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## The Emotional Side of Teaching Conceptions: Exploring the Relationship between Conceptions of Teaching and Teacher Burnout, Well-Being, and Resilience

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*Abstract: This paper investigates the relationship between teachers' conceptions of teaching and several indicators of their emotional experience. With a sample of 200 teachers, the study identifies three dimensions of teaching conceptions, "student-centeredness," "educational purpose," and "projection into the future." Statistical analysis revealed that student-centeredness is negatively correlated with teachers' resilience and well-being. Additionally, we found that well-being and sense of personal accomplishment are significantly lower, and depersonalization significantly higher, when the educational purpose is psychosocial learning as opposed to academic learning. We also found some differences in conceptions of teaching among different countries and among different educational levels. These results may have useful implications for teacher education and for the management of educational reforms.*

**Keywords:** teaching conceptions, teacher emotions, burnout, well-being, resilience, student-centeredness

### Introduction

Over the last decade, teachers' conceptions of teaching have emerged as an important area of research. This has mainly been due to the hypothesis that these conceptions strongly influence teaching practice, rendering them critical in a context of worldwide educational reforms to promote more student-centered educational models (Alt, 2018; Chen, 2015; Masduki et al., 2019; Mirete et al., 2020; Muimongkol et al., 2021; Richter et al., 2021). In

this scenario, the relationship between teachers' and students' agency in the educational process has received most of the attention in the study of teachers' conceptions of teaching (Chen, 2015). In general, this dimension has been studied as a continuum from more teacher-centered to more student-centered conceptions of teaching. For example, Muimongkol et al. (2021) qualitatively identified three different conceptions of teaching science along this continuum, namely "explaining," "demonstrating," and "doing experiments," while Wu and Ding (2020) identified four conceptions in technology teachers: "transmitting," "apprenticing," "facilitating," and "changing conceptions." This continuum has also been addressed from a more quantitative approach, and some questionnaires to measure student-centeredness have been developed (e.g., Chan & Elliott, 2004; Richter et al., 2021; Trigwell & Prosser, 2004). However, although student-centeredness is the central dimension in the study of teaching conceptions, some authors have considered additional dimensions. For example, Wu and Ding (2020) added the dimension "teaching objectives and content," and Chen et al. (2021) considered a somewhat similar dimension, which they called "orientation." Within these dimensions, Wu and Ding (2020) identified the categories "knowledge," "technology skills," and "technology literacies," while Chen et al. (2021) defined the categories "skill-oriented," "community-oriented," and "identity-oriented." Other authors have also added dimensions related to how the teacher envisages or projects the student into the future. For instance, Jacobs et al. (2020) added the dimension "orientation to professional practice," whereas Chen (2015) added the dimension "developing life-long learners." In both cases, these dimensions are measured by means of questionnaires. Some authors have also used the different dimensions of teaching conceptions to identify teacher profiles. For instance, based on a combination of three dimensions – "student-centeredness," "appreciation of active learning," and "orientation to professional practice" – Jacobs et al. (2020) identified six different teacher profiles: "transmitters," "neo-transmitters," "organizers," "intermediates," "facilitators," and "conceptual change agents." From a more qualitative perspective, Wu and Ding (2020) also identified several different teacher profiles based on the combination of the dimensions "teaching methods" (student-centeredness) and "teaching objectives and content."

An additional complication of the study of teachers' conceptions is that they are assumed to be contextually and culturally dependent, that is, teaching conceptions may be qualitatively different in different communities (Brinkmann, 2015; Gao & Watkins, 2002). This may contribute to the emergence of different systems of teachers' conceptions when teachers in different countries or different educational levels are studied. Such differences have been found mainly in comparisons of Asian and Western countries (Gao & Watkins, 2002) and of different educational levels (Chen, 2015), although this type of research is scarce. In any case, in general – notwithstanding some contradictory results (e.g., Alt, 2018) – there is a certain consensus on the findings indicating that, at least with regard to the student-centeredness dimension, there is a relationship between teachers' conceptions and their educational practice (Masduki et al., 2019; Mirete et al., 2020; Richter et al., 2021).

However, in the context of educational reforms, teachers' emotional experience also play a crucial role (Darby, 2008; European Commission, 2021; Tikkanen et al., 2020). Teachers' emotional suffering has been related to teachers' attrition, absenteeism and health problems, and to a detrimental impact on teaching quality and students' learning, motivation and behavior (Frenzel, Daniels y Buric, 2021; Salvagioni et al., 2022; Madigan y Kim, 2021; Redín y Erro-Garcés, 2020). In this sense, although much emphasis has been placed on the role of teachers' conceptions in relation to their teaching practice, the relationship between these conceptions and their emotional experience has received less attention. Some of the few studies conducted on this subject suggest that student-centered conceptions are associated with a better emotional experience for the teacher. For example, Richter et al. (2021), with a

sample of teacher educators in Germany, found a positive correlation between student-centered conceptions and job satisfaction, and Zabihi and Khodabakhsh (2019), with a sample of higher education teachers of English as a second language in Iran, found that teacher burnout was negatively correlated with constructivist conceptions (student-centered) and positively correlated with traditional conceptions (teacher-centered). However, there are some contradictory findings too. With a sample of primary school pre-service teachers in Greece, Kokkinos and Stavropoulos (2016) found no correlation between teaching conceptions (student-centeredness) and burnout; additionally, these authors identified a profile of highly stressed pre-service teachers, one of the characteristics of which was holding a constructivist (student-centered) conception of teaching. Nevertheless, with few exceptions, although the research on teacher burnout and teacher resilience has studied other types of meanings, such as self-efficacy beliefs, attributional beliefs, identity, narratives, or appraisals (Bowles & Arnup, 2016; Clarà, 2017; Dinham et al., 2016; McCarthy et al., 2016; Wang & Hall, 2018), it has rarely considered teaching conceptions.

This paper aims to help fill this research gap by examining the relationship between teachers' conceptions of teaching and teachers' emotional experience in their job. Since teaching conceptions are assumed to be contextually and culturally dependent, we will study them at different educational levels (kindergarten, primary, and secondary education) and in different national contexts (Spain, Chile, Ecuador, Brazil, and Australia), endeavoring to provide an inclusive and general classification of teaching conceptions. To this end, our research objectives are as follows:

1. Identify qualitatively different teaching conceptions across different educational levels and national contexts.
2. Determine the relationship between teaching conceptions and teachers' emotional experience.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Data Collection**

The participants in this study were 200 kindergarten, primary (ISCED 1), and lower secondary (ISCED 2) teachers working at 115 schools in five different countries: Spain (mainly Catalonia), Chile (mainly the Viña del Mar and Santiago regions), Ecuador (mainly the Guayaquil region), Brazil (mainly the Goiás and Minas Gerais regions), and Australia (mainly the state of Queensland) (Table 1).

|                         |  | <i>n</i>         | %            |
|-------------------------|--|------------------|--------------|
| Country                 | Spain                                      | 68               | 34           |
|                         | Chile                                      | 38               | 19           |
|                         | Ecuador                                    | 35               | 17.5         |
|                         | Brazil                                     | 37               | 18.5         |
|                         | Australia                                  | 22               | 11           |
| Gender                  | Women                                      | 148              | 74           |
|                         | Men  | 52               | 26           |
| Education level         | Kindergarten                               | 13               | 6.5          |
|                         | Primary                                    | 60               | 30           |
|                         | Lower secondary                            | 87               | 43.5         |
|                         | Kindergarten and primary                   | 14               | 7            |
|                         | Primary and lower secondary                | 23               | 11.5         |
|                         | Kindergarten, primary, and lower secondary | 3                | 1.5          |
|                         |  | <b>Mean (SD)</b> | <b>Range</b> |
| Age (years)             |  | 39.94 (11.27)    | 20 - 71      |
| Work experience (years) |  | 14.40 (10.33)    | 0 - 43       |

**Table 1 - Participants**

Participants were recruited by means of non-probability quota sampling<sup>1</sup>. To this end, a number of schools were selected based on the combination of three characteristics: a) national context (Spain, Chile, Ecuador, Brazil, or Australia); b) educational level (kindergarten, primary, or lower secondary); and c) local context (very small, small, medium, large, or very large cities). The schools’ administrators were then contacted to ask for volunteer teachers to participate in the study. Once the volunteer participants had been recruited and their informed consent obtained, a researcher met personally with each participant in private to administer a series of questionnaires and conduct an interview, all under conditions of strict confidentiality. Thus, all participants in this study completed a questionnaire and an interview. The researcher who conducted the interview did not know the results of the questionnaires; the interview was video-taped and then transcribed verbatim. The data were collected in the years 2018 and 2019. This study is part of a broader research project (NARRES, ref.EDU2017-87406-P), where different aspects of teachers’ emotional experience were studied ([www.erims.udl.cat](http://www.erims.udl.cat)). Ethical approvals were obtained from the involved research institutions in each country.

**Instruments**

In this study, teachers’ emotional experience was operationalized through five constructs: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, well-being and resilience. This operationalization responds to two assumptions. First, the use of emotional constructs which are ecologically valid in the context of teaching. Thus, we avoid relying on discrete emotional labels (such as anger, guilt, or happiness) because research has shown that real-life emotional experience is blended, and the participants’ use of these labels present reliability problems (Giner-Sorolla, 2018; Scherer & Moors, 2019; Barrett & Bliss-

<sup>1</sup> That is, recruitment was based on pre-established sub-groups (national context, educational level, local context), but enrollment was then voluntary, non-probabilistic

Moreau, 2009). The second assumption is an understanding of emotional experience as involving not only one's subjective experience of her emotion, but also her orientation towards the situation of practice (Clarà, 2015, Lazarus, 1984). Accordingly, the constructs that operationalize teachers' emotional experience in this study: a) are widely-used in the context of teaching to assess emotional experience - especially the constructs of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment, which are commonly used to define burnout- and; b) most of them, such as depersonalization, personal accomplishment, (eudaimonic) well-being and resilience, involve the perception of the teacher's orientation towards students and professional situations (Maslach, 2003; Tennant et al., 2007; Vallés & Clarà, 2022).

Three different questionnaires were used to measure teachers' emotional experience: the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey (MBI-ES) (Maslach et al., 1997; Maslach & Jackson, 1981), the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS)© (NHS Health Scotland, University of Warwick and University of Edinburgh, 2008, all rights reserved) (Stewart-Brown et al., 2009), and the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) (Smith et al., 2008). The MBI-ES measures three constructs: Emotional Exhaustion, defined as a feeling of depleted emotional resources, of no longer being able to give anything else at a psychological level; Depersonalization, defined as holding negative attitudes and feelings about students, a callous or even dehumanized perception of them, and a view that they somehow deserve their troubles; and Personal Accomplishment, defined as one's evaluation of one's own professional accomplishments. The MBI-ES includes 22 items: 9 for Emotional Exhaustion (e.g., I feel emotionally drained from my work), 5 for Depersonalization (e.g., I don't really care what happens to some students), and 8 for Personal Accomplishment (e.g., I deal very effectively with the problems of my students). All items are measured on a 7-point Likert scale (from "never" to "every day"). The SWEMWBS measures well-being, especially eudaemonic well-being, defined as a type of happiness based on a sense of meaningfulness and purpose of life. It has 7 items (e.g., I've been feeling optimistic about the future) measured on a 5-point Likert scale (from "none of the time" to "all of the time"). The BRS measures resilience, defined as the ability to bounce back or recover from stress. It has 6 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"), three of them positively worded (e.g., I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times), and the other three negatively worded (e.g., I have a hard time making it through stressful events). The fit indices and internal consistency of the instruments were calculated according to the rationale proposed by Vilardich et al. (2017) and Flora (2020). On the one hand, as several items from the MBI-ES showed ceiling and floor effects and high kurtosis and skewness values, we used the ULS estimator in the CFA and calculated the nonlinear SEM reliability coefficient ( $\rho_{NL}$ ) (Green & Yang, 2009) to estimate internal consistency. On the other hand, the BRS and SWEMWBS items showed no ceiling or floor effects, and kurtosis and skewness were not too high (between -1.04 and 0.20 for the BRS, and -0.79 and 0.40 in the SWEMWBS), so we used the MLR estimator and calculated the omega coefficient ( $\omega$ ) to estimate internal consistency. Since Cronbach's alpha is a widely-used coefficient to estimate internal consistency, we also report this coefficient<sup>2</sup>, just for reference, but it must be noted that  $\alpha$  is problematic in non-tau equivalent scales, as it is the case here (Vilardich et al., 2017). Thus, we used a congeneric model for the MBI-ES and SWEMWBS, and a correlated error model for the BRS, since we found a high correlation between the positively worded items of this scale (1, 3, and 5). Table 2 summarizes the fit statistics and the internal consistency coefficients for the instruments as applied in our sample. The BRS and SWEMWBS showed

<sup>2</sup> For the MBI-ES constructs, we report ordinal  $\alpha$ , because of the ceiling and floor effects and the high kurtosis and skewness found in several items.

good internal consistency and good fit indices, except for a slightly high RMSEA and a significant  $X^2$ . The MBI-ES also showed good fit indices, with the exception of the SRMR; internal consistency was good for Emotional Exhaustion and Personal Accomplishment, but poor for Depersonalization ( $\rho_{NL}$ ). For the evaluation of indices and coefficients, we used the cut-off values established in TALIS 2018 (OECD, 2019, p. 204). We then estimated the factor scores (regression method) for subsequent analysis.

| Questionnaire | Test statistic | df  | p    | CFI  | TLI  | RMSEA | SRMR  | Factors | $\omega/\rho_{NL}$ | $\alpha$ |
|---------------|----------------|-----|------|------|------|-------|-------|---------|--------------------|----------|
| MBI-ES        | 319.545        | 206 | NA   | .981 | .979 | 0.053 | 0.080 | EE      | .839               | .896     |
|               |                |     |      |      |      |       |       | D       | .560               | .706     |
|               |                |     |      |      |      |       |       | PA      | .839               | .896     |
| BRS           | 17.101         | 7   | .017 | .962 | .918 | 0.085 | 0.040 | R       | .741               | .791     |
| SWEMWBS       | 33.892         | 14  | .002 | .952 | .928 | 0.084 | 0.044 | WB      | .853               | .852     |

**Table 2 - Fit statistics and internal consistency coefficients of instruments and factors**

Once a participant had completed the questionnaires, a semi-structured interview (Clarà et al., 2022) was administered. In this interview, after asking the participant about her professional background and career as a teacher, as well as about specific emotional situations in different areas of work, we asked two questions: “what does it mean to be a teacher?” and “what is the essence of a teacher’s work?” The inclusion of the interview data in the present study focuses on the analysis of the participants’ answers to these two questions. The analysis of the other parts of the interviews can be found in Clarà et al. (2023), Chávez et al., (2024), and Peel, Kelly, & Danaher, (2023).

### Analysis

From the interview data, we inductively generated a content analysis framework to identify the different conceptions of teaching held by the interviewed teachers. To do so, we adopted a combined clean slate and grounded theory approach to content analysis (Gerbic & Stacey, 2005): taking the teacher’s narrative as a unit of categorization, we approached the data from the literature-based dimension of student-centeredness in order to inductively generate categories for this dimension. Over the course of this process, two additional dimensions emerged from the data that were useful for distinguishing conceptions among teachers, namely, what they viewed as their educational purpose (educational purpose) and the extent to which they envisioned or projected their students into the future (projection into the future). We thus incorporated these dimensions into the framework and inductively generated categories for them, too. Once the analysis system was stable and had been detailed into an analysis protocol (available in Clarà et al., 2022b), three pairs of researchers coded all the data. Specifically, the two researchers in each pair coded the data independently and then compared their respective codifications. Once any errors had been corrected, the inter-rater reliability was calculated, resulting in a Cohen’s  $K$  of .929 for student-centeredness, .913 for educational purpose, and .980 for projection into the future. Discrepancies were then resolved by a third researcher, and the final codifications were used for the quantitative analysis.

For the quantitative analysis, we first assessed the normality assumptions of the continuous variables – Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (D), Personal Accomplishment (PA), Well-Being (WB), and Resilience (R); all had a normal distribution. The dimensions “Educational purpose” and “Projection into the future” were nominal variables, while the dimension “Student-centeredness” was ordinal. Accordingly, we

conducted the following statistical tests: a) Spearman correlation between “Student-centeredness” and the emotional variables; b) planned contrasts (ANOVA and Student’s *t*) between the “Educational purpose” categories and EE, D, PA, WB, and R; and c) Student’s *t* tests between “Projection into the future” categories and EE, D, PA, WB, and R.

Additionally, we explored whether there were differences in the distribution of conceptions of teaching among the teachers of our sample in terms of country and educational level. To this regard, we used the Median Test to explore differences in “Student-centeredness”, and the exact Fisher’s test to explore differences in “Educational purpose” and “Projection into the future”.

## Results

In this section, we will first present the categories of teaching conceptions that emerged in the content analysis. We will then report the statistical analysis of the relationship between these categories and teachers’ emotional experience and about the differences in the distribution of teaching conceptions among countries and educational levels in our sample.

### Content Analysis

The content analysis procedure resulted in the identification of three dimensions, each with several categories, as shown in Table 3.

| <b>Dimension</b>     | <b>Category</b>       | <b>Description</b>  | <b>Frequency (%)</b> |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---|----------------------|
| Student-centeredness | Transmitter           | The agency in the educational process is fully located in the teacher   | 92 (46%)             |
|                      | Guide                 | The agency is located in the child, but the path this agency must follow is specifically established by the teacher   | 40 (20%)             |
|                      | Facilitator           | The agency is located in the child, and the teacher establishes the conditions in which this agency must be developed, but without determining the specific path to be followed | 28 (14%)             |
|                      | Supporter             | The agency is located in the child, and the teacher supports her in whatever direction the child decides to take  | 40 (20%)             |
|                      | <i>Total</i>          |   | <i>200 (100%)</i>    |
| Educational purpose  | Academic learning     | Learning by students of disciplinary content  | 49 (24.5%)           |
|                      | Psychosocial learning | Learning by students of general social and emotional competences  | 53 (26.5%)           |
|                      | Student well-being    | Students’ well-being and happiness  | 21 (10.5%)           |
|                      | Relationship          | Strong and caring relationships involving the student   | 17 (8.5%)            |
|                      | Society               | A better society  | 21 (10.5%)           |
|                      | Unspecified           | The teacher did not express the educational purpose   | 39 (19.5%)           |
|                      | <i>Total</i>          |   | <i>200 (100%)</i>    |

| Dimension                  | Category | Description  | Frequency (%)     |
|----------------------------|----------|--|-------------------|
| Projection into the future | Present  | The student is considered only in the present  | 134 (67%)         |
|                            | Future   | The student is projected into her future, after her relationship, as a student, with the teacher | 66 (33%)          |
| <i>Total</i>               |          |  | <i>200 (100%)</i> |

**Table 3 - Dimensions and categories of teaching conceptions**

*Student-centeredness*

In this dimension, we identified a continuum of four conceptions, from more teacher-centered to more student-centered. At one end of the continuum, the conception we call “transmitter” places all the agency and responsibility for the educational process on the teacher’s side, considering the student a mere receiver of the teacher’s educational agency:

*“The essence is transmitting. To transmit knowledge and transmit values. In the end, that’s what we transmit, that these little people sitting in front of us will be the adults of tomorrow, for them to have a certain basic knowledge and be as autonomous as they can be, as emotionally capable of overcoming their personal rough patches as possible. I think that is what we transmit. Ultimately, it is about transmitting knowledge and values to the people of the future. We are creating the future, and sometimes we are not aware enough that we are creating the country of tomorrow.” (Teacher 44, Spain)*

What defines this “transmitter” conception is that the party carrying out the central actions in the educational process is always the teacher. For example, in the above excerpt, the central educational action is “transmitting,” an action performed by the teacher; the student’s agency (in this case, “be[ing] as autonomous as they can be”) appears only as a result, as the outcome of the educational process.

In contrast, in the second category of this continuum, a conception we call “guide,” the student is recognized as having the central agency in the educational process. However, in this conception, the student’s agency is closely and quite specifically directed by the teacher:

*“I think the teacher is like a guide, but not a guide who simply says, ‘Go here, go there, do this, do that,’ but rather one who accompanies you along the way. Like the word guide, the guide explains [things] to you when you go on a tour, they explain this, that, the other thing. I think that’s what the teacher is, a guide who doesn’t simply stand up and start teaching the class, but starts with the child so that he internalizes what he is being taught, so that the child not only knows a concept by heart but also understands it, and that guide is the teacher. That is the concept I have.” (Teacher 155, Ecuador)*

What is characteristic in this conception is that the student’s agency, which is the central agency in the educational process, consists of a very specific set of actions defined by the teacher. For example, in the above excerpt, the teacher refers to helping the child “internaliz[e] what he is being taught.” The central educational action here is to “internalize,” an action performed by the student, but *what* the student has to internalize is very specific and predefined content (“what he is being taught”), and he or she must do it in a very specific way (the child has to “understand” the concept, as opposed to simply memorizing it).

In the conception we call “facilitator,” the student again has the central agency in the educational process, and again the teacher gives direction to this agency; however, unlike the “guide,” the “facilitator” does not define the specific actions the student should take, but

rather only a framework, a context, a set of conditions, within which the student may develop her agency with a certain degree of flexibility:

*“The [act of] discovering is more important than the learning itself, than the content of the discovery. Sure, the content is defined for you by the department [of education] and the curriculum and all that... and we’ll get there, we will. But it’s important never to lose the passion. And if this passion is maintained because they’ve discovered that a snail has a spiral on its shell, that it is spiral shaped... well, that’s it! And another day, it will be that invertebrates have no bones. The content is the least of it. What matters is the passion you put into it. And kids are also a passion.” (Teacher 64, Spain)*

In the above example, the condition defined by the teacher is a “passion” for “discovering”; it does not matter what exactly the student does, as long as she does it with a “passion for discovering.” This is the central characteristic of the “facilitator,” the establishment of certain conditions (e.g., passion, respect, etc.) within which students must develop their own agency with flexibility.

Finally, in the conception we call “supporter,” the student directs her own agency, which is the center of the educational process. The role of the teacher here is to be at the student’s side and to provide her with support whenever needed:

*“Being a teacher means – to put it romantically – disappearing. Playing an increasingly less prominent role and letting the child take the lead. A teacher is someone who illuminates the path the child wants to travel from a distance. They are more than a provider, also, of many tools, of many options. [They are] the person who makes visible to the child the paths, the routes, the perspectives he or she can choose from.” (Teacher 145, Ecuador)*

Note that, in the metaphor used by this teacher, it is the child who chooses the path (“the path the child wants to travel”), and the teacher provides support for this choice, whatever it may be, by “illuminat[ing] the path.” This is the main characteristic of this conception: the teacher’s respect for the student’s choices, and the teacher’s availability, regardless of what those choices may be, to provide support when needed.

### ***Educational Purpose***

In this dimension, we identified five different conceptions that teachers held of the purpose of the educational process. We also added a sixth category, which we applied to those teachers who did not express any educational purpose. The conceptions we identified in this dimension were as follows: academic learning, psychosocial learning, student well-being, relationship, society, and unspecified.

Teachers with an “academic learning” conception consider the purpose of the educational process to be student learning within delimited fields of knowledge, often aligned with scientific disciplines:

*“That’s the essence, the gratification of seeing your student receiving that knowledge. And even if you’ve had to spend time working hard to do that, you have achieved a goal. You have managed to bring a bit of information to your student.” (Teacher 206, Brazil)*

*“It means to be making a difference. I’m a scientist. I want all little scientists. I want someone to get the Nobel Prize one day and say, “I was inspired to be a scientist because my teacher, [Teacher 217], told me I could do it. That’s what inspires me.” (Teacher 217, Australia)*

In contrast, even though they also consider disciplinary learning, teachers who hold the “psychosocial learning” conception pursue more general and integrative kinds of learning by students, especially related to learning about themselves and how to relate to others and to their lives:

*“For me, being a teacher means supporting children in their learning process. This learning isn’t a matter of accumulating content and concepts but rather, for me, is about learning in relation to life, to be able to face life with an emotional balance, securely, with the ability to be critical, with the ability to assess and choose for themselves, with autonomy... And for me, that’s what being a teacher means. Supporting and providing the basis for these children to be able to develop fully.” (Teacher 66, Spain)*

*“I always think about helping, about making my student grow as a person. Sometimes, I really just set the math aside and think about the shaping of this human being.” (Teacher 190, Brazil)*

A different conception, which we call “student well-being,” does not primarily seek students’ learning, but their happiness and well-being. In this conception, learning is sometimes seen as a way to provide this happiness or well-being to the student.

*“For me, working with boys and girls, um... I don’t know, um... I think that... you have to take a very, very, very global view, not just... beyond what they learn, that is, for them to come to school and be happy.” (Teacher 25, Spain)*

*“Training people, people with a first and last name, people who think, people who are capable of thinking, of questioning, people who are capable of not giving up on their goals, especially if they are for their own happiness or (personal) fulfillment.” (Teacher 78, Chile)*

The conception we call “relationship” likewise does not identify learning itself as the purpose of the educational process; in this case, however, the purpose is to establish strong relationships with the student that leave a mark, usually relationships of care and love, sometimes similar to family relationships:

*“...knowing that you are part of their life. And when they call you, when they accidentally call you ‘Mommy,’ it’s because they keep you in the same compartment. (...) In that same place where they keep their “mommy” and “daddy” files, they also have a file for [me]? It’s just... It’s amazing. When they call me “Mommy,” I say, ‘Yes, I am a mommy.’ You know? But then, to myself I think, ‘How cool is that, that they put me on the same level?’ It’s great! It’s great! (...) That’s when you say to yourself, ‘Self, I’m doing a good job,’ and it’s a real rush. It’s a rush! It’s like... it gives meaning to everything you’re doing.” (Teacher 35, Spain)*

Finally, teachers holding the conception we call “society” express that the purpose of the educational process is to positively contribute to society at large:

*“I see the role of the teacher as being to improve society, to improve it not as if we were super heroes, but to guide values and reflections toward a more complex and richer understanding, in human terms, of what it means, what it means to live in society.” (Teacher 93, Chile)*

*“Right now, for me, being a teacher means doing what I’ve wanted to do my whole life, contributing to a better society.” (Teacher 199, Brazil)*

*“We need to create the desire to be a lover of learning, inquisitive minds, all of those things so that, as a society, we can become better.” (Teacher 243, Australia)*

As some teachers did not express an educational purpose in their narratives, we added an additional category in this dimension, which we call “unspecified.”

### *Projection into the Future*

When analyzing the data, we realized that, for some teachers, the future of the children they were working with was a central issue, while for others, it was not an issue at all. The narratives of this latter group of teachers focused on the present time they were sharing with the children and did not attempt to project them into the future. Consequently, we distinguished two different conceptions based on this dimension: “future” and “present.” The following excerpts offer two examples of the “future” conception:

*“Being a teacher means giving the other person the chance to change. And people do change, because how many students have we taught who now have a profession, who are already working, who have a livelihood, are supporting a family? So, for me, being a teacher is an act of love [...]. It is a love that isn't just a gift to the other person; it is a love that comes back to you, too. It is a love that comes tripled, doubled, that student will know you for the rest of their life, and they'll say, 'Look, she was my teacher. She changed my life.' And some will even do the same thing you did – I currently have students who are studying humanities abroad.” (Teacher 210, Brazil)*

*“You get to make a difference in the future. That's not always— You don't always see the difference you make. Sometimes it is frustrating not getting to see the full impact of what you've done or even [...], specifically, the impact you're making. I think, basically, shaping the future for children is what this is. I ultimately got into teaching to make a difference and that's what I get to do.” (Teacher 229, Australia)*

In summary, the content analysis enabled the identification of several categories of teaching conceptions along three dimensions: student-centeredness, educational purpose, and projection into the future. In the next section, we will analyze how these different conceptions are related to teachers' emotional experience and how their distribution differs along countries and educational levels.

### **Quantitative Analysis**

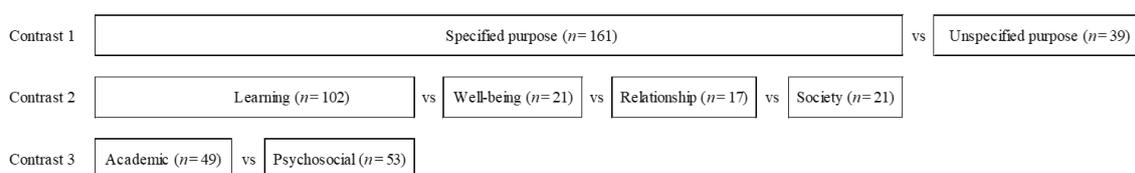
This section will report the results of the analysis of the relationship between each of the three dimensions of teaching conceptions identified through the content analysis and teachers' emotional experience, operationalized through the constructs of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, well-being, and resilience. We will consider each dimension of the teaching conceptions separately. Then, we will report the results about differences in the distribution of teaching conceptions among countries and educational levels.

#### *Student-centeredness*

Spearman's Rho analysis showed that student-centeredness was negatively correlated with resilience ( $r_s(198) = -.139; p = .050$ ) and well-being ( $r_s(198) = -.141; p = .046$ ). That means that the more student-centered the conception, the lower the resilience and the well-being. However, although significant, the size-effects of these correlations were small. We did not find any significant correlations between student-centeredness and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment.

**Educational Purpose**

In order to study the relationship between the conceptions of educational purpose and teachers’ emotional experience, we conducted planned contrasts<sup>3</sup> (Field, 2009). In relation to each of the emotional experience variables, we conducted three subsequent contrasts. On a first level, we contrasted conceptions with an “unspecified” purpose against those with a specified one. On a second level, we contrasted the specified conceptions in four groups: learning (including academic and psychosocial), well-being, relationship, and society. On a third level, we contrasted academic and psychosocial learning (Figure 1). This rationale is in line with our organization of the educational purpose categories along levels of generality, i.e., in a system of categories and subcategories. Thus, each contrast tests one generality level in the category system.



**Figure 1- Planned contrasts regarding educational purpose**

In contrast 1, the Student’s *t* tests failed to show any significant difference between the conceptions with and without a specified purpose in terms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, well-being, or resilience. Similarly, in contrast 2, ANOVA tests failed to show any significant difference between the educational purposes of learning, student well-being, relationship, and society in terms of teachers’ emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, teacher well-being, and resilience.

However, in contrast 3, significant differences were found between academic and psychosocial learning conceptions in terms of teachers’ personal accomplishment, well-being, and depersonalization. The Student’s *t* tests showed that the academic learning conception relates to significantly higher levels of well-being ( $t(100) = 2.64, p = .010, r = .255$ ), higher levels of personal accomplishment ( $t(100) = 2.61, p = .011, r = .252$ ), and lower levels of depersonalization ( $t(100) = -2.17, p = .033, r = .212$ ) than the psychosocial learning conception. No significant differences between academic and psychosocial learning conceptions were found regarding emotional exhaustion or resilience.

**Projection into the Future**

Student’s *t* tests failed to show any significant difference between those conceptions that projected the student into the future and those that did not in terms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, well-being, or resilience.

<sup>3</sup> Planned contrasts are adequate when the variance of outcome variables can be hypothetically broken down into component parts, so groups can be contrasted through mutually exclusive steps (so that the same group is only contrasted once). It is a more adequate alternative to post-hoc contrasts in this case because it minimizes the risk of Type II error, since significance levels must not be reduced.

*Conceptions of Teaching Among Teachers from Different Countries in our Sample*

The Median Test showed significant difference between countries regarding “Student-centeredness” ( $X^2(4) = 15,714$ ,  $p < .005$ ,  $V = .280$ ). Follow-up Bonferroni post-hoc tests showed that student-centeredness was significantly higher in Spain than in Chile ( $p < .010$ ): the median in Chile was 1 (Transmitter) while in Spain it was 2,5 (between Guide and Facilitator); the overall median for the five countries was 2 (Guide). No other contrasts between countries were found significant in the post-hoc tests in terms of student-centeredness. In addition, Fisher’s exact test failed to show any significant difference among countries regarding both “Educational purpose” and “Projection into the future.”

*Conceptions of Teaching Among Teachers Working in Different Educational Levels in our Sample*

To explore the distribution of the categories of conceptions of teaching among educational levels, we considered only those teachers exclusively working in one level –i.e., excluded teachers working simultaneously in two or three levels. Therefore, this analysis included 160 teachers. For “Educational purpose”, we conducted planned contrasts according to Figure 1. The Fisher’s test showed significant differences between educational levels regarding the types of educational purpose ( $X^2(6) = 21,587$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $V = .302$ ): In kindergarten we found significantly more purpose of “Well-being” ( $p < .050$ ) and less of “Learning” than in the other two levels; in primary education we found more purpose of Relationship ( $p < .05$ ) than in the other two levels; in secondary education, we found more purpose of “Society” ( $p < .05$ ) and less of “Relationship” ( $p < .050$ ) than in the other two levels. No significant differences were found regarding the types of learning purpose (academic vs psychosocial) nor regarding the expression of purpose among educational levels, and no differences were found either in terms of “Projection into the future” and “Student-centeredness.”

## **Discussion**

This study aimed to qualitatively distinguish between different conceptions of teaching among teachers working in different countries and at different educational levels, as well as to explore the relationship between these conceptions and teachers’ emotional experience. In this regard, one contribution of this paper is the identification of three different dimensions of teaching conceptions, thereby expanding the most widespread approach, which is strongly focused on only student-centeredness. In this sense, our research is aligned with other approaches such as those by Wu and Ding (2020), Jacobs et al. (2020), or Chen (2015), who, in addition to the student-centeredness dimension, consider other dimensions in order to offer a broader picture of teaching conceptions. In our study, in addition to student-centeredness, we identified the dimensions “educational purpose” and “projection into the future.” The “educational purpose” dimension was considered, for example, in the work of Wu and Ding (2020) and Chen et al. (2021) through their respective dimensions of “teaching objectives and content” and “orientation.” The “projection into the future” dimension was also somewhat considered in Chen (2015), through the dimension of “developing life-long learners,” as well as in Jacobs et al. (2020), through the dimension “orientation to professional practice,” although in both cases, these dimensions are in fact a mixture of the “educational purpose” and “projection into the future” dimensions identified here.

A second contribution of our study is the development of a set of categories, for each dimension, that can be reliably applied to teachers from kindergarten to lower secondary

education, working in different disciplinary areas and national contexts. This offers a broad and inclusive framework for the characterization of teachers' teaching conceptions. This is in line with the work of other authors, such as Jacobs et al. (2020), who, by means of a questionnaire, study teachers' conceptions in many different countries – although in a very restricted field and educational level (university professors of medicine). Compared to Jacobs et al. (2020), our study considers fewer countries, but a broader (and complementary) spectrum of educational levels and fields, and, unlike Jacobs et al. (2020), it uses an inductive qualitative approach to generate the categories. This type of endeavor may contribute greatly to current research on teaching conceptions, which tends to focus on a single disciplinary area and national-cultural context. This has resulted in a proliferation of different category systems, which are sometimes difficult to relate to each other. In this sense, advancing towards a more comprehensive and inclusive framework could significantly strengthen the field of teaching conceptions.

A third contribution of this study is the exploration of the relationships between teachers' conceptions of teaching and teacher's emotional experience, an approach that has rarely been used in the literature to date, but which could have important implications for the management of educational reforms (Gu & Li, 2013). We found that student-centeredness shows a small but significant negative correlation with resilience and well-being, and that the educational purpose of "academic learning" is associated with significantly higher well-being, higher personal accomplishment, and lower depersonalization than the educational purpose "psychosocial learning," with small to medium size-effects. In terms of student-centeredness, our results are at odds with the findings by Richter et al. (2020) and Zabihi and Khodabakhsh (2019), but are more consistent with the results obtained by Kokkinos and Stavropoulos (2016). Both Richter et al. (2021) and Zabihi and Khodabakhsh (2019) studied a sample of university teachers, which may at least partially explain the differences between their studies and ours, which is focused on kindergarten, primary, and lower secondary education. Moreover, Richter et al. (2021) studied a sample of teacher educators, which may exhibit idiosyncratic characteristics regarding the relationship between student-centeredness and emotional experience, since teacher educators are, in part, the people who must encourage and prepare student teachers to implement student-centered approaches in lower educational levels. However, for these future teachers, holding a student-centered conception may be emotionally challenging or, at least, not emotionally advantageous, as the results obtained by Kokkinos and Stavropoulos (2016) suggest. Our results point in a similar direction: we found that student-centeredness is negatively correlated with resilience and well-being. One possible explanation for this result could be that holding a student-centered conception could be related to feeling less control of the situation, since the main agency is located in the student. Consequently, the teacher may feel less capable of changing or overcoming unwanted situations, which may also cause frustration and impotence. Moreover, the working conditions of schools and educational systems nowadays may not facilitate student-centered approaches, and this may pose additional challenges to teachers holding this teaching conception. These hypotheses, however, need considerably more research.

As for the relationship between teachers' conceptions of educational purpose and their emotional experience, to our knowledge, previous research on this subject is virtually non-existent. There is considerable research about teachers' personal motivation to become (or remain) a teacher – suggesting that intrinsic motivation and mastery goals are associated with better emotional experiences for the teacher (e.g., Li et al., 2021; McLean et al., 2019) – as well as a few studies focusing on the relationship between teachers' sense of purpose and their emotional experience of the job – suggesting that a sense of purpose is a protective factor against teacher burnout or attrition (Brunetti, 2006; Ellison et al., 2021). However, teachers' conceptions about what the purpose of education is have mainly been studied in

relation to teachers' practice (Lotter et al., 2007; Martínez-Rodríguez et al., 2018), not their emotional experience. Our results indicate that those teachers for whom the educational purpose is to generate student's academic learning show higher levels of well-being and personal accomplishment, and lower levels of depersonalization, than those for whom the educational purpose is the generation of students' psychosocial learning. One possible explanation for these results is that generating psychosocial learning is a more ambitious endeavor than generating academic learning (since it includes academic learning, but also goes far beyond it), and requires greater emotional and personal involvement by the teacher; consequently, it may be associated with experiencing more difficulty and frustration. Additionally, since conceptions are context-dependent, in environments marked by harder social challenges, teachers may be more likely to assume an educational purpose that goes beyond mere academic learning; since these teachers work in more difficult social environments, their emotional experience may be worse not only because of the educational purpose they assume, but also the contextual conditions they work in.

This study has also provided support to the idea that conceptions of teaching may be cultural in nature and context-dependent. We found differences in "student-centeredness" among teachers working in different countries, and we also found differences in "educational purpose" among teachers working in different educational levels, in both cases with medium effect-sizes. Thus, we found, on the one hand, that teachers in Spain tended to be more student-centered than teachers in Chile, and on the other hand, we found that teachers working in the kindergarten level tended to be more focused on students' well-being and less on learning than those working in primary and secondary levels, that teachers working in the primary level tended to be more focused on relationships than those in the other two levels, and that teachers working in the secondary level tended to focus more on society and less on relationships than those working in the kindergarten and primary levels. These differences between countries and educational levels are suggestive: differences between levels may be due to differential priorities and needs involved in different developmental stages of children (Lerner, Easterbrooks, & Mistry, 2003), as well as to idiosyncratic shared identities of those working in each educational level (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011); differences between countries may be due to differences in national cultures (Hofstede, 2001; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022) as well as to different degrees of the penetration of different waves of reform ideas in these countries (Sahlberg, 2023). However, our results on these differences must be taken with caution, because the sub-samples we worked with were small and non-probabilistic. Still, it is worthy to note that the research on differences in teachers' conceptions among countries and educational levels is scarce, and in this sense, although not decisive, our findings about these differences may be at least inspiring to fuel further research on this issue.

This study has several limitations. First, while it did include teachers from five countries (Spain, Chile, Ecuador, Brazil, and Australia), which may offer some cultural variability, future research should include more countries offering stronger cultural contrasts. Second, the selection of the participants was non-probabilistic; although not essential for the aims of this study, future research, perhaps more concerned with transcultural comparisons, should advance in the use of probability sampling. Third, although the sample was reasonably large for the kind of qualitative analysis conducted, future research, using the protocol and category framework generated in this study, would benefit from a larger sample of teachers. Finally, it should be noted that, in our sample, the internal consistency for depersonalization was poor ( $\rho_{NL} = .560$ ). This is consistent with several other studies, which have also found poor internal consistency for this subscale, especially in non-English-speaking and relatively small samples (e.g., Figueiredo-Ferraz et al., 2013; Sá & Fleming, 2008; Saltijéral & Ramos, 2015; Vukmirovic et al., 2020).

Despite the study's limitations, its findings may have useful implications for the management of educational reforms, especially in the field of teacher education. First, the results suggest that, in parallel to promoting student-centered conceptions of teaching, it may be important to work with teachers to strengthen resilience processes. Second, it may be important to offer specific support to teachers who hold students' psychosocial learning as their educational purpose, in order to prevent feelings of depersonalization and declines in well-being and personal accomplishment. Finally, this study shows that important issues remain to be studied about the emotional implications of teaching conceptions and that this kind of research may be relevant to facilitate the implementation of educational reforms.

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