New ways of teaching in the face of an old problem; the education of young people at risk of exclusion

Abraham Bernárdez-Gómez (iD)
Department of Didactics, School Organization and Research Methods, University of Vigo, Pontevedra, Spain
Eva María González-Barea (iD) **and María Jesús Rodríguez-Entrena** (iD)
Department of Didactics and School Organization, University of Murcia, Murcia, Spain
entrena@um.es

Teachers are students' first contact in the classroom and the ones with whom they experience their relationships most intensely after those with their own classmates. Relationships with teachers and their actions in the classroom are of great relevance in how students develop their careers. Young people at risk of exclusion, which has been recurring in recent years, is an important matter. The aim with the research reported on here was to explore the life events and critical events that make it possible to describe the educational trajectory of young people at risk of exclusion who have dropped out of education and subsequently re-entered it. The aim was to investigate and characterise teacher-related events. We used a biographical-narrative approach by elaborating on the educational trajectories of young people at risk through the reconstruction of their life stories. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to collect data. The main results indicate that the teachers' relationship with their students and the teaching methodology differ considerably in the different stages of their trajectory. Teachers in the reinstatement stage are more understanding of the different situations of students and are more supportive, leading to more positive events than in previous stages.

Keywords: educational trajectories; relational climate; students at risk; teaching methodology

Introduction

Some problems in education are as old as school itself. The extensive research on education-related problems has shown that some problems have transformed over time as society changed. This is the case of the problem addressed in this text, namely the school dropout of vulnerable subjects or the so-called students at risk (Bernárdez-Gómez, González Barea & Rodríguez Entrena, 2021; Thureau, 2018; Vandekinderen, Roets, Van Keer & Roose, 2018) and how these students return to their studies (Cuconato, Majdzinska, Walther & Warth, 2016; Tomaszewska-Pękała, Marchlik & Wrona, 2017). Previous research highlight the social relevance of addressing issues such as those discussed here (Bernárdez Gómez, 2022). One consequence is the limitation placed on future career and employment opportunities. School dropouts often have fewer employment options later in life. A more serious consequence is the limitation that they encounter in their development, making it difficult for them to fully exercise their other rights.

The text that follows is a presentation of results related to the figure of the teacher and the methodology. It is part of a broader research project investigating what factors favour, or do not, the engagement in school of young people who leave and return to their studies. As such, the objective of the research was to explore the life events and critical events that allow describing the educational trajectory of young people at risk of exclusion who moved away from education and were reincorporated later.

In this sense, phenomena that are likely to spread and cause a break in student engagement are relevant. Strategies are needed to improve the engagement of students who are in a vulnerable situation (Kim & Kim, 2023). One of the ways in which this can be done is by studying the different factors within schools that cause student entry and exit (Portela-Pruaño, Rodríguez-Entrena, Torres-Soto & Nieto-Cano, 2022). In this way, differentiated environments can be created (Luo, Zhang, Yang & Huang, 2023) that enhance aspects such as student well-being, especially for students with circumstances such as those discussed in this research.

The study of educational trajectories is based on the study of people's life courses (Hutchison, 2019). This is a theory that has been widely studied in the field of social sciences and has, over time, become relevant to research of this kind (Augschöll Blasbichler & Vogt, 2020; Christodoulou, Bousia & Kiprianos, 2018; Portela Pruaño, Nieto Cano & Torres Soto, 2019). The paradigm on which the life course theory (LCT) is developed has a multifactorial character, as does the problem of school dropout. In fact, the different factors that we find at the point of the previous research are coincidental (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019). Thus, through the LCT, events that significantly affect the trajectories of students are presented. These events are the factors found in studies by authors such as Bernárdez Gómez and González Barea (2022), Gase, DeFosset, Perry and Kuo (2016) or Salvà-Mut, Oliver-Trobat and Comas-Forgas (2014) who refer to different areas of proximity to the individual: micro-, meso- and macrosocial. In turn, it should be noted that the different events that occur manifest different intensities. On the one hand, life events present throughout the trajectory, but without special meaning for the subjects and, on the other hand, critical events that are strong enough to generate transitions in trajectories that can cause a change in their direction.

In a South African case, authors point to it as a relevant issue since life-oriented curricula are proposed (Weybright, Caldwell, Xie, Wegner & Smith, 2017). This type of guidance is proposed as a solution to situations that affect the trajectory of students and their engagement, such as school dropout. Anderson (2020) points out that young people's attitudes towards the different factors they face are key in the development of their trajectory. Similarly, Mokoena and Van Breda (2021) indicate that the narrative experience that these students offer is conditioned by the influence that students have. Therefore, the importance of teachers in the students' trajectory is highlighted.

Theoretical Framework
The different events that occur in the trajectories of an individual substantially affect the engagement that they present (Crosnoe & Benner, 2016). One of the multiple definitions of the construct of engagement is the connection that students have with their studies and the intensity with which they dedicate themselves to the educational task (Zabalza Beraza & Zabalza Cerdeiriña, 2022). In our case, when different events begin to weaken the students' engagement, a process of disengagement begins (Yusof, Oei & Ang, 2018). The situation can be rectified when the students regain a sense of engagement with their education. Following a period of disengagement, the students resume their education, completing the unfinished tasks from a previous stage (Bernárdez Gómez & Portela Pruaño, 2023; Portela Pruaño et al., 2019). Here, we are referring to the situation in which students begin progressive withdrawal from the educational experience offered by the educational centre (Gebel & Heineck, 2019; Weybright et al., 2017). Thus, in the following pages, we show the different data extracted from the research process that indicate what type of engagement is most prevalent in the trajectories of students who drop out. We also show the stages in which these students present greater events that produce positive and negative engagement. The events causing this quality of engagement, positive or negative, including the relationships that students establish with teachers and how they develop the curriculum in the teaching-learning process are also presented.

The relationships between students and their teacher have a considerable influence on the engagement of students. This is due to the external reinforcement and support that the positive relationship with their teacher implies for them, leading to different constituent conditions of friendly and hospitable atmospheres where students feel safe and welcomed (Mokoena & Van Breda, 2021). This acquires greater consideration when it comes to students who reject school or who have a low level of engagement and have begun a process that would result in them leaving their education. In addition, a good relationship with teachers will allow them to feel involved in the construction of their education. A relational climate that is not conducive to students feeling that they belong in school can be a direct problem in the teaching-learning process and in the different dynamics that take place in the educational institution. Thus, the importance of relationships must be recognised, both in and outside the classroom, as they facilitate the feeling of belonging, enabling their inclusion to be effective, and strengthening a positive feeling towards their peers and teachers.

Students regard the curriculum and the teaching-learning process as relevant when they present life and reality. It is important for them to feel that what they are taught is meaningful and connected to their reality and that what they learn is useful (Anderson, 2020; Fielding, 2012; Mireles-Rios, Rios & Reyes, 2020). This realisation serves as origin and focus that question the curricular designs of the ordinary educational system done in the absence of students. A good example of this is when, with this problem, "the ground is being sown for some to hang up, particularly those who, due to their social, cultural, economic circumstances, etc. are further away from the 'culture' transmitted by the school" (Bernárdez Gómez, 2022:59). Consequently, Gase et al. (2016) highlight the need to transform educational practice by considering what students can learn at any time in their lives (before and after school) in addition to the time they spend at school.

Methodology
Research Objectives
The general objective with this research was to explore life events and critical events that allow describing the educational trajectory of young people at risk of exclusion who had moved away from education and were subsequently reincorporated.

The following specific objectives made it possible to achieve the general objective:
- To identify the different events that appear in the trajectories of students who have returned to their training process after a period of dropout.
- To establish what relationships exist between student engagement and different events related to schools and teachers.

Study Design
Taking the stated objectives and previous research regarding this problem into account, our research was developed in an eminently qualitative way. The design was biographical-narrative in nature. Through this methodological design we were able to establish the different events that are present in the trajectories of the students (Brandenburg, 2021) with the intention of gathering data about and understanding the different relationships that have

developed during their lives (Rodríguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020). Through this methodology we tried to give meaning and construct meaning to isolated facts that are evoked in the individual (Portela Pruaño et al., 2019). This, inherently, involved a reflective and introspection process at the behest of a person that contrasts the different events in the life of another individual or an aspect of it.

Sample

The sample was selected unintentionally and non-probabilistically based on the following: (a) they had to have gone through a situation of separation from school, (b) were currently undergoing some measure of reintegration into the education system; (c) a suitable sample size. This last criterium was the most relevant, since twice as many subjects were selected as those recommended by Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández and Baptista (2018) for these studies – from three to five subjects. The sample eventually included a total of 100 subjects from different training studies who considered reintegration programmes or measures: basic vocational training, professional training programmes and access tests to other studies.

These types of training courses are among those in the European Union between the 12th grade and higher education. These studies are oriented to develop competencies in a specific professional qualification for which higher studies are not necessary and which serve as a way of reintegrating students who have dropped out previously, back into the educational system. These training actions are focused on developing competencies that allow students to enter the labour market or to resume their studies.

This type of reintegration programme is characterised by the fact that they are dedicated to "students at risk of educational exclusion and/or who present personal or schooling characteristics that negatively value the school frame-work" (Bernárdez-Gómez et al., 2021:257). In this way, one of the requirements of the candidates, who have gone through a situation of distance and reincorporation into school is guaranteed.

Data Collection

In-depth semi-structured interviews were employed as data collection technique to obtain the subjects' life stories. It is agreed that this technique is ideal to develop biographical-narrative research. This tool allows the researcher the necessary immersion in the problem under study and sufficient flexibility to develop the interview according to the different needs that emerge as it is carried out (Deterding & Waters, 2021). The interview was validated using the method of individual aggregates (Traverso Macías, 2019) by submitting an initial draft to and receiving the observations made by experts in the research area.

The interview was structured in three different sections. The first section contains a series of initial questions to verify that the interviewee meets the necessary criteria and to establish the personal and socioeconomic context of the interviewee. The second section contains a key set of questions dedicated to investigating each of the stages in the student's career: the stage prior to leaving school, the stage in which the student was away from school and the stage of reincorporation. Finally, a set of questions dedicated to delving into any aspect that was not sufficiently clear and to assess the trajectory lived, as well as its perspectives.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected were analysed using two complementary techniques, namely content analysis (Friese, 2021) and the qualitative data analysis model of Barton and Lazarsfeld (1961). These two techniques were used sequentially with the support of ATLAS.ti analysis software. Firstly, the data analysis provided content analysis whereby: 1) the information was reduced and the data prepared for encoding; 2) it was structured by categorisation; and 3) relationships were drawn between the different categories. Secondly, the data analysis was complemented by the Barton and Lazarsfeld analysis model, which entails: 4) systematising relationships through code concurrences; 5) performing matrix formulations using semantic networks; and 6) performing an analysis to support the theory.

Glasser and Strauss (1967) indicate that an analysis from a simple level to a more complex one could be performed using Barton and Lazarsfeld's (1961) procedure. By using this procedure greater relevance was possible through the support of data analysis software such as ATLAS.ti (Friese, 2021), which facilitates the monitoring of the steps in the analysis procedure by having tools that help in each of the steps. This has been done in previous research (Bernárdez-Gómez et al., 2021) and shown below.

The categories used in the analysis included those related to the engagement perceived by the students, the type of event, the stage of their educational trajectory in which said event occurred and the type of event depending on the level of approach to the student. However, within those categories referring to events that may occur in their trajectory, only those referring to the educational institution and teachers were taken into account for this article. With respect to the categories used directly in this analysis, it should be noted that they refer to the engagement, stages and elements and dynamics of schools: curriculum and teaching-learning process (CEA, being the acronym in Spanish), relational climate of the centre (CRC), structural and organisational aspects (AEO), educational and centre leadership (LEC),

support and orientation actions (AAO) and relationship with the community and the family (RFC).

Ethics

This research was approved by the research ethics commission of the University of Murcia (Id: 3226/2021).

Results

The first results that we extracted after coding show that a high percentage of the emerged codes that relate to or mention the dynamics occurring in the school were directly linked to the CEA or the CRC, with a coefficient of concurrence (Co-oc) of 0.26 (30%) and a Co-oc of 0.32 (38%), respectively, on the total of elements of the centre (Table 1). This points us to the importance of these two elements in the trajectory of the students who have studied.

In addition, if we focus on the teacher (Table 1) we observe that there is a coefficient of concurrence to consider between the appointments assigned to teachers and those mentioned by CEA and CRC, with a Co-oc of 0.27 and 0.32, respectively. A significant coefficient is also observed with the citations that mention support and orientation actions, so it is also an element to consider within the trajectories of these students, as shown in Figure 1. Here, we find (illustratively) the strength of the relationship between the category referring to teachers and the subcategories that make up educational institutions. This figure shows the results of Table 1; the high correlation of events related to teachers with those related to the relational climate of the centre (CRC), those related to the curriculum and the teaching-learning process (CEA) and those related to support and guidance actions (AAO).
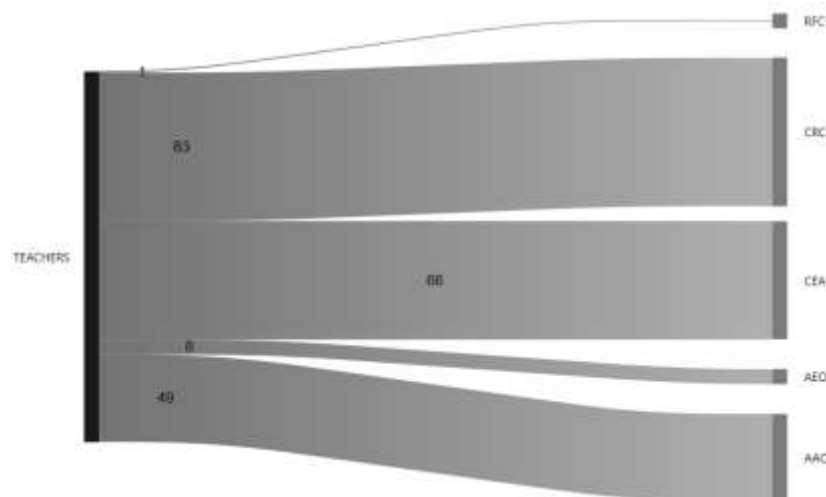

Figure 1 Sankey diagram of relation between school factors and teachers

Table 1 Coefficients of concurrence between elements and dynamics of institutions and categories of educational institutions and the teacher

	Educational institution		Teachers	
	N^i	Co-oc^i	N	Co-oc
Support and guidance actions (AAO)	53	0.16	49	0.23
Structural and organisational aspects (AEO)	41	0.14	8	0.04
Curriculum and teaching-learning process (CEA)	89	0.26	66	0.27
Relational climate of the centre (CRC)	112	0.32	83	0.32
Educational and centre leadership (LEC)	2	0.01	0	0.00
Relationship with the community and the family (RFC)	11	0.04	1	0.01

If we focus on the quality of engagement facilitated by each of the constituent elements of the centre (Table 2) we see how the same categories predominate again, both generating negative and positive events. Thus, CEA (Co-oc 0.12) and CRC (Co-oc 0.19) are the elements that reduce the engagement of students throughout their careers the most. If we focus on the events that benefit the engagement shown by the students, we

have those mentioned above that are also related to the teachers: AAO with a Co-oc of 0.15 and CRC and CEA both with a Co-oc of 0.16.

In turn, teachers and the educational institution both showed high coefficients in terms of engagement (Table 2). This indicates that both can be elements that play a fundamental role in the quality of student engagement. The different events, of a positive and negative nature, do not

occur indistinctly in all the stages that these subjects go through. In the stages before the subjects leave there is a high occurrence of events with a negative character – 0.23 in the primary education stage and 0.48 in the compulsory secondary education stage. On the other hand, in these stages, positive events do not exceed a

coefficient of 0.14. On the contrary, regarding the stage in which students return to their training, the results are diametrically opposed. Character events that produce an implication are reduced to 0.07 and events that benefit student engagement present a Co-oc of 0.40.

Table 2 Coefficients of concurrence between categories of institutions and engagement type

	Negative engagement		Positive engagement	
	N	Co-oc	*N*	Co-oc
Support and guidance actions (AAO)	29	0.06	58	0.15
Structural and organisational aspects (AEO)	24	0.05	21	0.05
Curriculum and teaching-learning process (CEA)	61	0.12	70	0.16
Relational climate of the centre (CRC)	96	0.19	74	0.16
Educational and centre leadership (LEC)	0	0.00	2	0.01
Relationship with the community and the family (RFC)	11	0.02	4	0.01
Teachers	83	0.15	115	0.26
Educational institution	171	0.29	151	0.28

Table 3 Coefficients of concurrence between categories of stages and engagement type

	Previous primary stage		Previous secondary stage		Reinstatement stage	
	N	Co-oc	*N*	Co-oc	*N*	Co-oc
Negative_engagement	123	0.23	248	0.48	43	0.07
Positive_engagement	86	0.18	86	0.14	165	0.40

If we differentiate the type of engagement produced in each of the stages (Table 3), it is clear which stage produces more positive or negative

engagement. In the stages prior to leaving, there is mainly negative engagement, whereas at the time of re-entry, the engagement is mainly positive.
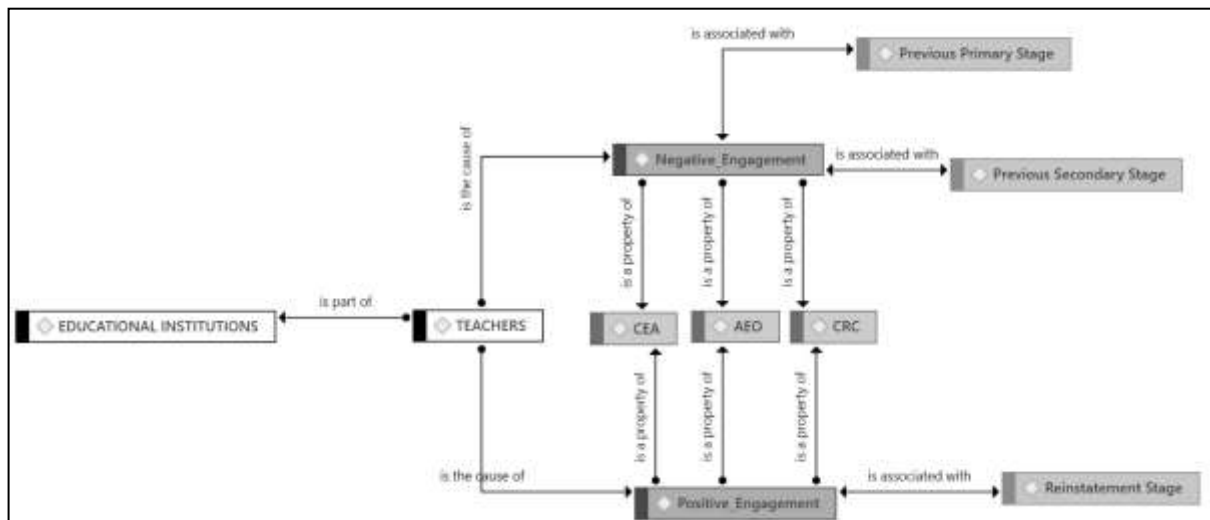

Figure 2 Semantic network of relationship between school factors, engagement and stages in the educational trajectory

In Figure 2, the different relationships between codes that emerged in the analysis have been reflected through a semantic network. Likewise, the kind of engagement they produce and the stage in which they occur have been highlighted. Thus, teachers, as part of the institutions in which students develop, are one of the main factors that influence the engagement of students. The teachers are the main agents that control important elements such as the relationship

with students, the support actions that are developed and the application of the curriculum through the teaching-learning process.

Teachers, Key Factors in Trajectories
The teacher is the first contact that the student has with the institutionalised educational world. Teachers are the means through which the daily classes are developed, and, in the case of primary school teachers, they are the reference adults with

whom students spend the most time after their parents. This figure is, therefore, relevant in the different stories narrated by the subjects. Moreover, other factors associated with the educational context that can affect the trajectories of students converge in this figure: some related to the relationship of students with teachers, others with aspects related to the teaching-learning process (Gase et al., 2016), with the educational leadership exercised in the centre, or with basic aspects of organisation. This shows the relevance of this figure in the different stories narrated by the subjects.

Regarding the relationship of teachers with their students, it is observed that students have a clear memory of what the different teachers meant to them throughout their journey in the educational institutions. As reported below, there are specific cases where the relationship was positive, depending on the educational stage:

> ... I have had many teachers who would sit down with you to talk, to try to help you. In high school, the change is huge. In primary school you will not forget them because there you will always love your teachers more than in high school. In high school you say: 'who has given me this grade, how about it? look at what s/he has told me, done to me....' In primary school things are easier. (D2:32)[ii]

The subjects pointed out the relevance of the educational institutions in their sense of belonging. Concretely, how teachers act is highly valued by them and is reflected in their trajectories. Positive memories involving teachers recurred in all the stories. Likewise, it is valued that they have contributed to improving the quality of engagement of the students themselves.

It is worth noting the differences in students' interactions with teachers in primary school and those in high school (Baskerville, 2021; Mireles-Rios et al., 2020). The subjects pointed out how teachers in primary school payed more attention to them, while the relationship with the latter was not to their liking. They mentioned that some teachers were skilful (Kafia, Ibrahimi & Ibrahimi, 2021; Laine, Ahtee & Näveri, 2020) in dealing with children, are able to manage the classroom, have relationships with students, and are sensitive and understanding about what happens to them. However, situations arise when some teachers fail to handle issues that they may regard not to be relevant:

> ... There is always someone that stands out. I remember the teacher in charge of physical education in the second year of the secondary school. We would bring bags to change clothes and, as a rule, whenever we would forget them, the teacher would say: 'Alas, now you are no longer doing physical education.'
> And I would always forget my bag, so would just sit in the classroom. I forgot my bag once and I said:

> 'I'm going to fetch it', so I left school at 09.10 am. and that was it. (D4:35)

Some teacher or organisational actions that are unintentional but may have a great impact, positive or negative, on students, and may be a reason for students to reject their educational process. This means that, in an environment that is no longer pleasant, one of the few activities that can help to improve the quality of engagement is withdrawn. Given this, it is worth considering how the different positions that the teacher adopts, however insignificant they may be, can have a subtle and transcendent effect on the students' trajectory that pushes them away resulting in them leaving school.

Considering the positive effect that the teacher may have, primary education teachers have special relevance, since the relationship that students maintain is prolonged over time, both in the hours at school and on the days they spend with their students when they act as tutors of the course.

> ... We used to have a tutor, a person who taught us many subjects in school. Her name was Esperanza, she was quite awful, she was not a bad person, but she was quite mean. She was an old lady, and she must have been used to old-style teaching, right? Very often she would tell you to shut up [...] and I remember that once she took me by one ear and badly hurt me and pulled me down. I ended up hating her quite a lot because of that. (D6:22)

This example shows that the teacher who was in front of the class for most of the day, did not take the students' trajectory into account as she did not have the necessary skills to manage incidents in the classroom properly. Considering this, one can understand that it is not a simple task – it would not be the first time that someone points to the ratios of the classrooms as a difficult school task. Some of the examples show that the students could no longer deal with the teachers' hostile ways and sought the help of specialist teachers before distancing themselves.

> ... I had one class and a teacher in particular that I loved. She was a pedagogue therapist her name was Toñi. I would go with her, because she knew I would be jumping up and down and doing things like that. When I did not like the class, I would play or when I did not like it when the teacher gave us a lot of homework or things like that, I would just leave and would go to the pedagogue therapist classroom. There, with her, I would calm down, write with her and study a little. (D8:28)

The quote above illustrates a possible solution to the distancing of students and their selective absenteeism when teachers do not encourage engagement. Specialist teachers (specialists in therapeutic pedagogy, hearing and language, guidance) can play an active role in increasing student engagement. The main reason for this is the understanding and individualisation that these teachers show towards students who come to them. One of the main actions demanded in current education is real attention to the diversity of the

students. Through events related to other factors, students expressed the need for friendly environments that make them forget how little they like to be there, and this could possibly help to reduce instances of withdrawal from school.

> *I remember with great affection one teacher in particular who was my tutor. He taught us the three key subjects, including maths and environmental studies, and I had one teacher in fifth and sixth grade, whose name, if I remember correctly, was PEPE. He is likely to have retired a few years ago, the truth is that he was a nice guy and a constant source of joy.* (D1:41)

There is a need for a different learning and teaching process, because not all students are the same.

An issue that attracted great attention during the interviews was students pointing out the great differences they observed between the centres they had attended in the previous stages and the centre[iii] where they were reincorporated into school. The latter had a very positive impact on their trajectories, because it differed from the traditional teaching they had experienced prior. Teaching at the reincorporation centre was practical and stimulated active learning accompanied by personal and professional development (Baskerville, 2021; Corchuelo Fernández, Aránzazu Cejudo Cortés, González-Faraco & Morón Marchena, 2016). In this new stage, the teacher is placed as a reference figure who is in constant contact with them and the students feel supported for the first time in their schooling.

> *The attitude of teachers, for example, changes a lot. It is not the same when the students are 15, 16 or 17 years old as when they are adults. I think I was the youngest student in my class, and I was 24 back then. If they gave you homework, they did not check it because you may not have had the time to do it ... There were people who were working, so if you had the time, you would do it; otherwise, you would not do it. However, they recommended doing it as a way to review what you would do in the classroom.* (D1:118)

The interviewees usually related that the teachers they found when they went back to school were key. They would highlight a range of factors that schools or centres should have when providing students a second chance. These include a welcoming classroom and centre climate, teachers who are sympathetic to the situation of their students, who have the necessary experience (Anderson, 2020; Prieto Toraño, 2015; Zabalza Beraza & Zabalza Cerdeiriña, 2022), and who are able to provide continued support to students in order to achieve success in their education. As already pointed out on several occasions, teachers have a fundamental role in students' education since they are the first contact and link between students and the skills they need to acquire.

> *... There is a teacher who is even very nice, he is kind, nice. He is quite pleasant in communicating with others, conveys confidence, security, serenity.*

> *It's not like these teachers who say, 'Come on, let's open the book on page xx, right?' [...] Of course we have a book, we have two books, actually, but, how can I explain it? The class is more fun, you know, it is not the typical class where you are bored, where you are working on the book all the time because that also is tiring. I see it as a lighter class, more fun, if someone tells a joke and the teacher starts laughing and tells a joke too, for sure.* (D3:75)

An issue often mentioned in their accounts refers to the relation between teachers and students in the classroom and how this affects the teaching-learning process. This is enhanced by the methods teachers employ to stimulate dialogue and participation. The students also often highlighted the special characteristics that these teachers show and how they are the architects who adapt to the peculiarities of each student, which would be unthinkable in the previous stage. It is commonly found in the literature when discussing the previous stage how there is a need for control in the classroom and supervision of student attendance that seems intended to prevent or avoid problems, such as absenteeism (Brandenburg, 2021; Salvà-Mut et al., 2014). And yet, this usually seems counterproductive with students with these characteristics.

> *... He was the only teacher who would not take into account the class absences, in fact, he would encourage me every day and would say things like: 'Come on, you are almost there'* (D6:82).
>
> *... For me it is good because this if different to high school. Here as we only have two teachers and it is no longer the case that they let us leave the school before the break, even if they let us leave a little earlier to go home or things like that, it is because of how they treat you, how you talk to them and how they talk to you.* (D8:59)

Focusing on attendance levels is not the only organisational measure that can be taken to facilitate the education of these students. Students have expressed how flexibility versus rigidity is much more effective when it comes to non-ordinary students (Fielding, 2012). Their life stories are not simple, as are many of the current situations in which they find themselves. It is, therefore, necessary for teachers to customise the educational process and provide solutions adapted to the specific problems of the students with whom they work. The same applies when talking about the curriculum offered. The returning students were more positive towards their current studies more positively compared to prior to their leaving school.

> *... You graduate in high school, study Baccalaureate, go to the university ... but when studying in general, you are not taught what you will need, but there are always subjects that are of no use or interest, and what do I want those for? I want to learn what will be useful for me tomorrow. [...] I should learn what is going to be useful for me, but they don't teach me other things or include subjects in the curriculum that are no use.* (D2:61)

Meaningful learning focused on students' areas of interest has been highlighted by many students and is widely reflected in the literature (Corchuelo Fernández et al., 2016; Prieto Toraño, 2015). The main question that students ask themselves is about the usefulness of what they should learn. It could be said that the curriculum of reincorporation training, being eminently practical, active and focused on developing skills that they understand to be useful, is tangible and has a purpose that students can perceive.

Discussion

Educational exclusion, school dropout, student engagement, relationships with teachers or their methodologies are problems that have, over the years, been covered in research (Anderson, 2020; Bernárdez Gómez, 2022; Tomaszewska-Pękała et al., 2017; Yusof et al., 2018). However, given the changes that occur in society, it is necessary for teachers to address these problems as new challenges they are faced with in their daily work.

In this sense, the research has underpinned the knowledge previously generated on educational trajectories (Mireles-Rios et al., 2020; Tomaszewska-Pękała et al., 2017). Students' educational trajectories cannot be considered linear. Along these trajectories, they are confronted with numerous events that cause interference in them, as pointed out by life course theory (Hutchison, 2019). Through the students' voices (Fielding, 2012), it was possible to verify how the consequences of these events were not only present when they happened (Weybright et al., 2017). A teacher's action at an early stage or a student's perception of a specific aspect of the teaching-learning process can be an element of conditioning the student and leaving its mark in his or her educational trajectory (Bernárdez-Gómez et al., 2021; Gottfried & Hutt, 2019; Zabalza Beraza & Zabalza Cerdeiriña, 2022).

In the South African context, we pointed out how it was deemed necessary to include life orientation in the curriculum (Weybright et al., 2017), to enable teachers to accompany students on their journey. The way in which teachers manage the different events that occur in and outside school determines the influence of such events on students (Anderson, 2020). The impact of such events or factors can be high (Mokoena & Van Breda, 2021) but can be minimised with the help of teachers.

Finally, a key factor among the actions highlighted and stressed by the group of young people at risk, is the change in methodology applied after their reincorporation and the significance of the learning. Students consistently mentioned the difference between the educational institution before they dropped out and the current one (Mokoena & Van Breda, 2021; Salvà-Mut et al., 2014). This lead us to ask why some teachers

acted in a certain way. In the case of educational centres where students are reincorporated, the learning process is specifically customised to the students' needs, which does not happen in previous stages (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019). This adaptation to the individual circumstances of each student should be established as an educational priority for the teacher and educational administration.

Conclusions, Limitations and Research Challenges

In conclusion, we briefly refer to the objectives set for the research, namely: (1) to identify the different events that appear in the trajectories of students who have returned to school process after a period of dropout; (2) to establish what relationships exist between student engagement and different events related to schools and teachers. Three key points emerged regarding these teachers and students.

Firstly, teachers have shown to be pivotal in helping students decide which trajectory to follow in their educational career. They are the main architects of students' experiences while at school (Baskerville, 2021). The teacher has always been significant in the development of students, which is highlighted in this research. In addition, the focus is on complementary issues in the teaching task, such as support to students (Portela Pruaño et al., 2019).

Secondly, the students once again expressed the need for support and guidance at educational institutions and, in particular, by their teachers. This was evident from what was highlighted in the narratives on the subjects in their reinstatement. Students considered teachers to be the agents from whom they expect such actions and attitudes towards them. Particularly relevant to this issue is the relational climate of the school: how teachers relate to students will define the acceptance or rejection of their education (Laine et al., 2020).

Limitations and Research Challenges

It is important to consider certain limitations of the research. It would have been beneficial to delve deeper into the data and conduct second interviews with the subjects to focus on specific aspects. However, although the methodological approach was developed in a rigorous manner, a larger sample size and greater saturation of data would have been beneficial.

Furthermore, it is necessary to identify ways to translate the positive aspects detected in the research into practice. Issues such as support and guidance for students or a curriculum more focused on tangible issues have proven to be effective in improving the engagement of students in general – not only for those at risk. Although strategies are being sought to mitigate school dropout, approaches to tackle this problem at its root have not yet been developed. To achieve this it would be

necessary to have plans in place to act before undesirable situations occur, such as formulating policies that favour the creation of friendly schools to accommodate students.

Authors' Contributions
ABG obtained funding for the research and developed the data collection and analysis. EMGB and MJRE developed the conceptual and empirical framework for the research. All the authors discussed the data, drafted and revised the manuscript.

Informed Consent
Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Notes
i. Refers to the total number of events marked with the category referenced by the number.
ii. Citations are referenced according to the categorisation provided by the analysis software. Thus, the number followed by the letter D refers to the document number within the data package and the one after the colon is the quotation number within that document. The dataset can be found at: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10507508
iii. Refers to the coefficient of co-occurrence of codes provided by the ATLAS.ti software (Friese, 2021), where two or more codes appear together in the same data context. More info: https://atlasti.com/research-hub/co-occurrence-analysis-with-atlas-ti
iv. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.
v. DATES: Received: 29 September 2022; Revised: 28 March 2024; Accepted: 6 August 2024; Published: 31 December 2024.

References
Anderson B 2020. Boys in "trouble": Contestations, contradictions and conflicting notions of Coloured high school masculinities. *South African Journal of Education*, 40(Suppl. 2):Art. #1758, 10 pages. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v40ns2a1758

Augschöll Blasbichler A & Vogt M 2020. Between and beyond. The course of a life in the realms of history of education, general pedagogy and comparative studies. Interview with Edwin Keiner. *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación*, 7(2):235–247. https://doi.org/10.14516/ete.380

Barton AH & Lazarsfeld PF 1961. Some functions of qualitative analysis in social research. In SM Lipset & NJ Smelser (eds). *Sociology, the progress of a decade: A collection of articles*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Baskerville D 2021. Truancy begins in class: Student perspectives of tenuous peer relationships. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 39(2):108–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2020.1788125

Bernárdez Gómez A 2022. *Vulnerabilidad, exclusión y trayectorias educativas de jóvenes en riesgo: Un marco para su comprensión* [Vulnerability, exclusion and educational trajectories of young people at risk: A framework for understanding]. Madrid, Spain: Dykinson, S.L. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2gz3s8d

Bernárdez Gómez A & González Barea EM 2022. Engagement in at-risk students trajectories: Perspective from the levels of approach to the student. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 15(2):97–107. Available at https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1377851.pdf. Accessed 8 October 2024.

Bernárdez-Gómez A, González Barea EM & Rodríguez Entrena MJ 2021. Educational reengagement programs and measures in the Region of Murcia. An approach to their understanding. *International Journal of Sociology of Education*, 10(3):246–270. https://doi.org/10.17583/rise.7516

Bernárdez Gómez A & Portela Pruaño A 2023. School dynamics and their role in the educational trajectories of at-risk students. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 12(1):493–505. https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.12.1.493

Brandenburg R 2021. I started letting the teachers in': What factors contribute to successful educational outcomes for disengaged young adults? *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 29(3):397–413. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2020.1747107

Christodoulou M, Bousia C & Kiprianos P 2018. The life – course formation of teachers' profession. How emotions affect VET teachers' social identity. *Revista de Sociología de la Educación (RASE)*, 11(2):280–296. https://doi.org/10.7203/rase.11.2.12300

Corchuelo Fernández C, Aránzazu Cejudo Cortés C, González-Faraco JC & Morón Marchena JA 2016. Al borde del precipicio: Las Escuelas de Segunda Oportunidad, promotoras de inserción social y educativa [On the edge of the precipice: Second Opportunity Schools, promoting social and educational integration]. *International Journal of Educational Research and Innovation*, 6:95–109. Available at https://upo.es/revistas/index.php/IJERI/article/view/1848/1560. Accessed 8 October 2024.

Crosnoe R & Benner AD 2016. Educational pathways. In MJ Shanahan, JT Mortimer & M Kirkpatrick Johnson (eds). *Handbook of the life course* (Vol. II). Cham, Switzerland: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20880-0_8

Cuconato M, Majdzinska K, Walther A & Warth A 2016. Student's decision-making strategies at transitions in education. In A Walther, M Parreira do Amaral, M Cuconato & R Dale (eds). *Governance of educational trajectories in Europe: Pathways, policy and practice*. London, England: Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474287203.ch-011

Deterding NM & Waters MC 2021. Flexible coding of in-depth interviews: A twenty-first-century approach. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 50(2):708–739. https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124118799377

Fielding M 2012. From student voice to democratic community: New beginnings, radical continuities. In BJ McMahon & JP Portelli (eds). *Student engagement in urban schools: Beyond neoliberal*

discourses. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Friese S 2021. *ATLAS.ti 9 user manual*. Berlin, Germany: ATLAS.ti scientific software development GmbH. Available at https://doc.atlasti.com/ManualWin.v9/ATLAS.ti_ManualWin.v9.pdf. Accessed 23 July 2021.

Gase LN, DeFosset A, Perry R & Kuo T 2016. Youths' perspectives on the reasons underlying school truancy and opportunities to improve school attendance. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(2):299–320. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2231

Gebel M & Heineck G 2019. Returns to education in the life course. In R Becker (ed). *Research handbook on the sociology of education*. Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788110426

Glasser BG & Strauss AL 1967. *The development of grounded theory*. Barcelona, Spain: Alden.

Gottfried MA & Hutt EL (eds.) 2019. *Absent from school: Understanding and addressing student absenteeism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Hernández-Sampieri R, Fernández C & Baptista P 2018. *Metodología de la investigación* [Research methodology] (6th ed). New York, NY: McGraw Hill Education.

Hutchison ED 2019. An update on the relevance of the life course perspective for social work. *Families in Society*, 100(4):351–366. https://doi.org/10.1177/1044389419873240

Kafia E, Ibrahimi S & Ibrahimi E 2021. Historical, contemporary and psychological viewpoints of teacher's leadership. *Open Journal for Educational Research*, 5(1):1–10. https://doi.org/10.32591/coas.ojer.0501.01001k

Kim H & Kim K 2023. North Korean refugee students' strategy of school engagement and its impact on identity in South Korea: "Aspiration towards an inter-Korean identity through a process of being one of them." *Multicultural Education Review*, 15(4):288–309. https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2024.2323700

Laine A, Ahtee M & Näveri L 2020. Impact of teacher's actions on emotional atmosphere in mathematics lessons in primary school. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 18(1):163–181. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10763-018-09948-x

Luo YF, Zhang S, Yang SC & Huang CL 2023. Students' judgments on different cyberbullying incidents: The relationship between moral philosophy and intention to engage. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 38(3):989–1009. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-022-00636-7

Mireles-Rios R, Rios VM & Reyes A 2020. Pushed out for missing school: The role of social disparities and school truancy in dropping out. *Education Sciences*, 10(4):108. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10040108

Mokoena P & Van Breda AD 2021. School dropout among female learners in rural Mpumalanga, South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 41(3):Art. #1842, 9 pages. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41n3a1842

Portela Pruaño A, Nieto Cano JM & Torres Soto A 2019. La reincorporación formativa de jóvenes que abandonan tempranamente la educación:

Relevancia de su trayectoria previa [Re-engagement in education and training of young people who leave education early: The importance of earlier prior trajectories]. *Revista Española de Pedagogía*, 77(272):103–121. https://doi.org/10.22550/REP77-1-2019-07

Portela-Pruaño A, Rodríguez-Entrena MJ, Torres-Soto A & Nieto-Cano JM 2022. Push and pull reasons underpinning vulnerable young people's decisions regarding re-engagement with education and training. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 143:106656. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2022.106656

Prieto Toraño B 2015. El camino desde la vulnerabilidad escolar hacia el desenganche educativo. El papel de las escuelas de segunda oportunidad en la estrategia contra el abandono educativo [The path from school vulnerability to early school dropout. The role of Second Chance Schools in the strategy against school leaving]. *Profesorado. Revista de Curriculum y Formación del Profesorado*, 19(3):110–125. Available at https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/567/56743410008.pdf. Accessed 13 September 2024.

Rodríguez-Dorans E & Jacobs P 2020. 'Making narrative portraits: A methodological approach to analysing qualitative data.' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 23(6):611–623. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1719609

Salvà-Mut F, Oliver-Trobat MF & Comas-Forgas R 2014. Abandono escolar y desvinculación de la escuela: Perspectiva del alumnado [High school dropout: The students' perspective]. *Magis. Revista Internacional de Investigación en Educación*, 6(13):129–142. https://doi.org/10.11144/javeriana.m6-13.aede

Thureau G 2018. La asociación española de escuelas de segunda oportunidad. La segunda oportunidad del sistema educativo [The Spanish Association of Second Chance Schools. The second chance of the education system]. *Educar(nos)*, 81:11–13.

Tomaszewska-Pękała H, Marchlik P & Wrona A 2017. *Finding inspiring practices on how to prevent ESL and school disengagement. Lessons from the educational trajectories of youth at risk from nine EU countries.* Warsaw, Poland: University of Warsaw. Available at https://medialibrary.uantwerpen.be/oldcontent/container23160/files/Deliverable%205_1_Publication%206_final_final_15_12_2017.pdf. Accessed 9 October 2024.

Traverso Macías D 2019. Diseño y validación de un cuestionario sobre la conciencia, regulación y comprensión de las emociones basado en la competencia lingüística [Design and validation of a questionnaire on the awareness, regulation and understanding of emotions based on linguistic competence]. Master's dissertation. Cádiz, Spain: Universidad de Cádiz. Available at https://rodin.uca.es/xmlui/handle/10498/21696. Accessed 23 June 2020.

Vandekinderen C, Roets G, Van Keer H & Roose R 2018. Tackling social inequality and exclusion in education: From human capital to capabilities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 22(1):1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1362044

Weybright EH, Caldwell LL, Xie HJ, Wegner L & Smith EA 2017. Predicting secondary school dropout among South African adolescents: A survival analysis approach. *South African Journal of Education*, 37(2):Art. # 1353, 11 pages. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v37n2a1353

Yusof N, Oei TPS & Ang RP 2018. Voices of adolescents on school engagement. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 27(1):23–32. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-017-0362-1

Zabalza Beraza MA & Zabalza Cerdeiriña MA 2022. *Coreografías didácticas en Educación Superior. Una metáfora del mundo de la danza* [Didactic choreographies in Higher Education. A metaphor for the world of dance]. Madrid, Spain: Narcea.