

The Demand for Good Manners at Secondary School

Verónica Soledad Silva¹

¹Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA), Buenos Aires – Argentina

ABSTRACT – The Demand for Good Manners at Secondary School. This article focus on the perceptions that young students from socially disadvantaged sectors assign to respect and disrespect practices at school. From a qualitative design, this investigation analyses the results of a survey made to three hundred students of a public secondary school, located in the suburbs of the city of Posadas, Argentina. The analyses show that students confer great significance to good manners. We read their answers as expressions of social behavior codes that show an explicit request of individualized acknowledgment that sets in the first place the relational character that the respect feeling or its flip side acquire.

Keywords: Respect. Young Students. Acknowledgment.

RESUMEN – La Demanda por un Buen Trato en la Escuela Secundaria. Este artículo aborda las percepciones que jóvenes estudiantes de sectores populares atribuyen a las prácticas de respeto y falta de respeto en la escuela. Desde un diseño de tipo cualitativo, el estudio analiza los resultados de una encuesta tomada a 300 alumnos de una escuela secundaria pública, ubicada en la periferia de la ciudad de Posadas, Argentina. Los análisis evidencian que los estudiantes le otorgan central importancia al buen trato. Interpretamos sus respuestas como expresiones de códigos de comportamiento social que dan cuenta de una solicitud expresa de reconocimiento individualizado que pone en primer lugar el carácter relacional que adquiere el sentimiento de respeto o su contracara.

Palabras-clave: Respeto. Jóvenes Estudiantes. Reconocimiento.

Introduction

In recent decades, we have witnessed a process of transformation from high school in the Latin American region. On the legislative front, for example, several countries were in favor of making mandatory this level of education¹. In Argentina, the National Education Act (Law No. 26606) (Argentina, 2006), enacted in 2006, makes high school education obligatory. In this context of expanding school enrollment, it is necessary to serve a population sector that historically was excluded from this educational level (the popular sectors) and also naturalized that this space was not for them (Bracchi; Gabbai, 2013). The public school received a heterogeneous group of young people whose families did not go through or were unable to complete the experience of high school (in the aspects of socialization and construction of identities). These young people, who in many cases represent the first generation of his family with the possibility of finishing secondary level, they must share long hours in the company of other peers, which in many cases may entail conflicts of various kinds: from misunderstandings in the everyday activities, even physical violence events.

Research indicates that the most common points of conflict at school are linked to problems of social integration between students (Abramovay, 2005; Velázquez Reyes, 2005; Míguez, 2008) expressed by disqualifying treatment among peers when they must deal with living with those who considered different (Maldonado, 2000; Paulín; Tomasini, 2008; Di Leo, 2009). The main reasons why young people are excluded or exclude themselves would be linked to processes of social inferiority, where a symbolic distance between inclusion and exclusion is built (Kaplan 2011; 2013).

Another aspect to note is that these conflicts not necessarily lead to physical violence among students (Míguez, 2008; Kaplan, 2009b; Paulín; Tomasini, 2008). As evidenced by some research (Argentine Observatory..., 2010; 2013; Mutchinick, 2013), the violence in a broad sense as a way of incivilities (jokes, charged, discrimination, disrespect) would more frequent in the school and no physical violence (beatings and clashes). The various forms of inferiority can generate in those who suffer from a feeling of helplessness and powerlessness and a sense of disrespect (Mutchinick, 2013). The search for respect is particularly relevant among young people (Garcia; Madriaza, 2005; Zubillaga, 2007; Aleu, 2012; Paulin, 2015). Respect emerges as the core of conflict both in the fight to obtain it as in daily demonstrations of disrespect.

Nuñez (2011, p. 282) notes that the search for respect of self-affirmation is a process that involves the belief that “[...] performing a type of action or behave in a certain way may obtain the desired respect”. Students seek to enhance those attributes that allow them to project an image of recognition, while seeking to hide other attributes that can be debunkers.

In this paper, we start from the notion that in the negotiations of the daily interactions at school, among students, is put into play the search to build an image of respectability / no respectability. This cons-

truction of subjects worthy of respect to their peers acquires centrality in the processes of identity development of young people. In this regard, it is that respect a fertile analytical category to think about these processes of connection between students.

After presenting the main theoretical references about respect, and to clarify the methodology adopted, we will focus on the analysis of the responses made by students, looking for an interpretative construction of their perceptions about respect.

One Possible Route of Respect

Different authors agree in affirming the centrality of respect in social and personal experience of the subjects (Sennett, 2003; Vidal, 2003; Martuccelli, 2007; Bourgois, 2010). Following Kaplan (2013, p. 56-57), we consider that “[...] production of social self-esteem, sense of identity and self-worth of individuals and groups are one of the symbolic functions with greater social impact”.

A characteristic feature of modernity is the centrality of the idea of recognition. The fact that the individual requires always be recognized by the other, resulting in a series of conflicts and new demands, which complicate the dynamics between individual identities and collective identities (Martuccelli, 2007).

Indeed, the need for inter acceptance becomes a central element in the process of individuation, which in modern times is presented in a particular way; this is due to the advent of radical individuality that calls for new mechanisms of self-acceptance. Unlike traditional societies where rigid hierarchies determined the status of each of the different social groups in modern societies the feeling of inferiority becomes unbearable (Vidal, 2003).

Thus modern societies are characterized by the need of respect and denouncing situations of humiliation, where everyone claims the right to be treated as equal, or at least not be classified in a position of inferiority. Demand respect acquires a performative character in terms Illouz (2014), in another words, is achieved in the course of the interaction with people.

As Martuccelli (2007) states, democratic systems mark the advent of a demanding society of equality which shatters own world of vertical tension hierarchy therefore occupied in the social scale range loses its strength. However, democracy does not negate the real existence of rich and poor, masters and servants; appealing to a level playing field regardless of the occupied range, ambiguities and contradictions regarding expressions of deference are generated.

In the same sense, Sennett (2003) posits that in modern societies shortage of positive expressions of respect for others, due to the weakening of certain rituals (in traditional societies, or pre-capitalist) favored expressions of mutual respect despite social inequalities. Respect involves a social relationship of reciprocity and requires an expressive effort by the actor to its recipient can feel indisputably, “[...] in social life, as in

art, reciprocity requires expressive work. Is necessary to achieve it, run it" (Sennett, 2003, p. 69).

In this work, we understand respect as a social practice of inter-subjective character in which people express mutual recognition (Sennett, 2003; Zubillaga, 2007; Aleu, 2012; Paulin, 2015). We emphasize that we consider core element, the reciprocal respect. Another aspect to consider is that the analysis of practices of respect is incapable of being separated from the social, cultural and historical conditions that organize legitimate ways of feeling, thinking and acting.

As we have pointed out, respect necessarily require social confirmation; in contemporary times, the problem of the relationship with the other is more difficult and more central, the individual would be condemned to a daily effort to build itself, which requires increasingly the look of others (Martuccelli, 2007). This mindset respect helps us understand the fact that when this lack, subjects experience the feeling of indifference, the nonexistent from the others (Aleo, 2012).

We understand that in our current historical time, the pursuit of respect is built on fragile foundations. In the case of young students, being in a transitional time from the adult point of view, the fact of being respected would be a symbolic fine of great value that feeds their identity heritage. Some conflicts or tensions arising from relationships between students can be understood from this perspective.

In view of this situation, we say that the construction of youth identity is crossed by various tensions that reveal the complexity of the relationships established with others, making them pricklier and at the same time more constituent.

Methodological Aspects

The research is based on a qualitative design (Gialdino, 2007). The main objective was to explore the perceptions that students attribute to respect and disrespect at school. Below are the results of a survey conducted in 2013 to students of a public high school, located on the peripheries of the city of Posadas, province of Misiones, Argentina. The criterion of selection of the school was the peripheral location relative to the center of the city and low socioeconomic status of students.

Under the assumption that low socio-economic sectors have less social respect (Sennett, 2003; Zubillaga, 2007; Bourgois, 2010), we wonder what their subjective perceptions are about feeling of respected or its flipside.

The educational establishment has 10 years old and has the particularity to be born with the construction of social housing neighborhoods that were created because of a compulsive migration of people living on the shores of the Parana River by the construction of the dam Yacyretá.

For the selection of students, a sampling no probabilistic intentional was conducted, seeking cover at least 50% of students in each course and maintain gender proportionality of the institution.

From an enrollment of 500 students, the sample was composed of 300 students from first to fifth year, 58.7% women (n = 176) and 41.3% males (n = 124)².

Regarding age, 55% of the students is between 13 and 15 years, 42% between 16 and 18 years, and only 2.8% have between 18 and 21 years.

As for the highest educational level attained by parents, we find that only 13.1% of mothers and 17.2% of fathers finished high school. Half of the mothers have full primary education. Half of the fathers have incomplete secondary. Only 4.5% of mothers have higher secondary studies, this percentage fathers is 8.2%.

These indicators realize that the school has a high percentage of students, nearly 80% of the total, which is the first generation with the possibility of finishing his secondary studies. In this regard, the compulsory secondary school represents a symbolic and legal traction that promotes access to social sectors that have historically been excluded from this level of education.

Young People write about Respect

In this section we will focus on the response of students around the open questions about respect and disrespect.

For the reconstruction of their perceptions, at first, the responses of students were polled (native categories) based on similarities and differences. In a second stage, more abstract categorizations (analytical categories) were developed to group the responses in cores sense that favor less dispersion of these.

As an example we cite the following: the category *scenarios and interactions that favor the feeling of disrespect* was built based on the responses of young people mentioned not to feel respected at school or in the neighborhood, and even in company of peers, family or adults from the school. Therefore we appealed to build a more abstract category that might contain the different statements of students, understanding that alluded to a common core: scenarios and interactions that impede the feeling of respect.

We also note that the categories constructed indicate only one way to organize the collected material, but does not respond to an exhaustive classification. As Madriaza & Garcia (2006, p. 250) say: “[...] many events are difficult to place [...] and tend to fall significantly in more than one category simultaneously or just tend to be the limit of some, taking characteristics of another”.

In the following table (Table 1), present a classification of practices that involve students disrespectful.

Table 1 – I Feel Lack Respect When...

Analytical category	Native categories	General porcentajes
Disparagement practices	They insult me They yell at me They ignores me They annoy me They tease me They discriminate me They mistreat me They humiliate me	69%
Scenarios and interactions that favor the feeling of disrespect	The school The neighborhood Home Being with people who do not want me Being with peers Being with teachers	7,2%
Practices of mutual thoughtlessness	I do not consider the other Annoying to others I do not respect	5,6%
Others		5,4%
Show any sign of weakness	Do something wrong I write because they say my handwriting is ugly I get bad scores I read incorrectly in front of others I play football	5%
Feeling judged or criticized	They talk bad about me They judge me They do not understand me, my thinking is different They don't let me be myself	5%
Physical assaults	They physically assault me They hit me	1,8%
Tautological³		1%
Total		100%

Source: Self-production.

As we can seeing in Table 1, the largest number of responses (69%) about what students consider as disrespect focuses on the category labeled *Disparagement practices*. Here we have gathered responses such as insults, shouts, the feeling ignored, unmolested and derision, discrimination, abuse and humiliation. The survey results are consistent with several investigations (Mutchinick, 2013; Observatorio Argentino de Violencias en las Escuelas, 2010; 2013) indicating that young people identify as violent those practices known as incivilities (taunts, humiliations) or harassment between peers; these represent for students undesired treatment which are not indifferent for them, but on the con-

trary, are experiences that degrade and erode the relationships which are built daily at school. We believe with Miguez (2009) that we are in a historical and social time of less tolerance to certain practices; those practices were considered before as natural and now contravene what the interpersonal relationships should be.

In second place, the category: *scenarios and interactions that favor the feeling of disrespect* (7.2%) groups those answers which relate disrespect to be in school, the neighborhood or the house, or near certain people (colleagues, family or teachers) who, we believe, can be perceived as threatening.

In third place, students mentioned that they feel disrespected when they do not respect others, what we have termed as *Practices of mutual thoughtlessness* (5.6%), and realizes the representation of how this involves reciprocity in a relationship. That is, students recognize that to demand respect have to provide it and if this does not happen, situations that hamper are generated.

In fourth place, students do not feel respected when exposed against others with errors or mistakes such as: move to give lesson, read in front of peers, playing bad football, etc. We have grouped these answers under the category: *Show any sign of weakness* (5%). We can link this result with proposals of several authors (Sennett, 2003; Martuccelli, 2007; Gaulejac, 2008) indicating how in our modern societies the positive development of self-image depends largely on the demonstration of self-reliance and individual success. Situations which expose individuals to public discredit scenarios are lived in shameful way: "In a world fascinated by the individual success, performance and excellence, there are strong tensions between the ideal images [...] and reality of what is experienced" (Gaulejac, 2008, p. 36).

In fifth instance, we have grouped in *Feeling judged or criticized* those answers that could be interpreted by students as offenses to its uniqueness as, for example, "judge my ideas and opinions", "do not let me be myself", "do not understand my way of thinking is different".

Finally, only 1.8% of students said physical attacks as a situation of disrespect. This result is concurrent with the previously mentioned investigations (Observatorio Argentino de Violencia en las Escuelas, 2009; 2015; Mutchinick, 2013) where it is evident that there would be a prior range of practices that show a lack of respect for students, before use of physical violence.

The responses of young people give us clues to think about certain threshold of sensitivity displayed in practices that endanger the feeling of respect for students. As Sennett (2003) points out, the lack of respect reveals a lack of recognition towards the other, a way of denying the presence of the other as human beings.

Below (Table 2) we describe the responses of young people around feel respected.

Table 2 – I feel respected when...

Analytical category	Native categories	General porcentajes
Practices of recognition	They hear me They speak well to me They treat me well They take me into account They do not bother or insult me They accepted how I am	55,10%
Scenarios and interactions that favor the feeling of respect	The school The neighborhood Home Being with friends or colleagues	13%
Practices of mutual consideration	Respect to be respected I consider the other We treat each other well I treat well so I get a good treatment	10%
Ability to do something right	When I play football because I play well when I sing I study because I'm smart Drawing because they said I'm an artist	5,6%
Tautological		5%
Winning respect for imposition	They fear me I hit others because they are disrespectful They all obey me I humiliated and faced others Win a fight Scream	4,3%
Others		3,9%
Being a good Samaritan	Help others I help the elderly	1,7%
Reaching consensus	We agree We think alike	1,4%
Total		100%

Source: Self-production.

The 55.10% of student responses focused on the category labeled as *Practices of recognition*, among which the well treated, taken into account, not to be disturbed and streamed feel is accepted.

These responses could be expressing demands for equal treatment seeking by young people today; there would be a constant request for individualized consideration of their own existence. Where the school was formerly defined as a space of transmission of knowledge, it is now a place where the expectations forms of treatment gain great relevance.

In second place, 13% of students said he was respected when in the company of certain people (like classmates, friends and teachers)

or in certain places, such as home, school and neighborhood. In this thematic nucleus we have called: *Scenarios and interactions that favor the feeling of respect*.

In third place, we have combined those responses that emphasize reciprocity in the treatment of respect in the category of *Practices of mutual consideration* (10%). Students indicated that respect first had to be a practice that arose from them to demand it from the other, for example: “one has to treat well the other to respect you” or “I interact with people in a good way to receive the same treatment”.

The 5.3% of students mentioned feeling respected when they do something right, for example, “play football”, “draw” or “study, because I’m smart”, we grouped these responses with the category: *Ability to do something right*. For Sennett (2003), one of the sources of respect in modernity is related to individual development of skills and abilities. While our societies appreciate talent and this becomes a matter of self-respect, not necessarily favor exchanges of mutual respect. Often the development of a personal skill can invite indifference to others, as well as the invidious comparison (Sennett, 2003). Our contemporary societies are characterized by promoting feelings of envy and jealousy, promoting the false message that nothing prevents us to become what we want to be.

In sixth place, 4.3% of students feel respected when said “they fear me”, “when I hit others”, “when I humbled others”, among other examples, we grouped these answers under the label: *Winning respect for imposition*. The low frequency of this type of responses, it is evidence that this method of obtaining respect is not ideal for young people. This source of respect is a unilateral position against the other, which would question the reciprocal nature of it.

In penultimate place, under the banner *being a good Samaritan* (1.7%), we linked the answers which the feel of respect is related to provide help to others.

Finally, they related with respect *Reaching consensus* (1.4%), ie, with the possibility to agree. This response makes visible the low number of students who consensus as a source of respect.

The results show descriptively perceptions of young people about practices that are vehicles of respect or otherwise. Students are sensitive to how they addressed the word, if they are listening or not, the ways in which they are shown importance. On the opposite side, insult, teasing, abuse, humiliation, feeling ignored is for them a sign of disrespect.

Conclusions: respect navigates between recognition and contempt

The survey results tell us about the centrality acquire *Practices of recognition* and *Disparagement practices* in expressions that are vehicles of the feeling of respect or otherwise. Recognition and contempt appear as two sides of the same coin, set out an “emotional bond” (Aleu, 2012,

p. 3) which expresses the importance of treatment or social touch. Students demand, mainly that *they are treated well*, his statements express a constant request for individualized consideration of their own existence, *listen to me, speak well to me, do not insult me, don't ignore me, having me in mind*, etc.

In both responses, more than half of young people focused attention on those practices that highlight the reassertion of himself in the eyes of others or, on the contrary, those situations involving occupy a place of inferiority to others. Paraphrasing Kaplan (2009), we say that the feel of respected or feel treated with disrespect reveals a contradictory social dynamics of attribution of value-negative value from which the subjects construct images and self-images and generate unconsciously, a *symbolic calculus* about its potential and limitations.

We believe that the quest to be validated socially is presented as a primary need that allows young people to get a place in their community of belonging, especially in societies where they have “bad reputation” because they belong to the poorest strata of society and also for being a youth / adolescents where the process of identity development becomes more cogency.

Seeking recognition not only occurs in the emotional and social level, but involves a profound aspiration is to want to be by yourself without being subject, as far as possible, the desire of the other or the mechanisms of reproduction social (Gaulejac, 2008, p. 32).

Also, the responses we have grouped as *scenarios and interactions that favor the feeling of respect* and *mutual thoughtlessness or consideration*; realize the relational character that acquires the feeling of respect, the central point is on the ways in which we feel to others and how others make us feel. As Sennett (2003, p. 263) says, “you cannot receive respect by simply ordaining”, but part of it is an intersubjectivity negotiation that compromises the individual character and social structure.

Following the developments of Martuccelli (2007), social confirmation of the subject passes through the respect that is his due, analysis of demands respect helps us understand contemporary modes of sociability. We share the assumption of Paulin (2015) when he postulates that, in the areas of youth sociability, specific conflicts unfold in the dispute for recognition as part of the trials and challenges that society imposes on young people.

We believe that interplays between forms of accepting the other – expressed through mutual respect or forms of exclusion and rejection – which are manifested by the lack of respect – is an area of symbolic dispute for the construction of youth identities, where emotions become relevant.

Respect as a emotional bond becomes a mobile and dynamic attribute that is part of the relations established with others.

We consider respect as a category that requires a reconstruction of the meaning that actors give to situated practices; we understand that this study represents a photograph of situation; their functionality lies in the possibility of obtaining a panoramic pointing where young people focus their awareness on this subject.

This work aims to contribute to future researches that address the overlaps between respect, emotions and ways of social intercourse.

As Vidal (2003) points out, respect is a vague concept that in societies like ours deeply individualized, surf the tension between the proclamations of equality of modern democracies and ruptures of the old forms of social bonding.

In view of this scenario, the school faces a daunting task: how to promote relations of mutual respect, in a social background that promotes individualism and where the dominant paradigm consists of success and fear of dependence.

Moreover, in what ways the ties of mutual respect are promoted in the context of reconfiguration of interpersonal links, where uncertainty and ambiguity about how they should be expressive exchanges between individual are a commonplace.

The demands of respect become essential in the construction of personal identity and the establishment of a positive relationship of the individual with himself. We opt for a school that can reflect on the importance of these processes, promoting greater ties of equality and recognition among its different actors.

Translated from Spanish by Sabrina Ichazu

Received in February 26, 2016

Approved in August 09, 2016

Notes

- 1 In these regard countries such as Uruguay, Chile and Brazil, in recent years; they have enacted laws governing the obligatorily of the middle level. (For more information, see Ruiz, M. C., Schoo, S. (2014).
- 2 The structure of the Argentine educational system comprises four (4) – the levels Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education and Education Superior –. The National Education Act establishes the obligation of the three (3) first levels. Regarding Secondary Education, Article 29 provides that “is mandatory and is a pedagogical and organizational unit for / as teenagers and young adults who have completed primary education level”. In the province of Misiones, the secondary level has a duration of 5 years. Students are expected to enter the middle level 13 and completed that section at 17 or 18 years. However, it is usual to have a significant number of students exceeds the average ages. For more information, see: <http://www.me.gov.ar/doc_pdf/ley_de_educ_nac.pdf>.
- 3 With the category of *tautological*, we refer to those answers that included the word ‘respect’ in the same response, for example: “I feel that I lack respect for not respecting me”.

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Verónica Soledad Silva has a degree in Psychology from the National University of Córdoba (UNC). Doctoral Fellow of the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET). PhD in Educational Sciences from the Faculty of Humanities and Education Sciences of the National University of La Plata. Member of the Program Social Transformations, Subjectivity and Educational Processes, Institute of Research in Educational Sciences (IICE), Faculty of Philosophy and Languages, University of Buenos Aires. Professor of Sociology Theories, Department of Education Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy and Languages, University of Buenos Aires.
E-mail: veronica.silva087@gmail.com