and impose over the rest. This difference can be seen in classrooms when students follow instructions given by teachers they respect due to the connection and encouragement they receive from them instead of challenging those who request attention just because "they are the teachers and one must do as they say".

## **2.3 Teacher training**

### **2.3.1 What is it?**

Teacher training<sup>2</sup> is done with the purpose of increasing the capacities of these individuals in their professional practice (Davini, 2016). Accordingly, professional trainings are differentiated from ordinary programs if they are “organized and conducted in educational institutions of the system or workplace, guild, etc. and that is constitutes one of the central functions of the superior institutes of teacher training and of universities” (Lavalletto, 2015, p.232). As this study focuses on the case study of a teacher training conducted by public and private institutions, it is relevant to understand what are the features literature highlights of effective or preferred courses, workshops, and programs.

Trainings may have different purposes at their core, and students may also come with expectations on how they will engage with it. On one hand, the purpose of a program can be explored through the following questions: “what are the conceptions of the training?, what are the modalities of training being practiced?, with which devices do they work?, what is the relation between the different instances offered?, what kind of situations of practice are chosen for training, in which institutions, with which socioeconomic characteristics?” (Lavalletto, 2015, p.233). On the other hand, students tend to interpret the program as an accompaniment, a reflexive process, a know-how, or a crossing point in their careers. Both decisions, programmatic and individual, shape the level of engagement and outcomes the parts will have during and after the program.

### **2.3.2 Expected outcomes of teacher training**

Davini’s research pointed out that teachers value more the learning they get with hands-on practices than the ones learnt purely academically with a professor (2016). Sadly, the later is the usual method of instruction of teacher training programs. It is not surprising then that some authors consider pre-service training a “low-impact” activity for future teachers (Liston & Zeichner, 1993). Thus, she proposes that a good teacher training should offer seven practical capacities that will engage the cognitive, reflexive, and value-based processes in the student. They are (Davini, 2016, p.34-36):

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<sup>2</sup> Like school climate, teacher training also has many translations in Spanish. Although not all the following words can be used interchangeably, the conceptual research done in this chapter encompasses the terms *capacitación*, *formación*, *práctica*, and *entrenamiento* as related to the experiences of teachers and all other educational staff with programs meant to improve or enhance their performance in their jobs.

- “Organize learning situations appropriate for the subjects and their contexts” including connecting theory with practice, and making the students vulnerable to share their mistakes.
- “Manage the development of teaching and learning of the students” related to pedagogical tools and promoting their self- and reflexive skills.
- “Program wider sequences of teaching and learning “as to be able to introduce the long-term connection of one skill or subject with the rest of the curriculum.
- “Use new technologies” by exploring the offers in their regions.
- “Team work and school integration to the school” with their colleagues and the growth of the staffing team.
- “Face the duties and ethical dilemmas of the profession” by developing values such as solidarity, empathy, social responsibility and the role they play in their communities.
- “Reflect on their practices, their difficulties, obstacles and progress” by promoting their autonomy as professionals and accordingly become an agent of change in their institutions.

As it can be seen the active engagement of the teachers during trainings is highly desirable as it will allow them to bridge their contextual experiences with the tools provided by the course.

These outcomes can be achieved through different cognitive and pedagogical methods. Some the recommended ones by Davini (2016) are: significant transmission of concepts where learners actively engage with the taught concepts relating them to prior knowledge and logic; reflexive dialogue where students are faced with questions and stands created to provoking intrigue and action; change or conceptual conflict that causes tensions between their prior knowledge and their interpretations of new scenarios; the study of cases that connect daily life with the terms and processes being discussed; and simulations or role plays that push the students to identify and defend values and perspectives that may differ from their usual points of view.

Teacher trainings are done with the sole purpose of directly impacting the practice of the practitioner and the community it belongs to through social learning. Perkins and Salomon



(1998, as seen in Davini, 2016, p. 38-40) denominated these expected impacts as social mediations, not to be confused with the concept of mediation of this research, which can occur through: “active social mediation in the individual learning through a person or group that supports the practitioner”, “active social mediation in horizontal groups”, “social mediation of learning through cultural tools”, employing “social organizations as learning environments”, and “lifelong learning”. Therefore, a program can only be determined successful if its graduates are active practitioners of its tools individually and with their communities.

Davini’s focus on the requirements for effective programming, and Lavalletto’s questions and reflections on how programs define themselves and students reflect on their role of the program will serve this research for the evaluation of the answers provided by the practitioners of the program as well as of the practices used for the transfer of knowledge and skills.

## **2.4 Conflict**

A conflict is a clash of values and interests among two or more actors resulting on a disagreement. It is considered a natural process and inherent of human interaction as any mismatch of values, cues, traditions, and communication patterns can result in conflict (Brener, 2014). Its effect is an alteration or drastic change on the order or normalcy established in a system and relations between person-person, person-institution, and person-normative (Prawda, 2003). Thus, conflicts cannot be resolved but mitigated. Similarly, as Michael Wiewiorka (as seen in Isla, 2008) discussed, all conflicts are related to historical processes and as such of continuous changing nature for which a deep analysis of the context where they emerged. However, they are usually recognized only after they have become visible as a violent action has occurred (Brener, 2014).

Violence and conflict are sometimes misused interchangeably (Comellas i Carbó, 2012). In fact, all violence includes some type of aggression and has emerged from a mishandled conflict, but not all conflicts result in violence. García Sánchez & Ortiz Molina (2012, p.34) explained that the tendency seems to be that “in educational institutions, violence is seen as an attribute of students and authority as the resource of teachers” which puts in danger what is

considered as violent and what is considered as a source of authority. Consequently, violence can easily escalate if either of the parts does not feel respected, listened, and recognized.

### **2.4.1 School conflict**

In educational settings all interpersonal relations are susceptible to conflict. There are two parts to this: why do they emerge, and how do they take place. Prawda (2008) sees conflicts in schools as a resonance box of society where the actors bring their issues from the outside, and the educational ecosystem only replicates it in the institution. On the other hand, Kaës (as seen in García Sánchez & Ortiz Molina, 2012, p.33) proposes that there is a fallacy in schools denominated the negation pact which does not allow them to recognize that:

“the attitudes of the students are related to the educational institution or the professors, giving the idea that way that all issues are originated in it come from the outside, due to diverse causes like the inequalities that the large majority of students from depressed areas live in, family issues or the absence of values. That way, the responsibilities of the other educational actors remain excluded.”

In practice, the result of this kind of negation is that the blame for the conflict lies directly on a certain actor, usually students or their families, and leaves teachers and school staff with the sense that getting involved with conflict resolution is an option and not a duty of their role in the institution.

Second, the connections among teachers, principals, parents, staff, students, and community members can silently be conflictive. As Simonetti (2012) argued, most conflicts in schools do not include violence they are usually caused by miscommunication, mistreatment, or stratum. Therefore, where it comes to teaching, educational practitioners must be aware not only of the cognitive status of their students but also their emotional and social skills. Nonetheless, as the section on teacher training explained, the mere act of educating is conflictual as a cognitive dissonance must occur for learning to be meaningful. This way teachers can act accordingly to empower their classroom for the effective and constructive resolution of conflicts creating a more enjoyable school climate.

Conflicts that emerge in schools can easily escalate if the parts involved are not clear of their interests and needs, and are not willing to engage in vulnerable dialogue. As Rogers (as seen in Simonetti, 2012, p.20) expressed teachers must answer honestly the following questions before considering if they are the best fit to mediate or facilitate a problem:

“can I run the risk of relating to them? Do I dare to allow myself to treat this child as a person, as someone I respect? Do I dare to recognize that they can know more than I do in certain topics, or that in general they can have better skills than I do?”.

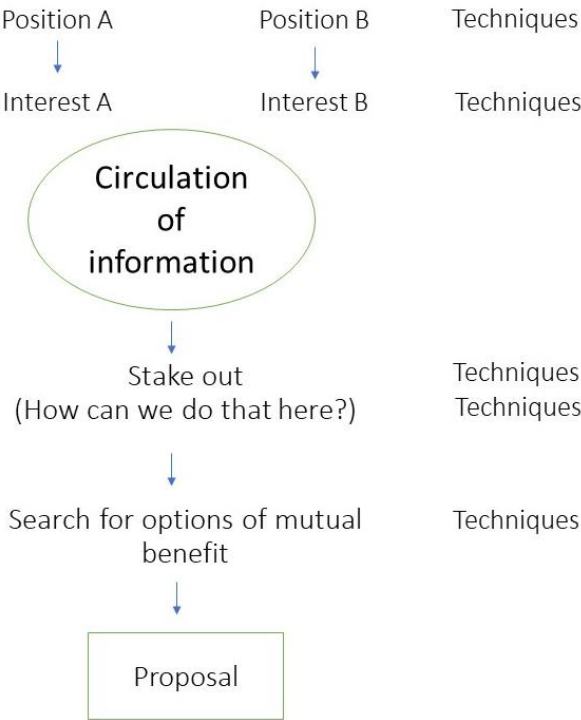
If they were to recognize the accountability they have to the other school actors then they would employ their authority to manage possible solutions, and affect the quality of the communication between the conflicting parts.

Teacher trainings, community workshops, and specialized courses for the school actors can help catalyze the dialogues needed to create and move new consensual proposals and actions that can empower them to take ownership of their conflicts constructively (Comellas i Carbó, 2012). Therefore, professor Ana Prawda (2008) proposes through her training program *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* for teachers to be trained on how to identify the conducts that originate conflicts, recognize which kinds of conflict they are trained to manage, and easily find the skills or resources needed to mediate it and prevent it from escalating.

## 2.5 Mediation

The capacity for mediation to improve relationships and as an alternative conflict resolution method has been praised and taken into different arenas like families, businesses, justice systems, and schools. One of the traditional concepts of mediation comes from Christian Moore (1995) who defines mediation as the process where a neutral third party helps conflicting sides that have voluntarily requested for help to reach an agreement where they both feel content with the outcome. Other conventionalities usually employed in mediation is that the discussions have a time and space set which is agreed by the parties, there are confidentiality agreements signed, and depending on the case and the context where it is taking place the final agreement has legal recognition. The diagram below describes what the mediation process looks like.

Diagram 1 – The mediation process<sup>3</sup>



As it can be seen the conflicting parties (position A and B) must be aware not only of their need but of the interest they hold dear when coming into the mediation table. The mediator helps them share their concerns and values through the circulation of information where the parts will learn what is at stake for each of them. It is only then that the third party can begin supporting the discussion of solutions or settlements of mutual benefit which are condensed in a final written agreement. Like it is described in the diagram, the knowledge of mediation techniques is needed at each step of the way.

An alternative outlook on mediation is as a way to deal with life, of shaping ones' communication methods, and of engaging with the values and people surrounding us (Prawda, 2003; Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011). In this sense, mediation aligns with the vision of conflicts as an organic characteristic of society, and in some cases desirable, that is only harmful when not handled appropriately. The challenge is that most cultures resist conflict and try to diminish its latency to reduce the vulnerabilities exposed by those engaged in it (Prawda, 2003). Thus, it is important to take into account the context where the mediation is taking place (Possato, Rodríguez-Hidalgo, Ortega-Ruiz, & Pacheco e Zan, 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> Prawda, 2003, p. 122

### **2.5.1 School Mediation**

The sole goal of school mediation is to diminish the degree (or escalation) and the frequency of conflicts in schools that inhibit or limit the impact they may have on learning and the relationships among its actors (Prawda, 2003). In other words, avoiding conflicts to turn into violence through dialogue and active listening. The characteristics of it are “willingness to participate, cooperation to solve the conflicts, self-compensation, confidentiality, effort to project towards the future, and a flexible structure” (Prawda, 2008, p.64). The tendency nowadays has been to train either students or teachers to be mediators with the hope the model and tools will be transferred to the families, and the rest of the staff (Jugman, 1996).

There are several differences between traditional mediation and school mediation. First, educational institutions have the responsibility with learners to shape their behaviors and values, so school mediation also becomes a didactical and pedagogical tool for all members of the community. The parts engaged in a school mediation process must recognize why and how the transgression occurred, the harm caused to all the related parties, and an appropriate reparation for the consequences caused (Prawda, 2008). Second, after an agreement is reached in traditional settings the parts can choose not to engage with each other. Third, not all schools have private spaces or time allotments to perform formal mediations, so arrangements need to be made to keep the confidentiality of the parts and their willingness to engage in the mediation process. Fourth, like the first point, although initially there are some individuals trained in mediation, the long-term goal should be for everyone in the institution to be skillful to play the role when required. Fifth, most times after the parts reach an agreement they will not be able to part ways as in the traditional methods. Actors spend most of their day in the same space working together at times. Thus, school mediation also needs to transform and heal relationships between the conflicted parts.

Diagram 1 showed that mediators need to be skillful to bring the conflicted parts to an agreement that truthfully represent and encompass their interests. Some of the techniques employed in school mediation are: discourse, paraphrasing, asking open and closed questions, active listening, playing devil’s advocate, and brainstorming (Prawda, 2003).

### **2.5.2 Challenges and limitations of school mediation**

School mediation faces internal and external challenges when being instituted. In the beginning stages the lack of knowledge or misconceptions on the technique can prove harmful rapidly creating defectors of the method in the institution. Likewise, if information of a mediation conducted inappropriately is spread, mistrust can quickly arise preferring traditional sanctions than trying new methods. Internally and intrapersonally, mediation requires vulnerability and impartiality which are traits not everyone works on. As Prawda, Fisher, Ury and Patton (2008; 2011) found, no one is born being a good mediator, and it requires effort and practice to continuously engage in deep reflection of ones' strengths and lacks. Externally, on the other hand, if there are no official trainings or local legislations that support the institutional efforts, then schools may choose to continue using traditional methods to be safe on the legality of their practices.

Not all school conflicts can be mediated. Some of them are: cognitive or evolutive challenges, psychological issues, domestic violence, high degrees of physical violence, socio-economic, and socio-political, among other cases where national legislations rule specific codes of action. In the cases on non-mediated conflicts, mediators can offer guidance and referral to specialized resources (Prawda, 2003; 2008).

### **2.5.3 The profile of a mediator**

Mediators should be recognized as integral individuals in their communities as they will be faced with situations where their values, identities, and cultural traits will be challenged (Georgakopoulos, 2017). Above all, the actors playing such a role need to remember that they are called to create a safe space for the conflicted side to have a confidential dialogue, so that they can solve their own issues respectfully. Some of the traits they should embody are “flexibility, imagination, mental agility, creativity, patience, perseverance, energy, capacity to persuade, responsibility, honesty, sense of humor and an aptitude to make themselves be understood” (Prawda, 2008, p. 67). Although it is unlikely that an individual will have them all at a high level, the aim is to make a continuous effort to improve.

### **2.5.4 Teachers as school mediators**

Prawda (2006), highlighted that teachers are natural mediators as their daily responsibilities require the introduction of new concepts which may disrupt and cause conflict on their learners. Moreover, the role they play as a bridge in the institution for parents, students, staff,

and the larger community as a recognized authority also serves them when performing the role.

One of the promoted advantages for teachers as mediators is that psychological health can improve due to the decrease in conflicts, the creation of healthier relationships among the community, and the sense of empowerment and autonomy from knowing what to do in situations prior considered unmanageable (Prawda, 2008). The only consideration to have before employing teachers as mediators though is that they may already be spread out with responsibilities and tasks.

## **2.6 Education in Buenos Aires Province and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires**

### **2.6.1 Format of the education system in Argentina**

Argentina has been widely recognized in Latin America for its advancements in education. From being a hub for innovation and research for the region since 1990 to the harboring of meaningful partnerships with international organizations, the country has served as an example on how to empower local authorities to generate more effective educational systems (Salto, 2017). Likewise, it has been at the forefront of innovative policies and practices for delivery and lifelong learning (Muñoz, 2012).

Education in Argentina is legislated by both federal and provincial entities. The federal level oversees country-wide assessments, overall provincial budgets, and minimum curricular standards; meanwhile, the provinces have autonomy to develop their own teacher training programs, management practices, and organizational structures they see fit (Salto, 2017). The commerce center and the highest populated regions in Argentina are the Province of Buenos Aires and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. For example, the Province of Buenos Aires is divided in 25 decentralized educational regions which are all coordinated by General Directorate of Culture and Education of the Buenos Aires Province. Some of the responsibilities it has are: general inspections, management of teacher issues, disciplinary courts, and the selection and recruitment of teachers (Dirección Provincial de Gestión Educativa de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, n.d.). Similarly, the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires also counts with its own Ministry of Education which oversees audits, teacher training,

pedagogical equity, management and budget administration, school planning and innovation (Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, n.d.). As it will later be explained, this has also prompted for the provinces to develop manuals, portfolios, and legislations related to school climate and conflict resolution.

In statistical terms, most teachers in Argentina work in public institutions and spend their time in the classroom with students. The 2004 and 2014 teacher census show that 70%-94% of individuals working in schools (excluding universities) are women in an age range of 35 to 49 and are working in high schools (Ministerio de Educación, Ciencia, y Tecnología, 2004; Ministerio de Educación y Deportes, 2014). In the Province of Buenos Aires there are 21,098 education institutions with around 5 million students and 368,836 teachers (Dirección General de Cultura, *et al.*, 2016) while for the country's capita there are 2,892 schools with 760,117 students and 97,116 teachers (Dirección General de Estadísticas y Censos del Ministerio de Hacienda, 2017; Ministerio de Educación y Deportes, 2014). These two regions are the most highly populated and economically developed, thus they host the greater concentration of teachers, students, and educational institutions in the country.

In socio-economic terms, the teaching profession in Argentina since 2000 faced the challenge of the economic crisis as all other professions. As Iglesias (2015) described there were three main periods in the past decades in terms of who goes into teaching. First, in early 2000s were the people considered “resilient” as teaching was seen as a discredited, stagnant, and unrewarded guild. This was followed by the initial economic recovery of 2005 through 2008 where although salaries were low teaching could provide the unemployed youth a path to employment stability yet with little regard in society. Finally, since 2009 rises in GDP and migration make teaching for first generation and low-class citizens an appealing choice although there was a decrease in applicants due to the extension of the required studies for qualification from three to four years. Therefore, it is not surprising that most teachers in Argentina nowadays have more than 20 years of experience.

## **2.6.2 Current issues in provincial educational agendas**

The Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and the west region of the Province of Buenos Aires face similar issues due to their geographical proximity and joint development as the major cosmopolitan hubs of the country. Some of these are rising rates of migration, recovery from economic crisis, and growing poverty (Bonini, 2010). The region of Buenos Aires has always



been known in Latin America for its diversity where 30% of its inhabitants are migrants largely from other provinces of Argentina but increasingly from neighboring countries and Peru (Dirección General de Estadísticas y Censos del Ministerio de Hacienda, 2017). This puts stress on the cultural and educational programs as they are challenged by students with traditions, language barriers, values, and norms, with whom they must coexist, and support their integration into a new context.

Similarly, poverty rates have grown ten times in the past three decades - especially after the economic crisis of 2001 (World Bank, 2003). The disruption of the crisis challenged the perspective of education as the great equalizer that had been core to Argentinian society (Anconetani, 2015). As Corbetta and del Carmen Feijó (2004, p.38) explained, the impact of this growth has been “the lost sense of cohesion and social integration that, as an ideal or a reality, were replaced by relations of exclusion and the feeling a lost sense of belonging”. The effect on teachers was clear as their training did not prepare them for dealing with drastically changing socio-economic contexts causing feelings of impotence, impossibility, and disconnection with both their students and their profession (Corbetta & del Carmen Feijó, 2004).

### **2.6.3 Relevant legislations**

Argentinian education, teacher training, and school management depend on legislations that serve teachers, and other members of the school community as sources of support. Some of the guiding national laws are bill 26.061 on the Integral Protection of the rights of boys, girls, and adolescents and bill 26.206 which is the current federal education law. Other laws that are included in conversations of school climate are the National Law of Cooperatives 26.759 of 2012, the National Law of Student Centers 26.877 of 2013, and the National Law of School Climate<sup>4</sup> 26.892 of 2013, and the Resolution 93/09 of the Federal Council of Education entitled *Orientations for the institutional and pedagogical organization of mandatory secondary education* (Brawler & Lerner, 2014).

In accordance with the National Educational Law of 2006, teacher training should occur in two cycles (26.206, 2006). First, one lasting four years and that is part of tertiary education programs which provide the foundational knowledges required to teach. Second, a cycle of

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<sup>4</sup> *Ley Nacional de Convivencia* where *convivencia* was translated here as *school climate*

specializations depending on the interests of the teacher and in alignment with local legislations (International Bureau of Education, UNESCO, 2010). This law also protects the provision of free lifelong learning trainings while in service. Similarly, it demands of teachers to also seek for trainings and programs to continue growing in their professions. Lastly, through this law the National Institute for Teacher Training and the National Direction for Curricular Management and Teaching were established which are responsible for all federal programs, legislations, professional development, national programming, and incentivize teachers on this topic (Instituto Nacional de Formación Docente, n.d.). They also coordinate the Superior Institutes of Professional Training who even though have specialized professorates in technical skills they lack courses on classroom management skills (Instituto Nacional de Formación Docente, 2007).

School mediation law initially emerged in Argentina through provincial bills in the early 2000s meant to empower principals and teachers to train students on mediation techniques. The efforts were not consolidated in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires until 2009 when the law on school mediation was passed which created the Integral System on School Mediation (3055, 2009). Likewise, schools can also integrate school mediation programs in their institutional documents through their Institutional Educational Projects or their Institutional Curricular Projects.

In response to the call for federal bills to handle cases of physical and socio-emotional harassment, school conflict, and infringement of social conduct in 2013 the Argentinian government approved bill 26.892 for Promotion of Coexistence and Approach of Social Conflicts in Educational Institutions, also known as the anti-bullying bill. In it schools are mandated to revise their norms and internal agreements including a focus on rights, the non-violent resolution of conflicts, and the acceptance of differences (26.892, 2013). It also prohibits the exclusion of “teachers, students of their families from institutional life”. Likewise, it commands education governmental agencies to propose and guard sanctions to transgressions in proportion to the context of the case, and excluding any consequence that denies or diminishes the right to education of the actors. It is important to note that I was unable to find a governmental agency or specific federal program that oversees the training of schools or the sensitization of the public on this matter. Similarly, by law all schools should revise their institutional planning, and they can employ “participation instances” or “school organism of participation” to lead in this matter. The first one refers to classroom assemblies,

teacher meetings, and family meetings while the second one is composed by ruled and integrated organizations within the institution such as the Student Council, School Council on School Climate, Classroom Council, and the Cooperatives (Brawler & Lerner, 2014).

#### **2.6.4 Relevant programs, plans, and trainings**

The study plans of the Superior Institutes for Teacher Training focus on humanistic education overviewing culture, history, and relevant theories; specializations on areas chosen by the participant; and professional practices in different contexts (Ministerio de Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología, INFOD, 2007). Teacher training governmental agencies share that the main challenges they face are the “fragmentation and low impact of the offers for continuous education and professional development; the need for training on the improvement of institutional management and the need to support teacher training practices of initial training” (Instituto Nacional de Formación Docente, 2007; International Bureau of Education & UNESCO, 2010). In consequence, they promote to be working in more diversified offers of programs covering a wider range of problematics concerning these actors. However, as Bonini (2010, p.3) pointed out teachers complain that there is a growing “distance” between what they are trained to technically provide by those institutions and the social complexities of violence and conflict they are faced with daily in schools. Thus, although four years of teacher training seem comprehensive on general pedagogical practices and epistemological background, pre-service teachers lack knowledge and tools on conflict resolution, improvement of school climate, school violence, or bullying. Like Davini (2016, p. 18) expressed, “in many cases it is not really clear if teacher training proposed to be developed are focused on pre-service training, or continuous education.”

With the purpose of reaching all interested communities, the national Ministry of Education developed in 2014 a toolbox on how to deal with conflicts called *Guía Federal de Orientaciones 1 y 2* (Ministerio de Educación, & Secretaría General del Consejo Federal de Educación, 2014a; 2014b). They clearly state the expectations from the school actors when conflicts like bullying, physical violence, domestic violence, and death, among others emerge. Another relevant initiative in the country level was the *Programa Nacional de Convivencia Escolar* which was established from 2004 until early 2010s which provided in-person support to educational institutions through trainings of auditors, supervisors and principals as well as consultancies on how to improve their internal norms and codes of conduct. An interesting

initiative for children was the creation in 2010 of the first kids' public TV channel, Pakapaka, of the Ministry of Education of the Argentinian Republic which has a program called "S.O.S. Mediadores" which teaches and demonstrates cases mediated by primary school students of conflicts like exclusion, fights, and respect. Finally, schools are federally required to hold *Jornadas de Especialización Docente* twice or thrice each academic year and are one-day faculty retreats. These provide autonomy and authority to schools to train their staff on topics that are of keen interest to the institution, and they are free to invite any specialist in the agreed area.<sup>5</sup>

The provincial governments have also taken upon themselves to create supporting material on the issue. For example, the Education Secretary of the Province of Buenos Aires in 2008 created a document that specifies what is considered bullying or school harassment, how to recognize in the institutions, and how to handle it (Order 02/08, 2008). Together with UNICEF, the provincial government also launched two publications the *Guía de Orientación para la intervención en situaciones conflictivas y de vulneración de derechos en el escenario escolar* and the *Guía de sensibilización sobre Convivencia Digital* which were delivered to their schools where guidelines for action for a wide variety of cases such as: suicide, sexting, child labor, cyberbullying, death, grooming, addiction and illegal substances, sexual abuse, and school violence, among others (Gobierno de la Provincia de Buenos Aires & UNICEF, 2014; 2017). These efforts were also commercialized in a local social media campaign through the hashtag #ChauAcosoEscolar in the website of the local government (Gobierno de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, n.d.). On the other hand, recently the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires launched its *Guía de Orientación Educativa: Abordaje Cooperativo y Pacífico de Conflictos en la Escuela* which comprehensively explained how to handle conflicts constructively, also part of a comprehensive toolbox on healthy school climates (Ministerio de Educación de Buenos Aires Ciudad, n.d.).

Besides the trainings done by the Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires, the recent federal efforts and those of the Province of Buenos Aires seem to have been limited to academic research, fascicles or guides which the schools can access physically or electronically to guide them when the highlighted conflicts arise. As exposed by the research of Bonini (2010), teachers and professors need and request workshops, training, and lectures

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<sup>5</sup> This is one of the ways how the program *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* has been introduced into schools.

that bring the concepts and theories to their contexts opening the opportunities to listen to their challenges and perspectives.

### **2.6.5 Teachers unions**

Although the effect of Argentinian teacher unions in school climate, teacher training, and the other concepts lies outside the scope of this research, union activities did play a big role during the time of the fieldwork of this research. The changes that had to be done are explained thoroughly in the methodology chapter.

Since the beginning of the year, teacher unions were calling for strikes country-wide to share their discontentment with the stagnancy of their wages and a new federal law called *Plan Maestr@* directly proposed by the President, Mauricio Macri (Rivas Molina, 2017). The goal of the governmental agenda was to guarantee school attendance, increase outcomes testing, develop a new teacher training and teacher certification methods, improve access to ICTs and tertiary education, and (the most contested one) make English mandatory for all teachers, to which unions opposed (Presidencia de la Nación, 2017; Miles de docentes marchan, 2017). This resulted in protests in all of Argentina and long strikes that affected school calendars, and the government's support rates.

# 3 Case study: *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* in Argentina

## 3.1 What is it?

*Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* is a teacher training program developed by the professor Ana Prawda to empower education practitioners to handle school conflicts in effective and constructive ways. The mission of the program is to “achieve a school climate able to facilitate effective communication in benefit of all and each of the members of educational institutions” (Prawda, 2017c). It was first conducted in 1996 and since then principals, teachers, school supporting staff, government officials, mediators, and educational practitioners have partaken in it (Prawda, 2008).

This program has been praised for its methodology and pedagogy which adapts to the needs of the learner contextualizing the tools taught to their unique conditions. The specific objective of the program as explained in proposal documents are two-folded. On one hand to “identify the changes in paradigm of the current century and their repercussion on the communication among family members and the school team”. On the other hand, it also attempts to “use the techniques and strategies of communication developed through the *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* program” (Prawda, 2017c). The vision of the creator is then that, if a practitioner effectively employs the techniques in the classroom, it can be replicated in the rest of the institution, later in the surrounding community, and eventually in the greater regions connected to it (Prawda, 2008).

## 3.2 How did it come about?

Professor Ana Prawda is a specialist in education management and school mediation, is a published author, and is currently a professor in some of the most renowned universities in Argentina. Her research for the past thirty years has focused on school violence, mediation, conflict, negotiation, and teacher training programs (“PAE impulse actividad especial”, 2014). As such she has worked closely with local, regional, national, and international organizations on the topic.

The program emerged from the need professor Prawda (2017b) saw of counting with in situ problem solvers schools. She noticed that when a conflict emerged at any level of the institution, most actors appealed to teachers for support and guidance. Thus, instead of employing the usual mediating channels where external professionals visit some days per week to handle conflicts that had escalated, she thought teachers and staff could be empowered with tools to control the conflict and help the actors in solving it themselves. As she described: "...if teachers were provided with appropriate tools they would quickly disseminate them to the rest of the school and a transformation of the school climate could take place" (Prawda, 2017). Professor Prawda reflected that initially her intention was not training school mediators, she was merely teaching techniques and strategies to handle conflicts like those of mediation. The final methodology started shaping up when the editorial group Santillana outreached to her in the late 1990s requesting for trainings and workshops for teachers. The lessons learnt later became books and publications which increased attention to the method including conference invitations. Since, the method has been tried in different regions of Argentina, and contextualized programs have been developed for Mexico, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Spain. In addition, she has also trained other five individuals to be part of the core team of facilitators of the program who can conduct the course independently. Prawda (2017) considers the growth of her program successful and that it does not have commercial intentions of institutionalizing, so it has been mainly through the recommendation and promotion of former students that the program has grown over the years.

### **3.3 Why does it focus on teachers and other education professionals rather than students?**

Different to other mediation programs in schools, *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* intentionally focuses on teachers and other education practitioners. The program highlights the role of teachers at the center of transformation in schools. Some of the key reasons for choosing a focus on teachers is that they interact daily with students, parents, other teachers and related institutional staff; they have a social contract with the other actors for the cognitive, social, and emotional results of their students; they are recognized as a natural source of authority; and they have a legal responsibility to protect their students from any possible harm (Prawda, 2003). Thus, empowering them is empowering the school ecosystem.

During the initial stages of the program, professor Prawda (2017b) collaborated with a lawyer which helped her get into some schools, yet she was being requested to teach the method only to students. When the training started she realized she had to at least include teachers because they were resisting having students mediate their conflicts distrusting the impartiality, authority, and knowledge they could have. Once they started training teachers these were happy to learn new techniques and try them in their classroom and with their colleagues; and their students quickly understood the benefits of the model using the tools interpersonally.

As explained in *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* (Prawda, 2008), the needs of each center are unique and required to be listened to by adapting the tools, techniques, and communication strategies. Beyond the formal mission of the program, professor Prawda hopes that the tools empower teachers to be able to spend more time in the classroom teaching the intended content and not resolving easily avoidable conflicts. As she described it in an interview “our purpose is to give teachers a framework that allows them work together while learning, and at the same time learning to work together” (Prawda, 2017b)<sup>6</sup>. This means that teachers can organize an active network that continues to adapt the model to other spaces transferring socio-emotional skills and other relevant contents taught in school. However, the program does not reject the need “... or possibility to consult and/or invite external mediators, as long as the issues require it. It rescues the consensual norms, and recognizes that there are situations that cannot be mediated” (Prawda, 2008, p.58). Therefore, although the MESM methodology focuses on teachers, its techniques and tools are for anyone willing to introduce them in their daily interactions with the school system.

### **3.4 Pedagogical method**

As described in the book *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* (Prawda, 2008, p. 57) the technique hopes to include “...the school, analyzing, and supporting the management of the teachers in the classroom, of the principal in the whole school, of the administrative in their secretary. And the student in the formation of a citizen with critical and reflective thinking, responsible and committed with the society he inhabits.” Therefore, Prawda’s methods are constructivist. The learner is required to engage with the information initially by themselves and continuously reflect on the possible outcomes. This way they can recreate how the

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<sup>6</sup> The original phrase does not have an exact translation into English “...un marco que les permita convivir aprendiendo y a la vez aprendiendo a convivir.”



situations presented could be of value to their context, how could they adapt it, and what could they add from their own experience and expertise to enhance it in their practice.

Some of the most prevalent tools for teaching the program is open class discussions, evaluation of case studies based on the personal experiences of the learners, and role playing. Thus, the participant gets a hands-on and active role in their learning which is intended and expected to be replicated when they go back to their schools. As it can be seen, to get the most out of the program, the participants are required to be vulnerable and expose their values, beliefs, shortcomings, and strengths in each activity so that the tutors and classmates can provide useful feedback and tools.

An example on how an activity could take place would be a video of a parent's meeting is presented (Prawda, 2017b). After gathering their first impressions of it, the tutor would request the participants to draft a case study on the same topic based on their personal experiences. These would be shared in small groups, and later the tutor would request for some of the cases to be discussed by the whole group. After presenting, the tutor would enquire and provide feedback on the choices made by the learner at each stage weaving in mediation and conflict resolution rationales, theories, and tools behind it. By the end of the discussion, the participants should have acquired a contextualized analysis, evaluation, and feedback on how to handle those situations in their contexts.

The content and method of teaching has evolved in the past seventeen years. Professor Prawda (2017c; 2008) described that some of the ways this occurs is by:

- Continuously incorporating feedback given by the students on the content of the course.
- Add edits to the book *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*.
- Keep updating the local and regional cases discussed in class which can relate the most to the group.
- Have a thorough training every six years for the whole core group of facilitators and researchers that work with professor Prawda on new techniques and theories.

- Network and partner with local legal experts to present and support students with the most updated amendments, bills, and norms.
- Network and partner with psychologists, pedagogics, mediators, and any other relevant expert that students have requested more information or support from.
- Include alumni in some sessions to share about their experiences or expertise.
- Empower the learners to create networks of mediators which can support the long-lasting growth and engagement of the school community with the methods. They are called R.E.M.C. which stands in Spanish for “Educational Network of Communication Models, Educational Network of Constructivists learning Models, or for Educational Network of Community Mediators” (Prawda 2008, p. 61).

### 3.5 Courses and other outreach methods

Samples of the most common ways the program takes place and its coursework are detailed in the table below.

Table 2– Modalities MESM<sup>7</sup>

Mix of online and in-person workshops	
50 hours, 6 meetups every two weeks of 6 hours each, and 14 hours of online work. The online platform provides students with readings, case studies, exercises, and videos where they can engage with the topics. If the groups are large they are divided in different online classrooms guided by a tutor and an overseeing professor where they present and discuss their assignments.	
Week 1	Week 2
Intro to the platform, and introduction participants	Block 1: Conflict <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. School conflict (negative and positive aspects of it)</li> <li>2. Scenarios of a conflict</li> <li>3. Types of conflict and the different ways how to handle it</li> </ol>

<sup>7</sup> Sources: Prawda, 2008; 2017a; 2017b; 2017c

	<p>4. The escalate of conflicts</p> <p>5. Differences between conflict, violence, and bullying</p>
Weeks 3 and 4	Weeks 5 and 6
<p>Block 2: Setting the social scene and the school</p> <p>1. New paradigms</p> <p>    Values, conducts, and norms</p> <p>    Communication</p> <p>    Family</p> <p>    Technology and social media</p> <p>    Learning and teaching methods</p> <p>        1.1 How is the reality of my school related to the aforementioned paradigms?</p> <p>2. Reconstruction the teacher role and functions</p> <p>    The new and the different needs of students and professors</p> <p>3. National and provincial laws, bills, decrees, and norms</p>	<p>Block 3: School mediation with and without mediators</p> <p>1. Didactical and pedagogical model</p> <p>    Theories of knowledge, techniques, and mediation strategies: the intersectionalities</p> <p>    Teacher mediators and student mediators</p> <p>2. The school mediator</p> <p>    2.1 The profile of a school mediator</p> <p>        Communicate clearly</p> <p>        Reduce emotional tension and remain impartial</p> <p>        Not judge or do psychological interpretations</p> <p>        Work with the interpersonal relations</p> <p>        Lifelong learner</p> <p>        Active listener</p> <p>        Learn how to listen</p> <p>        Language</p> <p>        Impartiality</p> <p>    2.2 The role of a school mediator</p>
Week 7, 8 and 9	Weeks 10 and 11
<p>Block 4: The school mediation process</p> <p>    Positions, interests, and needs</p> <p>    Techniques</p> <p>    Discourse</p> <p>    Paraphrasing</p> <p>    Active listening</p>	<p>Block 5: Case study clinics, training, and closure</p> <p>    Case study role playing</p> <p>    Space for exchanges, proposal, and questions and answers</p> <p>    Evaluation</p>

Devil's advocate Brainstorming Questions How to you ask questions? Drafting an agreement	
<b>In-person classes</b>	
<p>40-50 hours with weekly meetups. It uses the same structure as the mixed online and in-person modality. Attendance in-person required. This method could stand by itself, or can be part of a wider educational program through a university.</p> <p>Sample structure of a 4 or session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theme of the session is presented through reflexive questions to the participants on how they relate to it, and how much they know about it.</li> <li>• Group dynamics that should result on how to tackle or handle the issue presented.</li> <li>• Cognitive and practical mistakes from the prior activity are addressed through open class discussion (participants are requested to deepen on their perspectives and values)</li> <li>• Presentation by professor Prawda of the theories governing the topic, and the best-practices recommended.</li> <li>• Group activity or role-play using the conclusions and tools they gained from the day applied to their workplace or personal contexts.</li> </ul>	
<b>Short courses and information sessions</b>	
<p>These can be online and in-person. They usually focus on one of the blocks, and can last from 2 to 16 hours.</p> <p>These kinds of sessions tend to be requested by schools, private institutions, and interest groups to learn how to tackle specific issues relevant to their practice. One of the most outreaches is from school during their “Jornadas de Profesionalización Docente” or teacher professionalization days which take place twice a year and are mandatory by the Argentinian government.</p> <p>Sample structure from a 2-hour online presentation for “Academica ODR Latinoamérica: Red Sobre Resolución de Conflictos y Nuevas Tecnologías”:</p> <p>Part I: The transformations of our societies and their impact on school relations.</p> <p>Part II: What is bullying and what can one do about it.</p> <p>Part III: the proposal of School Mediation with and without mediators.</p>	

As it can be seen the guidelines are very general. This is done purposely to adapt it to the needs of each cohort. Professor Prawda explained in an interview (Prawda, 2017b) that the content is flexible, and the blocks can happen in different weeks than the ones proposed as it is the group who guides and shapes the course. The same happens with the supporting material they receive. For example, if a cohort has more doubts on how to handle parents and less in school violence, most of the readings, role plays, and videos will be geared towards that.

In terms of the recruitment of new students, most of them come from personal recommendations of alumni. Moreover, as the number of students and interested parties in the technique grows, professor Prawda is regularly invited to conferences, radio and tv programs, and online chats to share her expertise (“Docentes de escuelas se capacitaron”, 2017; Prawda, 2015; “PAE impulse actividad especial”, 2014). Similarly, she also has a professional website and an active Facebook page where those interested in her research can sign-up to newsletters and contact her with questions (Prawda, n.d.). These methods have allowed public and private institutions to get acquainted with the technique.

### **3.6 Who is considered a practitioner of this method?**

A practitioner of this method is anyone who has fulfilled the work hours of the selected course, and is actively using its tools in their professional tasks. Although there is no set description by the program on what “active use” means, professor Prawda (2003; 2008) has described that the school mediators formed through her program should be able to perform all the practical tasks of an external mediator more effectively as they are acquainted with the educational field, the needs of their school, the key actors in their institution, and the nuanced norms of the site. Therefore, their interventions should empower other teachers and agents to mediate school violence and conflict more effectively.

### **3.7 The units of study**

For the purposes of this research, the units of study are active educational practitioners that have fulfilled the requirements of the program *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* in the past two years through an in-person or a mixed model scheme directly taught by professor Prawda, and who at the time of the study work in the west side of the Province of Buenos Aires, or the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires.

# 4 Methodology

## 4.1 Assumptions and rationale for a qualitative design

Considering the subjectivity attached to the lived experiences of the interviewees with school conflict, climate, and mediation the main concepts it was considered that a constructivist approach would be appropriate for the qualitative methodology of this case study. As Given (2008) explained constructivism disallows "...the existence of an external objective reality independent of an individual from which knowledge may be collected or gained. Instead, each individual constructs knowledge and his or her experience through social interaction."

Recognizing the social construction of the experiences of the units of study enhances the understanding of the complexities of the case study of *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*. This is enhanced by the views of psychological constructivism where learning can only take place as individual make meaningful connections with the information and experiences surrounding it (Bruner, 2002). Moreover, this paradigm also aligns with the aim of understanding the samples rather than generalizing for what could be of benefit for alike programs.

## 4.2 Data collection procedures

To acquire permission to conduct this qualitative study a project proposal which included the research questions and detailed instruments were submitted to my thesis supervisor and my local supervisor, professor Ana Prawda, in Argentina in Spanish. Initially, it was agreed with Professor Prawda that access would be granted to a thirty-hour training in the Province of Buenos Aires for observations, interviews with both current students and alumni who had been in the course in the past two years, and an interview with her to contextualize the program and the observations obtained.

The development of the methodology for this research continued evolving until the end of October when the last interviews were conducted. As explained before in the literature review, there were political protests and upheavals against the government and teacher unions nationally in early April. This prevented the course taking place and it pushed for it getting

postponed several times until its actual start date in mid-August. Consequently, data gathering took place at two different times: in June, July, and August interviews with alumni and Professor Prawda were done; in October and November a written interview protocol was given to the current students; and an observation of a two-hour online presentation my local supervisor did early August on the program instead of the initially intended in-person observations.

Two interview protocols were developed for the study. The first instrument was designed with the purpose of helping participants share about their impressions of *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*, how they have used the tools taught, and other factors which elaborated on elements described in the literature as pertinent to this topic (e.g. sources of support, autonomy and authority, perceptions of school conflict and violence, and relationships with other actors of the institution). After obtaining the approval and feedback on the instrument by my supervisors, changes were made accordingly to their feedback especially referring to wording and specificity of some items. The modifications resulted on an interview protocol which focused greater attention on the differences experienced by the practitioners with school conflict before and after the course. The changes made proved successful as the content of the interviews as well as the level of comfort of the interviewees during the interview was significantly improved. A simplified version of the interview protocol was given to current students foregoing the section related to their experiences after the course. The second protocol was to interview Prof. Prawda about the origins and purpose of the program; the proposed pedagogy, tools, and methodology of the course; student recruitment; connections with alumni; and vision of the future of the program<sup>8</sup>. To triangulate the information provided by the participants recent studies, books, national and provincial reports, and publications on school violence, teacher trainings, and school climate were researched.

Interviewees signed or verbally provided consent through an informed research consent form before being interviewed which they got a copy of. In it the purpose of the study, the expectations of the interview, the time required, potential benefits of partaking in the study, and details on how anonymity and confidentiality are being guarded were described. At the end of the interview they were read a de-briefing statement which restated the purpose of the study and the contact information of my supervisors and myself in case of any inquiry or

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<sup>8</sup> The final interview protocols have been added as appendices III, IV and V to this study



discontent<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, they also completed a subject general information form in which they provided demographic information such as: sex, profession, current job, years of experience in the field of education, level of instruction in education (if applicable), type of school (public, private, or other), area where the institution is located; as well as information about their engagement with Mediacion Escolar sin Mediadores and other methods of conflict resolution such as: what kind of training did they receive with Prof. Prawda, if they had partaken in other trainings or courses related to the topic, and if they were aware of legislations pertaining mediation of conflict resolution in schools<sup>10</sup>.

As other methods to solicit participation such as cold-introductory emails or requesting key alumni (identified as such by Prof. Prawda) for the contact information of other potential interviewees proved unsuccessful, Prof. Prawda herself did the introductory calls, messages, and emails. This last method drew interest faster and from a broader audience than the prior attempts. From the pool of initial respondents to my supervisor's request, only eighteen responded to my follow-up contact, and from there only ten participated in the interviews. Luckily, they reflect a range of different geographical origins, professions, and interactions with the program. All the interviewees were considered to have successfully completed (i.e. received a certificate of participation) the course for the purposes of this study.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format using the improved protocol and each lasted approximately an hour. Initially, all the interviews were meant to be conducted live and taped, however, due to the end-of-the-semester schedules or geographical location of the participants, arrangements were made.

The interviews for alumni were conducted in three different forms: in-person and audio-recorded, phone and audio-recorded, or through email with follow-up emails if there were points that needed more information. The preferred method was in-person interviewing for which the other options were only offered upon request. Participants were able to stop, to clarify, or to delete any information at the time of the interviews. None of them decided to use such resource. Below are the descriptors of the alumni interviewed:

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<sup>9</sup> Both the consent form for the study and the de-briefing declarations can be found as appendix I and VI

<sup>10</sup> The demographic questionnaire employed can be found as appendix II

Table 2- Alumni interviewed from MESM June-August 2017

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Years of teaching experience</b>	<b>Program modality</b>	<b>Type of school</b>	<b>Other trainings</b>	<b>Profession</b>
1	20+	In-person 30h	Private urban kindergartens, primary, secondary	Yes	Pedagogy expert
2	20+	In-person 5h	Private urban primary	No	School administrator
3	5-10	Online 30h	Private urban kindergartens	Yes	Teacher
4	20+	Mixed 30h	Public and private urban schools from kindergartens to tertiary	No	Teacher
5	20+	30h	Private urban primary schools	Yes	School administrator
6	10-15	In-person 4h	Private urban primary and secondary	Yes	Mediator
7	20+	In-person 30h	Public urban primary school	Yes	School administrator
8	20+	Short In-person trainings (total 40h)	Public and private urban kindergartens and primary schools	Yes	Pedagogy expert
9	20+	In-person 20h	Private urban kindergarten, primary and secondary	No	School psychologist
10	20+	In-person 30h	Public and private both urban and rural centers	Yes	School psychologist
11	20+	In-person 30h and other short courses	Private urban kindergarten	No	Teacher
12	20+	In-person short courses (total 36h)	Public and private urban primary schools	No	Teacher

The interviews for current students were done by professor Prawda under my guidance as they took place at the end of October. All interviewees received the same protocol which they

filled-up in paper together with the consent form. These were later scanned, and I transcribed them. Not all participants chose to be partake in the study. Learners had the option to clarify, change, or delete their answers, yet none chose to do so. Below are the descriptors of the current students that were interviewed:

Table 3- Current MESM students

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Years of teaching experience</b>	<b>Program modality</b>	<b>Type of school</b>	<b>Other trainings</b>	<b>Profession</b>
13	20+	In-person 30h	Public urban kindergarten	No	Social worker
14	5-10	In-person 30h	Public urban high school	No	Teacher
15	20+	In-person 30h	Private urban tertiary education	No	School administrator
16	5-10	In-person 30h	Public urban secondary	No	School administrator
17	5-10	In-person 30h	Public urban secondary	No	Teacher
18	Less than 5	In-person 30h	Public and private primary	Yes	Social worker
19	11-19	In-person 30h	Private urban tertiary	No	Lawyer
20	20+	In-person 30h	Public urban secondary	No	Teacher

### 4.3 Data reliability and validity

Taking into consideration the possible variation on the outcomes and practices of the learners of the program, a triangulation method to increase the trustworthiness of the data was created where the answers of the members of the different cohorts were cross referenced among them as well as with internal documents, videos, and the observation of an online class. This was accounted for when developing the protocol by having both closed and open-ended questions (Given, 2008). Nonetheless, from those interviews conducted on the phone or in-person I could notice openness from the parties to share their experiences. This was different from the email and written interviews where the quality of the responses provided varied.

### 4.4 Managing and Recording Data

All interview outputs were kept safe in a password protected external hard drive kept under key. The interviews that were voice-recorded used a Sony ICD-UX71 Digital Voice Recorder with 1GB Flash Memory. The subjects did not have any direct contact with the equipment. This equipment was chosen for its practicality to carry to the interview sites. I transcribed all the data acquired through this study. At the time of transcription, names were replaced with numbers, and other demographics were changed into ranges and categories (i.e. profession, and years of service).

## **4.5 Data analysis strategy**

After all transcriptions were done I reread several times each of the interviews to engage in an initial process of open coding and horizontalization of the data. From the many 17 codes that emerged, from enquiring “What is going on? What was done? How is it being done? Who did it? What are the goals? What was the meaning of it? What was the intent? What feelings or thoughts are being communicated?” to the data (Given, 2008). Three themes were chosen for the coding of the interviews with alumni, current students, and Prof. Prawda. The final central themes employed were personal transformations, school conflict, and program implications under the scope of school climate with several sub-themes for each category. In the case of personal transformations, the sub-themes found were self-awareness and professional accountability. For school conflict the sub-themes found were program’s tools and pedagogy, fostering healthy relationships, and sources of support (including legal and institutional sources). Finally, for the program implications domain a general discussion on the comparison with other trainings and methods, limitations when applying program, and hopes for the future was held. Domain analysis worksheets with these final codes were created showing the overlap of themes and outlier comments. The same themes were employed for the coding and analysis of the interview of professor Prawda’s and notes from a recent short course she did. It is important to point out that the translation of the interviews used in the results of the thesis was done after the coding to save time in the overall process, and I deemed unnecessary to translate them before analyzing them.

## **4.6 Researcher’s role in management, and ethical considerations**

After each audio recorded interview was conducted, I transcribed them. Each interview took approximately seven hours to be transcribed. Special difficulties were present due to the different accents of the interviewees and the sometimes-poor quality of some of the recording due to noise from the sites where they took place, or the participant's handwriting. However, no relevant sections were missed during transcription. In the end, all personal identifiers were removed or coded from the transcripts to ensure anonymity at all points of the project.

An important element that has been considered throughout the research project is my own bias and subjectivity as the interviewer, and the need for ongoing, systematic reflection and interpretation as the author of this thesis. As a foreigner to Argentinean culture and history before this study, I had to become acquainted with an educational and social system that is very unique when compared to the rest of the region (as described in the literature review). Therefore, I continuously cross referenced with Argentinean peers on the most relevant cultural shocks I was experiencing during my time in the country. Similarly, as my introductions to the interviewees were always through Professor Prawda, it was interesting to see how their initial reaction would be to the study (e.g. if I was introduced as a student from abroad and Venezuelan, as a Master student coming from European institution, or merely a supervisee of Prof. Prawda). As it was referenced in the Literature Review and Case Study chapters, the period I spent in the country was also of great distress for teacher unions and there was a general distrust of anyone not belonging to such circles. I also accounted for how my nationality, ethnicity, and accent in Spanish played during the interviews. This affected the interviews in two ways. On one hand, the current socioeconomic and political situation of my motherland is well known in the country plus there are many Venezuelans immigrating to Argentina. Thus, several interviewees brought up or asked questions about how I felt about the topic, and some pointed out how the immigration rates were becoming an issue for the country. Although I do not think their answers to the interview were deeply affected by these points, it did cause tension in the beginning. I chose to address this by stating again the purpose of my research and their participation as well as my status as a student from abroad. On the other hand, there are some linguistic differences between Argentinean and Venezuelan Spanish especially when it comes to terms used to describe common social interactions. I was able to account for most of them by just asking the interviewee to rephrase their answer or to develop their thoughts more. Nonetheless, interviewees may have been more willing to participate in the study and offer candid reflections about their experiences to someone whom they perceive is external to their context

and to whom they will be able to share opinions to which locals may have established opinions of. Finally, I have also tried to account for my prior knowledge and expectations on how trainings on school mediation and alternative resolution of school violence should be as I recently completed a professional certificate on those topics. As Marilyn Lichtman (2013) describes, qualitative researchers need to continuously be aware on how their own stories are shaping their study. To guard against this potential bias, I kept reflective notes on my experience as I pursued this study to separate my culture shocks and reflections from what is described by the participants in the study

## **4.7 Limitations of the data collection**

Although from the initial research stages it was clear that it would be a qualitative study, the access to participants and the pedagogy I was able to gain were always in question. In the case of the alumni portion, although professor Ana Prawda has done the training several times in the past years she does not count with a systematized inventory of alumni. This made that the initial idea of selecting a randomized sample of the alumni impossible, and made it difficult to create a consistent, up-to-date, and complete list of interviewees. This also resulted that the initial scope of the research which was only the West region of the Province of Buenos Aires to expand to any practitioner who had taken the training in any part of the Province and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. In addition, it was a concern through the process that professor Prawda served as the initial contact with interviewees, was the creator of the program, was the facilitator of it, was the middleman with the interviews of the local students, and served also as my local supervisor. The only measure I used to reduce bias was the triangulation of interviews between the groups and with books and articles.

# 5 Results

The twenty interviews conducted shed light on the experiences of educational practitioner with the program *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* either while finishing its coursework, or up to two years after the completion of their credits. The resilience and vulnerabilities shown through their accounts in the interviews highlight the complexities of being an educational practitioner in the west side of Buenos Aires Province and capital city today. As such, the results will be geared towards exposing their answers on the personal transformations through the course, their views on school conflict after the program, and their thoughts on the future of the program. Additionally, insights from the interview with professor Prawda and a two-hour introductory session are shared.

## 5.1 Personal transformations

Most participants were found to get to the course through conferences, presentations, and recommendations from peers. The common theme among the answers was that when they heard professor Prawda speak for the first time about school conflict and the role teacher could play they felt identified. For example, interviewees 6 and 4 attended short presentations professor Prawda gave and both chose to contact her directly asking for more tools and guidance on conflicts they were experiencing in their institutions. These beginnings are of special interest as their resonance with the tools even before the course seem to have set the participants on an expectation that a personal transformation would happen to them if they attended the course. As such, the findings of this section are divided into: the self-awareness they gained of their skills and traits, and the professional accountability they learnt through the sessions.

### 5.1.1 Self-awareness

The interviewees reflected different levels of self-awareness before starting the program. On one hand cases like interviewee 1 were found who were teachers during the dictatorship and went through the process of democratization of education in Argentina. Such change impacted the world view they had on themselves as educators as then is when it was politically acceptable to question the modalities, narratives, and guidance on how education should look like. Through the course, interviewee 1 reflected, “I realized the impact still today

such schemes had on me and how they affected my relationships with the newer generations of teachers as well as students”. On the other hand, other teachers realized that their patterns of communication were not effective. Interviewee 8 shared that since the course she now tries to apply active listening in her professional and personal endeavors because, alike interviewee 5, they used to quickly get emotional when potential conflicts emerged as they felt their authority was being challenged.

There seemed to have been a shared grown feeling of self-assurance on knowing how to handle conflicts more productively from the point of view that you need to be aware of what you are lacking, and what new tools you can implement. Interviewee 4 shared that during her course she enjoyed its methodology where:

“the class is shaped in base of what people bring up, professor Prawda gives them tool, but she does not know which tool you really need in your context, so it is your responsibility to be vulnerable and make the class aware of where you are coming from. She would then make it into a role play or a group work when you can really take ownership, because the idea is that: you are not taking a recipe away. You are co-creating what will work for you context.”

Interviewee 12 and 15 added to this that such spaces of vulnerability were at times tough because they had to recognize that they were feeding the issues they were supposedly just observers of. As it can be seen the course provided active and implicit spaces and activities for the students to become aware of the roles they play in conflictive situations. Moreover, they were also empowered by having to take ownership of the tools taught in order to apply appropriate responses to their unique contexts.

### **5.1.2 Professional accountability**

Following their self-awareness, the theme of professional accountability emerged taking it to the next level by demonstrating that as teachers, principals, and other related educational staff they have both a role and a responsibility to act in conflict resolution. Interviewee 7 described this theme as a priority in all schools as is her impression they all face at some level a “pointing fingers” situation where no one wants to take responsibility for the outcomes of a conflict. An example of this was given by interviewee 8 who shared that:



“one day while we were at recess two kids started fighting. As I was not on duty I waited for someone else to handle the situation. No one came, so I split them, and I just sent them to their respective classrooms. At the end of the day the kids fought again outside the school with more violence and they were both suspended. I now know see the authority my role could have played, and that the outcome could have been avoided.”

Similar cases of lacks in their professional accountability before the course were shared by interviewees 5, 10, 11, and 12. The stories they shared cover topics like parent-teacher relations, issues with colleagues and principals, and in-class conflict. Not all observations talk about conflicts. Interviewees 7 and 1 have under their charge other teachers and staff members. They both expressed that through the course they were able to notice that some of the tools taught were performed intuitively by their colleagues, and that when others saw they were more committed to their responsibilities they also started copying their behaviors. For example, they got asked where did they get the tools they were using and what were they doing that them and their classroom seemed more relaxed. Interviewee 4 shared that now she is in such a greater level of both self-awareness and personal accountability that she feels empowered to share them with parents to use them too in favor of the common growth of their children. Current student 19 encompasses this message when she says that “you have to be the school you wanna see in the world.”

## **5.2 School conflict**

Most interviewees refer to two kinds of changes after the course regarding school conflict. On one hand, individuals like interviewee 2 and 3 who took the course together with some colleagues and have been applying the tools have noticed a more pleasant school climate in the institution. On the other hand, other participants recognize that they are not scared any longer when a conflict is about to emerge because they know they have tools to try to ease it. Participant 12 shared that after the course there are less cases of violence and conflict reaching the principal’s office. Although she does not dare to establish a causal correlation, she admits that after the staff of her school underwent the training conflicts do not seem to escalate as quickly and as intense as they used to. In this section, the sub-themes that emerged were the pedagogy of the course, the fostering of healthy relations at their workplace, and the sources of support in their institutions.

### 5.2.1 Tools and pedagogy:

The alumni of *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* shared that in order to wholly put in practice the method one needs to continue learning and inquiring on alternative conflict resolution tools. Some of the most lasting learnings from the sessions that students often referred to, or shared that they continuously put in practice are:

- Differentiate types of conflict (i.e. interpersonal, related to management, and cognitive).
- Identify the positive aspects of conflict.
- Mediation as a constructive process of learning where one needs to learn to identify the interests and needs of the learners.
- Solutions, techniques, and frameworks for conflict resolution are contextual. Do not take something that worked once as a blueprint for the whole institution, or different settings.
- Communication techniques (specially paraphrasing, open questions, and dialoguing), effective dialogue, and active listening.
- Employ mediation and consensual agreements before imposing sanctions.
- Adequately employ the vocabulary of school climate, conflict, and violence.

Interviewee 1 shared that it stayed with her professor Prawda's pedagogy where the focus was always intrapersonal first: "I needed to understand myself first, how do I communicate with myself and others, and from there she would ask us "well if all of these [tools] help you solve an interpersonal conflict, what could happen when you introduce these in the classroom?"

Interviewee 12 complements this position by sharing that she was surprised on how constructivist the sessions were. She expressed that they were so engaging that she would feel time fly by,

"they were entertaining. She would first do an exercise where we all had to participate, then she would explain why we had done it, and where the theories supporting our reactions came from. Then we would think on how the same exercise would play in other situations and what kind of

modifications it required from us. I think that is it. The way she teaches is what impacts you.”

### **5.2.2 Fostering healthy relationships**

Except for 2 interviewees, all other went into education because they believed in the transformative power education has in societies. Thus, not expanding significant and respectful relationships appears to be a common threat. Interviewee 5 shared how even when teaching is tough work, recognizing the real source of conflicts between peers can make a huge difference in the relationships among staff members and even the relationships with students. As part of the staff of the school she shared that:

“When conflicts emerge one needs to be aware of how the parts are affected by it. When it comes to teachers, one needs to see that is really behind a conflict with a parent, up to what point there is a personal issue between them or if it is a pedagogical issue. This is one of the most complex parts. Because sometimes teachers can feel that I am not defending them. That I am always on the parents’ side. When this kind of situations occur relationships can wear off easily, but if one remembers that conflicts can be a positive catalyst and that it will bring growth and knowledge of the situations and the people then one deals with it differently.”

Three of the alumni interviewed are taking the advises of the course to expand the relationships with parents to which they have created one-on-one meetings with some, or invited them to participate in engaging school projects that reflected on family values. Another one organized mediation trainings during her class time with her students. An example of this was given by interviewee 1 who shared that

“once I realized that the bad climate in the school was the core of my issues everything changed. Specially my relationships with parents and students. Parent come to us with their problems because it is the only place with open doors that listens to them. Students tell us everything because it is the only place they have where adults pay attention to what thy have to say for four hours a day. On the other hand, teachers bring with them the good and the ugly because the school is the place where they have their friends and

colleagues. Thus, school climate is a transversal theme for conflicts in schools and in society.”

### **5.2.3 Sources of support:**

Two different sources of support were identified through the study: institutional and collective. The first one refers to the legal and normative supports they are aware they can rely on, and the second one reflects on the members of the school community with which they have to work together to accomplish their goals.

In the case of the institutional support only a third of the interviewees were aware of legislations related to alternative conflict resolution or mediation. However, many more shared that the schools they work at count with an institutional code of conduct, an internal organism for settlement of disputes, or individuals in the staff of their schools that they were able to go to in case of need. Interviewee 8 shared that it has been of great benefit to attend and help run teacher meetings. She expressed they used to be very boring and people made excuses to avoid going. However, since the school had workshops with professor Prawda, they have been using the meetings for community building and testing new methods to handle conflicts. There were only exceptions to this trend. One interviewee considered that their institutions is reluctant to change due to either their religious believes. The other one expressed that she is the only one trained in mediation or anything alike, and that it has been rough to get other teachers on board as they hold misconception on what it entails. Thus, it seems that depending on the institutional culture, there have been some schools more willing to try and test the tools taught in *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*. It is important to note, however, that all practitioners perceived that they have enough autonomy and authority over their classroom or team to try the tools without having to report it to other entities.

Regarding community support, those practitioners who came into the course with either a friend or a colleague spoke about the benefits. Interviewee 4 commented that when she took the course with a teacher from the same schools when the role-play and the group activities were done they were able to pair and dig deep on the kinds of tools could work in their contexts. Some of the alumni have even become promoters of the program inviting peers to take the course or attend presentations on similar topics together. Moreover, most alumni have remained in touch with the community they made through the program by: directly

contacting professor Prawda, having private meet-ups with peers from their cohort, or attending events hosting *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*.

## 5.3 Policy implications

Although the aim of this research is not to generalize its results, some of the participants have had experiences with other alternative conflict resolution methods offered in the region. This section highlights the comparisons the students made with other programs, considering possible limitations, points of improvement and hopes for its future.

### 5.3.1 Comparisson with other methods and trainings:

Interviewees described their preference on professor Prawda's methodology on the empowerment of teachers as the main agents of change in their institutions. Interviewee 8 shared that with the tools taught "everyone can learn how to communicate effectively, helping peers and teaching, at the same time, the techniques and strategies that do not allow conflict to escalate." Likewise, interviewee 5 just took a negotiation training and referred to the cross-overs of the practices specially on the importance of context and personal history when creating diagnoses. It was interesting the take-away of interviewee 7 who shared that with *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* "one not always need a neutral third party or an external mediator as the techniques are incorporated by everyone in their interactions avoiding for conflicts to scale. Also, it serves as a daily practice of its principles". This view is reinforced by the experience of Interviewee 2 who believes the effects of this program "are long-lasting because we are going to thorough changes of mentality. If you want to see the changes you need to be willing to put the effort it requires. And that is counted in years."

The practitioners also shared points of improvement thy would like to see. Interviewee 1 commented that a great addition to it would be a section on emotions and emotional intelligence as a tool for self-discovery as well as adding a specific track for high school staff who work part-time in educational institutions and are confronted with specific conflicts and issues. Practitioner 11 had a similar outlook by proposing the development of a second level of the course where one can go deeper in a focus section. On the other hand, Interviewee 7 hoped that the course will count with social events or an electronic community where graduates can look for support and grow with the techniques. Similarly, interviewee 4 shared

that she wished there was more time to put what has been discussed into practice during the course, so that the students can revise the initial plans of action they initially agreed to. This is also supported by all the recent students who believe they need more practical trainings and readings to feel comfortable applying the tools and techniques by themselves.

For the future, all interviews hope for the program to continue growing, and in some cases, institutionalize in the province of Buenos Aires. Alumni 5 hopes that the program gets funding and does a better job of broadcasting that it exists as she sees a clear commitment from governmental agencies promoting this kind of programs. This is backed by participant 2 who shared that when they did the initial training with all the school staff they were moved to action. However, it took place right before summer break, so it took a lot of effort to kick off again that initiatives the next school year. Interviewee 4 reflected shared that this course should be part of all the Superior Institutes for Training for pre-service teachers as it “should be mandatory for anyone who wants to be part of this profession and enter the field with practical knowledge”.

## **5.4 Reflections of professor Prawda on *MESM***

This section offers the reflections the creator of the program has on the possible effects *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* has had on the themes that emerged from the interviews with the graduates and current students of the program.

### **5.4.1 Personal transformation according to Prawda**

Professor Prawda considers that all practitioners intuitively have some practices that align with school mediation as the skills required for it are sometimes shared in classroom management or pedagogical courses. She exposed in a presentation that the starting point of interest on the course she offers has been the rapid increase in multicultural environments and the effects of globalization in society. Internal and foreign migratory movement bring about a clash of traditions, cultures, and religions. Thus, the first aim of the course is to help teachers “get to know, recognize, and identify how other people live, and what are people doing to obtain what they have and what they want to get.”

The self-awareness practitioners develop through the dialogues and role-plays support the development of a sense of accountability. In the case highlighted above, teachers must learn

“that before migrants used to adapt to the customs of their new locations, but new frames of understanding migration have change the ruling paradigms and makes us wonder in which ways can we include that new type of students.” This is the moment where negotiation and mediation tools are required. What tends to occur, she reflected, is that the school system replicates the perceptions from the ruling society, and sometimes this means that teachers unintentionally reinforce stereotypes and discriminations “setting conflict on fire because they lack tools”.

One of the aspects about being a mediator that she has seen more teachers struggle with is being impartial. On one hand, everyone knows each other in schools which means that most already have pre-conceived notions on who someone is and how they will behave. She reported to always remind her students that “we must recognize to ourselves what we are not willing to change because that is where others can support us in recognizing when we mess it up”.

#### **5.4.2 School conflict according to Prawda**

She argued that her program has the triple function of “preventing violence through communication techniques, provide didactical pedagogical models taught with their theories of knowledge, and promote a culture and education based in the value of peace.”. Therefore, her goal is that all successful practitioners in her courses leave with personal changes that will inspire others to also come onboard and learn about the tools. She admits, nonetheless, that “the skills taught are like a muscle” which one needs to use every day and build socially with others.

She has observed that a few students have left the program, after becoming acquainted with the benefits of school mediation, feeling like they must save the rest of the staff in their institutions. Her concern in those cases is that there will be a pass of authoritarianism from external mediators to these students getting promoted as the only good communicators or conflict solvers at their institutions. Instead of promoting autonomy, other actors may become less accountable and not recognize their role in how conflicts emerge in their institutions. On the other extreme are those who are scared to practice the tools and methods for the fear of being rejected by their peers. Her recommendation in these cases is to remember that “conflicts are beneficial as long as they don’t exceed ones’ capacity to bond with others”.

She recognizes, nonetheless, that schools will not flourish only with mediators. They require, psychologists, psychopedagogues, counselors, parents, sociologists, and social workers, among many more specialties willing to support the lives of students and the improvement of school climates.

### **5.4.3 Policy implications according to Prawda**

“Students usually come into the course either not having a clue on what mediation entails, or only having met external school mediators with whom they probably have never interacted” – Prawda explained. The implication of this in schools is that only some adults are made accountable for conflict resolution, and the rest just stay low as referral points or mere observants. This is why she defends that “we need mediation techniques *in situ* so that conflicts don’t level up and become violent. All members of the community have a responsibility to act when conflicts emerge”. She believes her approach is more holistic than other commercial ones as it demands direct and immediate action. She described that other program do not include their techniques in the daily life of schools and push for the creation of “mediation of school climate hour”.

Professor Prawda believes that all methods can contribute to the improvement of school climate. What differentiates *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* is that it does not sell it technique from a utopic or metaphorical future where the school community will “live happily ever after”, but from a strong association with peace education by prompting changes in the conducts, perspectives, and values “in the here and now”.

The greatest limitation of the program, in her view, is that the contact information of the graduates is not systematized. If this was to happen she thinks more people would request and join trainings. The long-term goal would be to conduct a deep self-evaluation of the program and envision pathways for it to reach public policy entities. Likewise, this expansion could allow for the creation of practice or lifelong learning hubs of the techniques. Additionally, she is aware that most students want more sessions. She knows of some who have gone into trainings and specializations in other topics as a result of the interest that emerged from her course.



She admits, that in the beginning of the program her ambition was to take it to the whole country replicating the model. Nowadays, she has realized that the real focus should be one classroom at a time. She tells her students that:

“if they can make that the classroom climate improves or that *one* student projects his life from a different ideal that the enclosed one they tend to hold, I think it is a huge step. If you are able to make him behave appropriately, that he is able to talk appropriately, that he learns to tolerate others, that he is empathetic, that he can think for himself and transfer his ideas correctly, reflect, and count with critical thinking. If you can achieve that, that’s it! I do not pretend to change the world. I want teachers able to teach and that children are able to see that a different reality is possible.”

## 6 Discussion of results

The purpose of this research was to investigate what are the experiences of the trained practitioners from the west side of Buenos Aires Province when introducing the program and tools of *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* to handle school conflict and transform school climate? 20 cases were studied from both alumni and recent graduates served as examples on what the experience of an education practitioner could be when partaking in the *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* program and introducing the resources shared into their professional practices in the Province of Buenos Aires. In this way, the results do not attempt to be generalizable to other alike programs for teacher training in conflict resolution, and not even between the different editions of the program. The answers obtained from the participants have been compared to the perceptions of the creator of the program. As it was explained in the cases study chapters, the open methodology and pedagogy developed by professor Prawda allows for the needs of the participants to be at the core of the workshops and curriculum making no two individual sessions alike. Thus, the five research questions are discussed separately.

### **6.1 Question 1: Does the program *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* offer preparation, as indicated by the graduated practitioners, for the transformation of school climate?**

The research of Thapa and *et al.* (2013) demonstrated that the perceptions teachers hold of their school climate can impact the development of such community. In the case of the practitioners of *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* I do not believe this question can be answered with the information collected from the interviews. I say this carefully, as the only interviewees that spoke about a transformation of an effect of the program on their school climate had both taken the same course together with the rest of the staff of their institution. And even then, they did not dare to bet for a causal relationship between the intervention of the program and the improvement of their climate. Therefore, the only conclusion that can be made from the data gathered is that for the interviewees who took the course through their schools they consider that if they continued to employ the tools (and have professor Prawda do a second part of it) their school climate will drastically transform in the long-run.

Nonetheless, and the results showed, all participants reflected on personal transformations through the course from which they understood their positionality, role, and accountability in school conflicts.

## **6.2 Question 2: Which tools taught in the program do the practitioners really use?**

Both alumnae and current students shared that the same tools were of benefit to them. Some of them were: being able to identify the types, parts, and complexities of conflict; effective communication mechanisms like dialogue, paraphrasing, active listening, and open-ended questions; and employing techniques from mediation for conflict resolution. Professor Prawda has a similar perception of which tools practitioners use the most. These findings are not surprising because, as Davini (2016) explained, when the teaching and learning methods are significant by facing the practitioners with the dilemmas they confront in their profession. Moreover, several interviewees shared that their favorite part was when they brought up their own examples from their contexts and were pushed to become self-aware and accountable for the decisions they had chosen to make. This is another trait also contemplated by Davini (2016) where reflexive dialogue is employed to cause conceptual and value tensions on the learner by simulating their daily life challenges.

## **6.3 Question 3: In what measure do practitioners report to implement the tools taught in their professional practices? What are their experiences when doing so?**

It was interesting to find that all recent graduates felt they did not have enough training to handle school conflict, while the alumni felt reassured that they counted with key tools that could be employed in almost all contexts. As most of the transformations shared are intrapersonal, it seems that it is more common for them to “set the example” by individually using the skills described in Question 2 than formally “teaching others” how to use them. For example, the school of interviewee 1 created a program where the parents would have to reflect on their family values with their kids and a book of values was co-created in each classroom. *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* seems to experience the two-folded challenge

described by Siede (2007) where it should provide training how to become a better authority, yet it also needs to support the transfer of the skills taught to the daily challenges practitioners experience.

## **6.4 Question 4: In what measure do practitioners consider that the tools taught are helpful?**

All participants considered that the course was worthwhile and that they left with a new tool or a skill that they could try in their workplaces. In that measure Thapa and *et al.* (2013) school improvement process by increasing the perceived autonomy of teachers was proven. Alike question 2, the education practitioners felt that they left the program more empowered to generate changes in their communities. This feeling was also enhanced by relying in their perceived authority and sources of support. This trait is visible in the alumnae who have reported to be able to foster more meaningful relationships with their colleagues, their students, and parents. The expectation then is that if better connections are being formed then the frequency and level of conflicts in schools will diminish (Prawda, 2013). Consequently, once again, the expectation of the interviewees is that if they commit to these tools in the long term their context will be transformed.

## **6.5 Question 5: Which are the sources of support that practitioners count with when introducing the program and its methodologies in their workplaces?**

The experiences found through the interviews match those reflected in the literature: the main sources of support for teachers introducing new methodologies are the institutions they are related to and their interpersonal relations. Most interviewees considered that they counted with enough autonomy to implement the practices in their workplaces. Nonetheless, only a few of them are aware of the legal and governmental support they are entitled to or that can guide them on how to transfer conflicts that cannot be mediated. It was found that those teachers who partook in the course with peers reported an easier introduction of the methods in their schools. As García Sanchez and Ortiz Moline (2012) exposed, the most relevant relationship in the school is principals-teachers. Prawda agrees with this as principals are the trend-setters of schools determining the autonomy and authority of all other actors.

Accordingly, the practitioners shared that the program should offer opportunities to expand networks and become an exchange of best-practices among graduates.

## 7 Limitations of the study

Although there were several limitations to this study related with the political context of the country, which cannot be controlled by researchers, there are some adaptations and recommendations that arose from the boundaries faced.

First, the lack of a systematized database with the information of all the participants that have gone through the courses with professor Prawda hindered the availability to randomize the samples interviewed. It also constrained the study's capacity to generalize on the impact it has had through the almost two decades of existence. Likewise, most of the practitioners interviewed have more than twenty years of service and women which did not permit the capacity of the study to analyze or compare in depth the experiences of new teachers or mid-career professionals of other genders.

As the program was getting postponed month-by-month during my stay, it was hard for me to anticipate if a different methodology should be developed. The consequence of this was that the first contact with the interviewees took place in June near the end of the semester right before Winter break. Consequently, several of the potential cases were unable to participate, or had their interviews in August through the phone.

Finally, the most important personal limitation I faced was that my computer broke right before my travels, so I could only use public ones intermittently due to my budget. This affected my response time to emails and concerns, the quality of communication with my supervisors, and the amount of work I could do while I was there. Moreover, some potential interviews that requested the use of online programs like Skype or Zoom could not happen.

Possible way to improve the methodology of the presented study:

1. To focus only on one municipality of the provinces, and do a deeper research on all the courses on mediation and teacher training that have been recently done.
2. Instead of making a personal contact attempt to get the sponsorship of a University through which one can easily access the information of the coursework delivered, evaluations, trainers, and contacts to interview.
3. Extend the fieldwork period from 3 to 6 months.

4. If possible, guarantee access to schools before traveling.
5. In case of analyzing the impact of the program on transformation of school climates then older generations should be interviewed (between 5-10 years of graduation).
6. Explicitly push for a percentage of male interviewees.

## 8 Conclusion

The presented study attempted answering the question of what are the experiences of education professionals in the West side of the Province of Buenos Aires and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires when introducing the program and the methodology of *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* to handle school conflicts and transform school climate? This was done by analyzing the answer to interviews done to twenty alumni and current students, and to the creator of the program in question. Overall, it was found that for practitioners who counted with the support of their institutions to either partake in the course, or to apply the learnings from the program were more content with the tools and methods the program offered.

There were many limitations to both the methodology and the recollection of data mainly correlate with the political processes the country was undergoing during the months allocated for the fieldwork, Thus, some of the data gathered, especially that of interviewees who answered the protocol in its written form was shallow and did not expressed the depth of the experiences of those individuals. Therefore, most of analysis presented was from practitioners interviewed by phone or email which were the alumnae of the program.

In regards of the specific research questions of the study, the findings threw the following conclusions:

1. Does the program *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* offer preparation, according to the trained practitioners, to transform school conflict?

This question was mainly targeted by the alumnae who have deep regards for the tools of the program. They reflected that the transformation they experienced way mainly personal by increasing their awareness of their values and points of views as well as of the impact their attitudes have in their institutions when conflicts arise. As the literature review presented, personal awareness, and empowerment are key for the improvement of school climates and the enhancement of their perceived autonomy and authority in the schools.

2. What are the tools taught by the study program that the students really use in their professional practice?



Paraphrasing, open-ended questions, dialoguing, and active listening were the tools the interviewees use more often in their professional practices. These are key methods for the mitigation of conflicts in school mediation, and prove that the practitioners underwent, like Davini (2016) explained, a transformative method of instruction

3. In what measure do practitioners report that they implement the tools taught by the program in their professional practices? What are their experiences when doing so?

The answers to this question were split evenly between graduates and current students. The first ones believe they have been able to practice the tools with the people they have direct professional accountability over, while the current students considered they had not have enough practical training to translate the tools to their contexts.

4. In what measure do practitioners consider that the tools are beneficial?

All interviewees were grateful that they had done the program and felt they had acquired tools for their personal empowerment and transformation. Nonetheless, there were some interviewees that reported that is they counted with greater sources of support in their institutions or through the *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* program, they would feel that the expected outcomes are possible for them.

5. What are the sources of support that practitioners count on when introducing the program and its tools in their work practices?

Most interviewees were unaware of which legislations and national or provincial programs exist in support of their mediation and school climate endeavors. More than half expressed that in their institution they counted with norms, codes of conduct, or formal set-ups for handling conflicts which could be helpful for their newly acquired mediation skills. There was also a correlation between the kind of institution the practitioner came from and the support they perceived from their workplaces. Those that expressed feeling supported had taken the course with a peer, or the training had taken place in their school. On the contrary, those from very traditional or religious schools shared to have experienced more challenges when introducing the advantages of the tools and methods of the course.

Throughout the research there were many lingering questions on how some of the processes of policy creation, adoption, and evaluation. Thus, below is a list of recommended inquiries for future research in the topics of training, school mediation, and conflict resolution.

- What is the impact or power of teacher unions in the teacher training of their municipalities?
- Why and how was the Programa Nacional de Convivencia Escolar cancelled?
- What is the role of the Observatorio de Violencia Escolar with civil society?
- How does the federal Programa de Mediación escolar differentiate from Prawda's offer?
- What are the outcomes of practitioners that have taken one of *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* course in the past five years?
- What are the differences between the mediatic responses to bullying than to school conflict or violence in Argentina?
- What has been the impact of the Argentinian laws on school mediation, school conflict, and school climate on other countries in the region?
- What best-practices can be taken from the Argentinian example on school climate legislations and practices?

The challenges of facing conflict and violence in school settings are faced by all the actors of the community. Argentina has been a trendsetter for Iberian America when it comes to creating legislations, programs, and spaces for the active emergence of tools and methods to handle conflicts in constructive ways. Nonetheless, questions remain on the effectiveness of these to reach and empower teachers to act and implement them in their classrooms.

*Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* attempts to provide a solution by training teachers and staff members with practical tools transferable to their contexts. Although this research points out that its alumnae and recent graduates consider the tools beneficial, the promotion of such advantages remained restricted to the few whose networks have participated in them.

Therefore, the dissemination of the results of this research, and the invitation to further

academic inquiries of the program are recommended. This way the program's theme of *convivir aprendiendo y aprendiendo a convivir* empowers more institutions.

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# Appendices

## Consent form for the study

### FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Por favor considere la información aquí expuesta antes de decidir participar en esta investigación.

**Título tentativo de la investigación:** “Experiencias al introducir nuevas prácticas para la convivencia escolar: el caso de *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* en la zona oeste de la Provincia de Buenos Aires.”

**Propósito de la investigación:** Entender las experiencias que tienen aquellos profesionales capacitados por el programa *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* al introducir las prácticas, herramientas, y metodologías enseñadas en sus lugares de trabajo.

**Qué se espera de ti durante la investigación:** Si eliges participar en esta investigación se te pedirá que completes una encuesta, y se te hará una entrevista. Algunas de las preguntas son sobre las herramientas y metodologías que fueron enseñadas en el programa de estudios, y otras serán sobre tu experiencia aplicando las mismas en tu contexto laboral. Con tu permiso, al aceptar ser parte de este estudio, tu entrevista será grabada (sólo el audio), para que yo no tenga que tomar tantas notas y prestarte mejor atención. Se te pedirá que no digas tu nombre en la grabación. No se han anticipado ningún riesgo del participar en esta investigación.

**Tiempo requerido:** Está previsto que la encuesta y la entrevista requieran una hora.

**Beneficios:** Este puede ser una oportunidad de contar y reflexionar sobre tus experiencias profesionales relacionadas a la convivencia escolar, conflicto y violencia escolar, resolución alternativa de conflictos, y el entrenamiento de *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*.

**Confidencialidad:** Las respuestas que ofrezcas en las entrevistas y encuestas son confidenciales. En ningún punto de la investigación tu identidad será revelada. Para los propósitos de la misma se te asignará un código numérico arbitrario para las transcripciones y análisis de tus respuestas. Sólo yo, la investigadora Ana Gabriela Aguilera Silva, sabré sobre la codificación. Las grabaciones serán destruidas después de que la tesis sea calificada por mi programa de posgrado (septiembre de 2017).

La información que me des en esta entrevista será usada en mi tesis de posgrado la cual me encuentro finalizando en este momento, y puede ser la base para presentaciones o artículos en el futuro. Como antes previsto, no usaré tu nombre ni ninguna información que te identifique en ningún caso.

**Participación y retiro:** Tu participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria, y puedes retirar tu consentimiento cuando desees sin ninguna penalidad.

**Información de contacto con la investigadora:** Si tiene alguna pregunta, duda, sugerencia, o queja sobre esta investigación por favor contactar a: Ana Gabriela Aguilera Silva, [agas001@bucknell.edu](mailto:agas001@bucknell.edu) o [ana.g.aguilera.s@gmail.com](mailto:ana.g.aguilera.s@gmail.com) . También puede contactar a mis supervisores: Prof. Brent Edwards [dbrent@gmail.com](mailto:dbrent@gmail.com), o Profesora Ana Prawda [aprawda@yahoo.com.ar](mailto:aprawda@yahoo.com.ar) .

**Acuerdo:** La naturaleza y propósito de esta investigación han sido explicada suficientemente, y estoy de acuerdo con participar en este estudio. Entiendo que puedo retirar mi consentimiento sin ninguna penalidad.

Firma del participante: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

## Demographics questionnaire for interviewees

<b>Nombre:</b>						<b>Género:</b>					
<b>Profesión:</b>											
<b>Tipo de trabajo que ejerce en este momento:</b>											
<b>Años de experiencia profesional en educación:</b>											
<b>Nivel de educación en la que se especializa:</b>											
Jardinera		Primaria		Secundaria		Técnica		Terciaria		Otro:	
<b>Tipo de escuela:</b>			Privada		Pública		Otra:				
<b>Área en donde se encuentra la escuela:</b>						Rural		Urbano		Otro:	
<b>Seleccione su modalidad del programa <i>Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores</i>:</b>											
Curso de 30 horas			Presencial		Semi-presencial			Talleres cortos			
<b>Si asistió a talleres,</b>			<b>¿Cuántos?</b>			<b>Duración en horas de cada uno:</b>					
<b>Fechas de su entrenamiento con <i>Mediación sin Mediadores</i></b>											
<b>¿Has recibido otros entrenamientos en el campo de convivencia escolar, resolución de conflictos, o violencia escolar?      SÍ      NO</b>											
<b>Si tu respuesta es afirmativa, ¿cuáles?</b>											
<b>¿Conoces alguna legislación, programa nacionales, o programa regionales que lidien con temas similares a los de este programa?</b>											

# Interview protocol for Professor Prawda

## i. Introducción

- a. Expresión de agradecimiento
- b. Descripción del propósito de la entrevista

## ii. Origen del programa

- a. ¿Cómo llegaste a la docencia y al enfoque académico de transformación de la convivencia escolar a través de las técnicas de mediación?
- b. ¿Cómo emerge el programa *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*?
- c. ¿Cuál es el propósito del programa?
- d. ¿Cuáles necesidades cree que este programa sacia que otras iniciativas privadas y públicas no llenan?

## iii. Pedagogía, herramientas, y metodología del curso

- a. En los documentos de propuesta de curso se ve que tiene una estructura flexible ¿cuál es el propósito y ventajas de ser así?
- b. ¿En qué se basa la pedagogía del curso?
  - i. ¿Qué entiende el programa como “mediación”?
  - ii. ¿Por qué el enfoque en profesores y maestros y no en entrenar directamente a los alumnos en mediación?
  - iii. ¿Cómo elige cuáles temas desarrollar en cada sesión?
- c. ¿Cuáles son las distintas modalidades en las que se ha realizado el programa de entrenamiento? ¿Cuáles son las diferencias entre los contenidos que los alumnos reciben en ellas?

## iv. Programa con la Universidad de la Matanza

- a. ¿Cómo se estable el programa de *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* en la Universidad de la Matanza?
- b. ¿Cómo llegan los alumnos al curso? ¿existe algún pre-requisito para inscribirse?
- c. ¿Cómo describiría a la demografía del alumnado que anticipa tomará el curso?
- d. ¿Cuáles son algunos de los conceptos que los alumnos tienden a confundir antes de tomar el curso?
- e. ¿Cuáles son algunas de las prácticas erróneas que la mayoría de los alumnos practica antes de tomar el entrenamiento?

## v. Conexión con exalumnos



- a. ¿Existe algún seguimiento formal o informal de todos aquellos que hayan tomado el entrenamiento?
- b. ¿Mantiene contacto con sus exalumnos? ¿de qué maneras?
- c. ¿Cuáles han sido algunos de los cambios que ha apreciado en sus exalumnos y sus trabajos que se pueden asociar con el entrenamiento?
- d. ¿Considera que el programa tiene alguna limitación? ¿Cuáles han sido algunas de las críticas que ha recibido en otras ediciones?
- e. Si sus alumnos se llevaran sólo un aprendizaje del programa, ¿cuál quisiera que fuera?

**vi. Agradecimientos**

- a. ¿Tienes alguna recomendación sobre cómo abordar a los entrevistados?
- b. ¿Tienes alguna pregunta para mí?
- c. Agradecimiento

# Interview protocol for current students

**Encuesta investigación “Experiencias al introducir nuevas prácticas para la convivencia escolar: el caso de *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* en la zona oeste de la Provincia de Buenos Aires.”**

Gracias por ser parte de este estudio y tomarte el tiempo de contarnos sobre ti. Mientras más información nos des en tu cuestionario, más completos serán los resultados del estudio y la retroalimentación que se le hará al programa *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*.

## **i. Experiencia profesional en educación**

- a. ¿Cómo elegiste la profesión que en estos momentos ejerces? ¿Qué te atrae de la educación?
- b. ¿Cuáles son tus responsabilidades cotidianas en tu trabajo?
- c. ¿En las normas institucionales de tu trabajo se establece quién y/o cómo se deben resolver diferentes tipos de conflicto que puedan emerger?
- d. Antes del curso, ¿puedes describir una experiencia en la que hayas lidiado con un conflicto que te marcó que haya afectado la convivencia escolar? ¿sientes que estabas preparado para manejar ese tipo de situaciones? ¿Cómo la manejaste?

## **ii. Experiencia durante el curso**

- a. ¿Cómo te enteraste del programa *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*? ¿Por qué elegiste tomar parte del mismo?
- b. ¿Cuáles contenidos y herramientas marcaron tu experiencia durante el curso?
  - i. De ellos ¿has empezado a usar alguno en tu práctica laboral?
  - ii. ¿Te recuerdas cómo esos contenidos que nombraste en la respuesta anterior fueron enseñados durante el programa?
  - iii. ¿Se ofrecieron en el curso métodos para transferir las herramientas a tu contexto laboral? En caso de que su respuesta sea afirmativa ¿cuáles?

c. ¿Consideras que las herramientas del curso pueden transformar la convivencia escolar? ¿Cómo?

d. ¿Cuáles aspecto del entrenamiento fueron tus preferidos? ¿Por qué?

### **iii. Experiencia aplicando los contenidos**

a. ¿Consideras que después del curso estás capacitado para emplear la mayoría de las herramientas enseñadas en tu trabajo?

b. ¿Consideras que tienes la autonomía y/o autoridad necesaria para introducir fácilmente las prácticas de *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* en tu trabajo?

c. ¿En tu lugar de trabajo sientes que cuentas con el apoyo necesario para introducir nuevas prácticas? En caso afirmativo, ¿cuáles son esas fuentes de apoyo?

# Interview protocol for recent alumni

## Encuesta investigación “Experiencias al introducir nuevas prácticas para la convivencia escolar: el caso de *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* en la zona oeste de la Provincia de Buenos Aires.”

### i. Introducción

- a. Formulario de consentimiento, y entrega de encuesta para rellenar antes de la entrevista
- b. Expresión de agradecimiento, y explicación sobre la necesidad de grabar la entrevista
- c. Descripción del propósito de la entrevista

### ii. Experiencia profesional en educación

- a. ¿Cómo elegiste la profesión que en estos momentos ejerces? ¿Qué te atrae de la educación?
- b. ¿Cuáles son tus responsabilidades cotidianas en tu trabajo?
- c. ¿En las normas institucionales de tu trabajo se establece quién y/o cómo se deben resolver diferentes tipos de conflicto que puedan emerger?
- d. Antes del curso, ¿puedes describir una experiencia en la que hayas lidiado con un conflicto que te marcó que haya afectado la convivencia escolar? ¿sientes que estabas preparado para manejar ese tipo de situaciones? ¿Cómo la manejaste?

### iii. Experiencia durante el curso

- a. ¿Cómo te enteraste del programa *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores*? ¿Por qué elegiste tomar parte del mismo?
- b. ¿Cuáles contenidos y herramientas marcaron tu experiencia durante el curso?
  - i. De ellos ¿cuáles usas con frecuencia en tu práctica laboral?
  - ii. ¿Te recuerdas cómo esos fueron enseñados durante el programa?
  - iii. ¿Se ofrecieron en el curso métodos para transferir las herramientas a tu contexto laboral? ¿cuáles?
- c. ¿Consideras que las herramientas del curso pueden transformar la convivencia escolar? ¿cómo?

**iv. Experiencia aplicando los contenidos**

- a. ¿Has notado algún cambio entre cómo lidias con conflictos después del curso?
  - i. ¿Me puedes dar algunos ejemplos?
- b. ¿Consideras que después del curso estás capacitado para emplear la mayoría de las herramientas enseñadas en tu trabajo?
  - i. ¿Has observado alguna limitación al momento de aplicarlas o en las herramientas en sí?
- c. ¿Consideras que tienes la autonomía y/o autoridad necesaria para introducir fácilmente las prácticas de *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* en tu trabajo?
- d. ¿En tu lugar de trabajo sientes que cuentas con el apoyo necesario para introducir nuevas prácticas? En caso afirmativo, ¿cuáles son esas fuentes de apoyo?
- e. ¿Cuáles son algunas de las opiniones de tus colegas sobre: mediación escolar, tu elección de haber tomado el curso, y de poner sus herramientas en práctica?

**v. Reflexiones sobre el curso:**

- a. ¿Cuáles son tus expectativas si se emplearan de ampliamente las herramientas de *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* en tu práctica profesional?
- b. ¿Tienes experiencia con otras técnicas para la mejora de la convivencia escolar o la resolución alternativa de conflictos? ¿Cuál? ¿Cómo distinguirías *Mediación Escolar sin Mediadores* con ellas?
- c. ¿Te mantienes en contacto con la profesora Prawda, otros practicantes del curso, o de otras metodologías de mejora de convivencia escolar? ¿Cómo lo haces (frecuencia y tipo de contacto)?
- d. Reflexionando sobre tu experiencia laboral después del curso, ¿hay algo más que haya podido contribuir a los cambios relatados?
  - i. ¿cómo podrías mejorar aún más tus capacidades para la resolución de conflictos?

**vi. Declaraciones finales y agradecimientos**

- a. Lectura de las declaraciones finales
- b. ¿Tienes alguna pregunta o duda para mí? ¿Quisieras agregar o compartir alguna otra experiencia?
- c. Muchas gracias por su tiempo y participación.

## **De-briefing statement**

La entrevista y encuesta de la que usted acaba de tomar parte tuvo como propósito aprender sobre sus experiencias con el programa *Medicación Escolar sin Mediadores*, cómo lo ha aplicado en su contexto laboral, y los cambios que ha observado en convivencia escolar desde su implementación. Las preguntas realizadas provinieron de un cuestionario aprobado por mis supervisores de tesis. Los únicos individuos que verán sus respuestas son mi supervisor de tesis, el profesor Brent Edwards, y yo como la investigadora principal. Estoy disponible para responderle cualquier pregunta que tenga en este momento, o en el futuro. Me puede contactar por email por las direcciones de correo electrónico descritas en el formulario de consentimiento. Muchas gracias por su tiempo y participación.