

# VIOLENCES in schools

CONCISE VERSION

MIRIAM ABRAMOVAY

MARIA DAS GRAÇAS RUA

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# PRESENTATION

This publication consists in the summary of the book “Violences in Schools”, launched by the Representation in Brazil of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Since it came out, the book has become a point of reference in the debate on the fight against school violence. One of the reasons for that is the singularity of this work in regard to the extension of the mapping and the analysis of the phenomenon -the book contains results obtained in 13 units of the federation and in the Federal District, something that had never been done before in the country. On the other hand, “Violences in Schools” has become a landmark for UNESCO's action in Brazil, since it attracted attention from researches, scholars and policy-makers in the public sphere to a problem that, when present in schools, impairs their functioning and prevents them from performing their institutional function of educating children and young people.

In parallel, the results presented in “Violences in Schools” encouraged the mobilization of several segments of society – government, non-governmental organizations, researchers and educators – allowing for the formulation of several actions aiming at the fight against school violence, of which one stands out: the establishment of the Observatory of Violence in Schools – Brazil, a joint initiative of UNESCO and of the Catholic University of Brasilia. In a general way, the foremost aim of these actions is trying to understand the phenomenon through studies and research, as well as developing proposals for action capable of operating changes in the picture of degraded human and social relations characteristic of some schools. The higher objective is to disseminate a culture of peace, built by means of strategies such as mediation, which aims at preventing violence and encouraging a harmonious coexistence. In the case of schools, mediation aims at promoting changes in the atmosphere of the educational institutions, starting from dialogue and conflict settling through solutions presented by the actors involved.

The present summary is also one of the results of the mobilization sparked by the book “Violences in the Schools”, which led UNESCO-Brazil to bring this material to teachers, principals and other members of the school staff, and also to students. This work intends to foment discussion, stimulate reflection and also to serve as a basis for innovative strategies to deal with and overcome school violence.

This summary presents the main theoretical lines that guide contemporary debates on violence in schools, as well as the major results obtained in research, allowing the educators to understand the issue in its full complexity. Thus, it deals both with the violence coming from outside the school walls, originating in society but harming students, teachers and other members of the pedagogical staff – such as the action of groups linked to drug traffic – and with the specific dynamics of the daily life of educational institutions, which are also modalities of symbolic and/or institutional violence.

In bringing this information and these results to educators, UNESCO believes they are fulfilling the relevant role of enabling them to deal with an issue that is certainly part of their daily experience, generating feelings of perplexity, insecurity and even helplessness. The major objective is to enable all actors in the school community to overcome violent situations that are extremely harmful to the full development of millions of children and adolescents who attend school everyday. After all, sociology teaches us that a peaceful and stimulating pedagogical environment is a pre-requisite for learning and for the educational process as a whole. For that reason, to overcome school violences is an investment with guaranteed returns in terms of quality standards.

Each Brazilian school must face school violences with firmness and pedagogical confidence. The building of peace must start as early as possible, since – quoting UNESCO's Constitution is never superfluous – if wars begin in the minds of men, it is in their minds that peace can and should be constructed. In other words, it is by means of good quality education, capable of mobilizing the creative potential of children and youths and ensure the full development of their self-esteem that we shall form minds oriented to the construction of a culture of peace.

Jorge Werthein  
*Director of UNESCO in Brazil*

# INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary Western world, the incidence of school violence is not a recent phenomenon. School violence is not only an important theme for reflection, but also, and above all, a serious social problem.

Since the 1950's, when the first studies on the subject were conducted in the United States, the various dimensions of the phenomenon have undergone changes, and the ensuing problems have become graver. Some of these striking changes were: the use of weapons in schools, including firearms; the dissemination of drug-use; and the spread of the phenomenon of gangs, sometimes associated to drug traffic, a factor exerting influence on the daily life of school. Another drastic change results from the fact that the schools and their neighboring areas are no longer protected or preserved, and are now, so to speak, incorporated into the everyday violence of urban space. Moreover, schools no longer represent a place of refuge, a safe haven for the students, and they have lost a good part of their ties with adjacent communities.

Inevitably, the analytic approach to the phenomenon has also changed in comparison to those initial studies. At first, violence in schools was dealt with as a simple matter of discipline. Later on, it started being analyzed as an expression of juvenile delinquency and of anti-social behavior. Nowadays, it is viewed in a much broader sense, from perspectives that express phenomena such as globalization and social exclusion, which require analyses not restricted to the social transgressions practiced by young students, or to the violences that crop up in their social relations.

On the other hand Brazilian society has been faced with an increase in school violences and in episodes involving verbal, physical and symbolical aggressions to actors in the school community, a fact which has attracted the attention of the various instances of government, of international agencies and of civil society<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1999, the federal government established a committee of specialists, coordinated by the Latin-American...

In 1997, UNESCO in Brazil initiated a series of research studies focusing on the themes Youth, Violence and Citizenship, presenting concrete proposals for public policies, in order to contribute to the search of solutions to problems affecting youths, such as social exclusion, labor market, family, education, social participation, and juvenile protagonism, among others.

The present research falls within the scope of these concerns and of the efforts to meet them. Its objectives may be described, in a broader sense, as the identification and analysis of the perceptions of students, of the technical-pedagogical staff and of parents concerning school violences and their causes; the description of the frequency and seriousness of the incidents registered, the evaluation of their impact on learning, and the identification of the mechanisms adopted and/or recommended – prevention, reduction and eradication of the problem.

In the conduction of this study a broad conception of violence was adopted, incorporating not only the notion of physical maltreatment, use of force and intimidation, but also including the sociocultural and symbolic dimensions of the phenomenon in question. It must be stressed, however, that violence in schools should not be viewed solely as a modality of juvenile violence, because its incidence expresses the intersection of three types of independent variables: institutional (school and family), social (sex, color, job, sociospatial origin, religion, parent's schooling, socio-economic status) and behavioral (information, sociability, attitude and opinions).

In order to express the plurality of the dimensions involved, this book has adopted the term “violences in schools”, which has the additional advantage of situating the phenomenon not in a generic institutional system, but rather in the spatial and temporal specificity of each of its units. Thus, if it is possible to think of the multiple manifestations that justify the term “violences”, it is also admissible to suppose that these violences take place in schools with different characteristics, and can vary in intensity, magnitude, permanence and gravity.

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... Institute for the Prevention of Delinquency and Treatment of Delinquents – ILANUD, with the aim of drawing up guidelines to face the problem. Likewise, the Ministry of Education, jointly with other bodies, organized a national campaign of Education for Peace. Civil society, on its turn, has mobilized in the form of campaigns and projects such as Se Liga, Galera (Get Wise, Folks); Peace, Build your own student organization; and the I am for Peace campaign, among others. UNESCO, with its Opening Spaces – Education and Culture for Peace program, advocates the strategy of a nationwide program that promotes the “opening of schools on week-ends”, with the construction of citizenship spaces capable of reverting the violence situation.

# METHODOLOGY

## CHARACTERIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study uses two types of approaches: the extensive and the comprehensive. The extensive approach resorts to quantitative techniques, and is based on the representativity and in the inferential capacity of the data, and is characteristic of survey type research. The comprehensive approach, on the other hand, uses qualitative techniques, and works with the contents of social manifestations, placing emphasis on the perceptions of the subject of his own experiences.

### COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH

The following techniques were used in this study: focal groups, individual interviews with school principals, other members of the technical-pedagogical staff, policemen, security guards, and inspector/coordinators of discipline; and *in loco* observation of schools. In all three techniques, procedure patterns were used to cover the various aspects of the phenomena under study.

### EXTENSIVE RESEARCH

The questionnaires were designed so as to be applied to students, teachers, and parents of students in thirteen Brazilian state capitals (Manaus, Belém, Fortaleza, Recife, Maceió, Salvador, Goiânia, Cuiabá, Vitória, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Porto Alegre e Florianópolis) and in the Federal District (Table 1).

**TABLE I – Questionnaires answered by students, teachers and parents in the capital-cities of the Units of the Federation (absolute numbers)**

Capitals	Informers			Total
	Students	Teachers	Parents	
Federal District	1,843	137	307	<b>2,287</b>
Goiânia	2,878	201	837	<b>3,916</b>
Cuiabá	1,960	262	669	<b>2,891</b>
Manaus	2,246	177	763	<b>3,186</b>
Belém	3,604	255	810	<b>4,669</b>
Fortaleza	2,105	186	808	<b>3,099</b>
Recife	1,939	149	639	<b>2,727</b>
Maceió	2,717	189	672	<b>3,578</b>
Salvador	2,162	315	1,112	<b>3,589</b>
Vitória	2,129	193	663	<b>2,985</b>
Rio de Janeiro	2,234	280	780	<b>3,294</b>
São Paulo	3,750	257	941	<b>4,948</b>
Florianópolis	2,088	187	667	<b>2,942</b>
Porto Alegre	2,000	311	557	<b>2,868</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>33,655</b>	<b>3,099</b>	<b>10,225</b>	<b>46,979</b>

Source: National Research on Violence, AIDS and Drugs in Schools, UNESCO, 2001.

This stage involved both public and private schools (Table 2), of fundamental and secondary levels, in day and night shifts.

**TABLE 2 – Sample distribution by school, Units of the Federation capitals and according to administrative dependence (absolute numbers)**

Capitals	Schools		TOTAL
	Public	Private	
Federal District	14	5	19
Goiânia	22	5	27
Cuiabá	17	4	21
Manaus	15	7	22
Belém	23	5	28
Fortaleza	16	8	24
Recife	17	4	21
Maceió	15	10	25
Salvador	14	9	23
Vitória	12	7	19
Rio de Janeiro	12	11	23
São Paulo	31	15	46
Florianópolis	15	6	21
Porto Alegre	16	5	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>340</b>

Source: National Research on Violence, AIDS and Drugs in Schools, UNESCO, 2001.

### SAMPLE DESIGN

The database for the selection of this sample was the register based on the 1998 School Census, carried out by INEP/MEC. The collection of data took place between April and December 2000. A stratified sample procedure was adopted, and the selection was done through conglomerates, in two stages. In this research, the schools correspond to the selection units, because the samples refer to them. The secondary or observation units are the grades/classes. Finally, the terminal units are the students, distributed according to the strata, in public and private educational institutions, in fundamental (starting from 5th grade) and secondary levels, in day and night shifts, and in the capital-cities of the Units of the Federation chosen for this study.

## CRITERIA AND LIMITS TO GENERALIZATION

In the case of the students, considering the design and the criticism of the sample, the research can be said to be totally valid, and the generalization for the period in the capitals under study is perfectly legitimate. On the other hand, the information collected through questionnaires from parents and teachers must be dealt differently from the information collected from the students; it cannot be generalized because it was up to each parent or teacher to fill in and return the questionnaire.

In what concerns the data collected through the observation procedure, one must keep in mind that, since they aggregate information on the selected schools, probabilistically, they do not allow statistical inference.

As a rule, only the valid answers were submitted to analysis, that is, except in the cases where they could be assumed to have a substantive meaning “no-answers” were not taken into account.

The term “members of the technical–pedagogical staff” appearing in the tables includes teachers, principals, teaching coordinators and supervisors and educational counselors. However, since most of them are teachers, the answers appearing in the text generally refer to the latter.



# I. VIOLENCES IN SCHOOL: THE LITERATURE REVISITED

The perception of violence in the school environment changes according to the perspective from which that environment is approached. In the past, the analyses focused on violence intrinsic to the school system, especially on the violence practiced by teachers against students (punishment, including corporal punishment). In the contemporary literature, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and other specialists tend to favor the analysis of the violence practiced among students or by students against property (vandalism, for instance), and, in a smaller proportion, by students against teachers, and by teachers against students.

Where emphasis is placed depends on the definition of violence employed by each study. Charlot and Émin (1997) mention the difficulty in defining school violence, not only because it refers to “heterogeneous phenomena, hard to delimitate and to order”, but also because violence deconstructs social representations that carry founding values, for example, the notions of childhood (associated with innocence) and of school (understood as a peaceful refuge).

Another factor that hinders the understanding and the analysis of violence – particularly of school violence – is the fact that there is no consensus regarding the meaning of the term. What is described as violence varies according to the school, the status of the person speaking (teachers, principals, students etc.), age and, probably, sex.

Charlot expands the concept of school violence using a three-level classification:

- a. *Violence*: hitting, physical injury, sexual violence, thefts, crimes and vandalism;
- b. *Incivilities*: harassment, rude language, disrespectful behavior;

c. *Symbolic or institutional violence*: understood as the students' feeling of pointlessness about staying in school for so many years; learning viewed as an unpleasant obligation, that forces young people to study subjects and contents that do not arouse their interest; the impositions of a society incapable of inserting the young into the labor market; the violence of power relations between students and teachers. Also viewed as violence is the denial of professional identity and satisfaction to the teachers, and also the fact that they are forced to endure students' absenteeism and indifference.

According to Debarbieux (1996: 42), in the study of school violence the following aspects must be taken into account:

1. crimes and offenses, such as thefts, robberies, assaults, extortion, drug traffic and drug use etc., as qualified by the Penal Code;
2. incivilities, specially as defined by the social actors;
3. feelings of insecurity or what in this country we call “a feeling of violence”, which results not only from the two components mentioned above, but also from a more general sense of insecurity felt in all the social environments used as reference.

For that reason, in several parts of the world, as well as in Brazil, the researchers are attempting to refine the concept of violence taking into account the target population – young people – and the place of the school as an institution. To that end, Brazilian literature focuses not only physical violence, but also gives emphasis to ethics, to politics and to the concern of giving visibility to “symbolic violences”. For example, Sposito, as Hannah Arendt (1961), finds a connection between violence and the collapse of the capacity for negotiation through dialogue – which, somehow, is the raw material of knowledge and of education. Thus, for that author “violence includes all acts that imply the collapse of a social connection by the use of force. The possibility of a social relation – created by communication, by the use of words, dialogue and conflict – is thereby denied” (Sposito, 1998: 60).

The terms used to indicate violence vary from country to country. In the United States, several research studies resort to the term “juvenile delinquency”. In England, some authors argue that the term “violence in schools” should only be used in the case of conflicts between students

and teachers, or in relation to activities that cause suspension, disciplinary measures or arrest by the police.

It is also important to notice that the types of violence that occur in school have undergone changes, a trend registered in Brazil and also in other countries. In the case of Brazil, Codo and Vasques-Menezes (2001) point out that fights no longer tend to be restricted to fists and words, and now resort to weapons, especially firearms, causing an increase in fatal incidents.

In spite of the differences among countries and among the concepts employed, there is a growing consensus in regard to the fact that attention should not be given to physical violence only, since other types of violence may be just as serious and traumatic.

## 1.1 THE TYPES OF SCHOOL VIOLENCES

Many are the types of school violences that have been analyzed and are considered common. In the American literature, in particular, attention is given to gangs, xenophobia and bullying<sup>2</sup>.

In Europe, especially in France, researchers have undertaken the study of incivilities in the school environment. Empirical descriptions are the best way to understand the concept. Dupaquier (1999) mentions:

- crimes and offenses against objects and property (breaking doors and window-panes, damage to equipment);
- intimidation of physical (pushing, spitting) and verbal (offenses, name-calling and threats) nature;
- negligence as to cleanliness of areas of common use (rest-rooms, for instance);

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<sup>2</sup> Bullying is defined by Nancy Day (1996:44-45) as physical or psychological abuse against a person who is not capable of defending himself. She says that four factors contribute to the development of bullying behavior: 1) a negative attitude on the part of the parents or the person responsible for caring for the child or adolescent; 2) a tolerant or permissive attitude towards the child's or adolescent's aggressive behavior; 3) a style of parenting that uses power or violence to control the child or adolescent; 4) a natural tendency to arrogance on the part of the child or adolescent. She also says that the majority of bullies are boys, but girls can also adopt bullying behavior. Bully girls sometimes use indirect methods, such as gossip, manipulation of friends, lies and excluding others from the group.

- ostentation of symbols of violence;
- attitudes aimed at arousing fear (carrying weapons, sexist attitudes)
- some illicit acts such as carrying and using drugs.

In Debarbieux's (1998) view, incivilities, that he classifies as anti-social and anti-school violences, may be traumatic, particularly when they become routine and are hushed up so as to protect the school. According to Bourdieu, they are rendered possible by a power that does not assume its function, and allows itself to be seen as conniving and authoritarian. Teachers do not see, do not complain, and the victims are not identified as such. One example would be the manifestations of racism, which are very commonly surrounded by a non-acknowledged complicity between young people and adults, students and teachers.

Although some authors do not view incivilities as a modality of violence, and tend to associate them more closely to aggressiveness or to behavior patterns that offend norms of sociability and respect for others, it is commonly agreed that attention must be given to the incidence of cases of incivility in schools, since they may generate a hostile environment (Dupaquier, 1999).

## 1.2 ENDOGENOUS AND EXOGENOUS VARIABLES

In order to understand and explain the phenomenon of the various types of violence that occur in schools, it is useful to resort both to internal and external aspects, such as the aggressors' and the victims' characteristics, as well as the different institutions and environments attended by the students.

Among the external aspects (called by the specialists “exogenous variables”), some must be taken into account, for instance:

- issues of gender (the role of each sex);
- racial relation (racism, xenophobia);
- family situation (social characteristics of families);
- the influence of the media (radio, TV, magazines, newspapers, etc.);
- the social space of schools (neighborhood, society).

Among the internal aspects (called “endogenous variables”), the following must be considered:

- the students' age, grade or level of schooling;
- the rules and the discipline stated by the school's pedagogical project, as well as the impact of the punishment system;
- the teachers' attitudes regarding the students and educational practice in general.

In order to identify variables or factors that are usually inter-related with school violences, several other relations and social processes must be brought into play. The tendency is not to isolate a single factor as the possible cause or background for those violences. It is preferable instead to identify sets of factors or environments conducive to violence. For that reason, besides multidimensional perspectives, several authors advocate the importance of a transdisciplinary approach, with contributions from sociology, political science, psychology, educational science and criminal law.

There is broad consensus regarding the fact that schools are negatively vulnerable (risks and obstacles) to several processes characteristic of contemporary times, such as social exclusion, the attitudes of the public power regarding education and the teachers' loss of social standing and economic power.

The schools' vulnerability to a number of macrosocial violences would contribute to their loss of legitimacy as a place of production and transmission of knowledges, when compared to new education media with a broader social reach, a wider scope and a much easier access.

According to some authors, such as Debarbieux, school is now more vulnerable to external factors and problems (such as unemployment and the precariousness of living conditions in poor neighborhoods). He mentions also the impact of mass access to schools, that now receive young people who have been negatively affected by experiences of exclusion and of gangs, with consequences for all members of the school community – students, teachers and parents (Debarbieux, 1998: 39) These external factors that generate vulnerability are compounded by those resulting from an increase in delinquent behavior and incivilities within the school environment.

Although external factors do have impact and influence on school violence, one must consider the fact that, within the school itself, possible ways can be found for dealing with the different modalities of violence and for building alternative cultures of peace, resorting to the school's own strategies and resources.

### **1.3 THE BRAZILIAN LITERATURE – ECHOES, SPECIFICITIES AND GAPS**

In Brazil, studies on issue of school violence started being conducted in the 1980's, and emphasis should be given to several researches developed by public educational institutions, by class associations and, in a lesser degree, by private research institutions, as well as by scholars and research teams linked to universities. In that period, the theme was addressed more often by Social Sciences professionals than by specialists in Education. The latter did not take interest in the subject until a recent date, due to the existing lines of research.

Although these studies are still incipient, since they focus mainly on regional or localized situations, the results show that, in the 1980's, the most common types of violence were acts against property (depredation, graffiti, etc.), whereas in the 1990's, forms of interpersonal aggression, particularly among students, also became frequent.

During the 1990's, differently from the trend registered in the previous decades, the issue of school violence started to arise attention and concern in Brazil, and not only as a phenomenon external to schools (exogenous causes). Nevertheless, special emphasis was still conferred to the problem of drug traffic, social exclusion and the action of gangs.

### **1.4 THE PERSPECTIVES OF THIS STUDY**

Although school violence does not involve a great number of incidents, and in spite of the fact that the worst cases of social violence do not occur in the school environment, the phenomenon is still A cause for concern. It is serious because it directly affects victims, aggressors, and the witnesses of this violence, and, most of all, it contributes to the breakdown of the idea of schools as places of knowledge, of personality forming, of education,

as the vehicle par excellence for the exercise of learning, of ethics and communication through dialogue, representing, therefore, the antithesis of violence.

In recent years, there was a noticeable increase in the number of criminal acts or “incivilities”, great or small, committed in the schools, giving rise to a justifiable feeling of insecurity within the school community. School could no longer be represented as a safe place for social integration and socialization. It is no longer a protected place. On the contrary, it has become a setting for episodes of violence.

Therefore, besides having to face internal administrative problems and all sorts of precarious situations that affect their teaching performance, schools are now going through a period of contestation of the ideology on which they were founded. Schools are criticized for not preparing the young for the labor market, for quality loss and for no longer being the main source of knowledge on humanities and a vehicle for the transmission of the cultural heritage of civilization. It is also accused of not corresponding to the expectations of a safe future for young people.

It is in this point of confluence of sociopolitical, economical and cultural processes that resides the great challenge of the issues under exam. To address school violence means to deal with an intersection of objects and their respective meanings. The perspective must encompass a specific order, rather than the mere superposition or sum of objects: school and violence.

In order to incorporate the various aspects of reflection and different theoretical conceptions, violence is understood, in the present study, as the physical intervention of an individual or a group against the physical integrity of another individual, group or groups, and also against himself or themselves – covering a spectrum of phenomena ranging from suicide, beatings of several types, thefts, assaults and homicides to violence in traffic disguised as “accidents”, as well as various forms of verbal, symbolic and institutional violence.

Due exactly to its complexity and to the multiplicity of its facets, the comprehension of the this phenomenon must be approached from a transdisciplinary, multidimensional and multicausal perspective.

## 2. THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

As seen in the preceding chapter, the debate on the exogenous and endogenous factors associated to violence in the school environment is controversial, and deals with rather sensitive issues. The major trend is to emphasize the factors external to the schools, which alleviates the responsibility of the school system, both in the face of the phenomenon itself and of the fight against it. The analysis, therefore, resorted to multidimensional approaches, in an attempt to identify a set of factors, both internal or external, as the probable causes of violence.

In this chapter, the focus is placed on the school environment, encompassing the adjacent area, the neighborhood where the school is located, and also traffic security conditions – pedestrian crossing strips, street condition, traffic police, etc.

In order to afford a better understanding of the various manifestations of school violence, the physical structure of the school buildings is also compared and described. The system of monitoring the entrance and exit of students and the lay-out and quality of the physical facilities, which determine the vulnerability of the access to the school building, are also examined.

### 2.1 THE SCHOOL VICINITY

The area surrounding the school (the street on which the school is located, the school neighborhood, the bus stop and the way to it) is the space where violence occurs more often, according to the students and to members of the technical-pedagogical staff participating in the survey. They all point out the neighborhood as one of the major five problems faced by the school.

However, a significant proportion of students and faculty members affirm that the school premises are more violent than its vicinity: one-fifth



of the students and one-fourth of the teachers, a fact that belies the security and safety of the school environment.

Among the problems identified in the school vicinity are:

*Precairous traffic signs and traffic security* – The lack of safety equipment on the streets leading to the schools account for the significant number of run-overs of members of the school community. In many of the streets where schools are located there are no traffic lights, no footbridges, no pedestrian strips and no traffic police. Moreover, in some neighborhoods safety problems are worse in the night shift, due to inadequate street lighting.

*Access to alcoholic beverages* – Many of the commercial establishments in the school vicinity are bars and taverns. In 63% of the schools surveyed, students frequent these bars, sometimes cutting classes. When groups of students go to these bars close to the school, they sometimes consume alcoholic beverages, and may get involved in violent practices.

*Security and policing* – There is no consensus regarding the appropriateness of police surveillance in the school environment. Many think that the presence of the police would BE not only useless but harmful. It is important to note that opinions vary according to the prevailing image of policemen. Thus, some of the interviewees (the inspectors) defend the presence of the police in order to check crime in the school vicinity. Others (the students) say that the school should solve its own violence problems without resorting to the police. The students do not view policemen as trustworthy. The relation between the students and the police is sensitive, and some students, in particular, say they are afraid of policemen. On the other hand, some policemen claim that the students have no respect for them.

*Gangs and drug-dealers* – According to both the students and the technical-pedagogical staff, one of the major problems found in many schools is the presence of gangs and drug-dealers inside the school or in its vicinity, exacerbating the atmosphere of insecurity and compromising the authority of those responsible for maintaining order in the schools. The school administrations fear that taking a stand to fight gangs and drug traffic inside the schools might yield counterproductive results. They refrain from applying punishments so as to avoid greater damage. In the present survey, several testimonies emphasize the presence of drug traffic. In many cases, the dealers use street vendors and even students to sell and distribute drugs

(the so-called “aviões” – airplanes). Gangs, on their turn, interfere in school life in many ways: threatening students, marking out the territory where some may enter and others may not, performing acts of vengeance, creating an atmosphere of tension, etc.).

## 2.2 THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

The survey has revealed aspects of the school environment that are worth mentioning, such as:

*The physical structure of the schools* – The physical structure of schools affects the school environment. Generally, the schools are separated from its vicinity by walls, fences or railings. A significant number of students complain about the quality of the physical environment, particularly the classrooms, corridors and patios, although they admit they like the school where they study. The places the students like the best in their schools are canteens or cafeterias, libraries, computer centers, sports gyms, laboratories and art pavilions (the last four were less common in the schools surveyed).

*Student discipline* – The direct local observation carried out by the researchers demonstrates that approximately one-third of the students display unruly behavior. In what concerns truancy and cutting classes, the percentages are rather significant.

### 3. THE SCHOOL: FUNCTIONING AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

According to Mariano F. Enguita, “education is a social and universal phenomenon, and a human activity necessary to the existence and functioning of all societies” (Enguita, 1989). The education of individuals must be integral, helping them in the development of their physical, moral and spiritual capabilities. By means of educational action, the social environment exerts influence upon individuals, who then become capable of establishing active and transformative relations. This influence manifests itself through knowledge, experiences, values, beliefs, ways of acting, techniques and mores, accumulated, transmitted and recreated from one generation to the next.

The schools and their professionals constitute a universe capable of propitiating the development of the student, as well as creating the conditions for meaningful learning and interactions among students, teachers, principals and other members of the technical staff, that may favor or not the information and communication processes happening in the schools. However, in this diversified environment fights and aggressive or violent acts also occur, and the measures taken to solve conflicts in general are the responsibility of the school administration. The procedures adopted are mostly reprimands, suspension, transference and expulsion, according to the seriousness of each case, as analyzed by the school.

Taking these aspects into account, this chapter deals first with rules and punishments, since they are the means for regulating relations in the school. The next step is to explore the actors' perceptions and motivations and, finally, to deal with the interactions occurring in school, mediated by friendship, conflict and various levels of agreement, identifying the ways by which the school context may influence the relations among the actors, either positively or negatively.

### 3.1 THE SCHOOL FUNCTIONING

Schools have rules that regulate their daily life, and these rules apply especially to students. The internal rules that provoke more reactions are those related to punctuality, use of uniforms, identification and the practices allowed or forbidden within the school. Most schools have rules concerning these aspects, and the different actors in the school community do not see eye to eye on the issue. One example is permission to smoke. As a general rule, students are forbidden to smoke in school, especially in the day shift. However, the teachers, the principal and other employees are not subject to the same restriction. The students complain that they (the adults in the school) break the rules themselves: "I may smoke because I am the principal" Then she lights a cigarette, but I can't".

Some schools are more flexible than others, and manifestations of what may be called institutional violence can also be found, namely, abuse of power on the part of the institution that imposes rules without allowing the students to defend themselves and to argue their cases.

Summing up, 'the various people inquired agree that rules are indispensable for maintaining order in the schools, but they draw attention to the types of coercion to which they are submitted in order to attain that end. According to Debarbieux (1998), among the problems with which the faculty and the school community in general are faced today, the most serious are forms of contestation of the school order itself, that show up as incivilities, explicit violence or rejection behavior.

#### 3.1.1 TRANSGRESSIONS AND PUNISHMENTS

In the schools, as in any other institutional spaces, some behaviors are sanctioned negatively through specific punishments, according to the type of transgression.

Since punishments tend to be arbitrarily stipulated, schools may be a privileged locus for the exercise of symbolic violence. Violence, in that case, would be exercised by the use of power symbols that do not require resorting to physical force, weapons or raised voices, but that are nevertheless effective in silencing protests. And in the school environment, there is a high probability of symbolic violence being wielded not only among students, but also in the relations between students and teachers.

In cases of serious transgressions, such as graffiti and vandalism, the students may be either transferred or expelled, or taken to the police station, accompanied by their parents. Drastic measures of this type are defended by the inspectors, for instance, who believe that extreme steps should be taken to maintain order in the school. The students, however, do not totally agree with this opinion, and present criticisms of two types to the punishments employed. The first refers to the differentiated treatment given to some students, because “the kid may tear the school down, but if he is the teacher's pet, all he gets is a scolding.” The second refers to an excess of threats of punishment, that results in their not being taken seriously. In that regard, however, a contrasting fact should be pointed out: in some occasions, when the principal threatens to punish, the result may be as efficient than the application of a punishment, or even more. It may also happen that punishments become so common that they cease to be viewed as sanctions.

Some schools adopt alternative punishments, that may be as severe than the ones habitually used, or even more so, since they may lead to humiliating and embarrassing situations. Many students complain about the lack of criteria and the abuses of power practiced by the school in applying punishment.

*(...) It was something that happened and I did not think it was right, something about school rules. A boy and a girl were kissing. Usually, the punishment for that is A reprimand. But they got suspended for a week. On the other hand, there are others who use drugs and smell ether, and all they get is a two-day punishment (focal group with students, in a public school in Maceió).*

There are also cases of the punishments stipulated in the school's rules not being applied. According to members of the student body, situations of this type may occur for several reasons, such as ineffectiveness or negligence on the part of the principal's office. But they think that not seldom pressure by the parents lies behind this impunity.

### 3.2 PERCEPTION OF SCHOOLS

The rules that regulate behaviors and relations among school actors contribute to the development of different feelings, attitudes and perceptions of the school and of the people involved in the learning process. Therefore, it is important to identify the factors that lead students and technical-pedagogical staff members to like or dislike the school where they study or work.

When asked how they felt about the school where they studied at the time of the survey, about four-fifths of the students answered they liked it. Nevertheless, they pointed out several specific aspects they disliked. Physical space is the item most disliked in the schools. On the average, in the capital-cities surveyed, four in every ten students complained about the school's physical space (classrooms, corridors, etc.). Another item that displeases students is the school administration and the principal's office. They also report disliking “most of the other students”, in proportions ranging from 24% in Belém to 42% in Maceió; “classes”; and “most of the teachers” (Table 3).

**TABLE 3 – Percentage of students \* who do not like specific aspects of school, according to capital-cities of the Units of the Federation, 2000**

Capitals	Aspects disliked				
	Physical space (classrooms, corridors etc.)	School administration, principal's office	Most students	Classes	Most teachers
Federal District	48	36	32	29	25
Goiânia	47	27	27	23	24
Cuiabá	39	30	33	24	21
Manaus	43	32	31	19	23
Belém	50	35	24	19	20
Fortaleza	40	37	34	21	27
Recife	45	40	33	26	22
Maceió	38	28	42	20	25
Salvador	46	36	39	24	26
Vitória	46	30	27	30	26
Rio de Janeiro	49	28	28	23	20
São Paulo	41	35	36	26	24
Florianópolis	41	38	33	34	29
Porto Alegre	45	29	30	31	25

Source: National Research on Violence, AIDS and Drugs in Schools, UNESCO, 2001.

Observation: The students were asked: “Check the items you dislike in your school”. The percentages refer to affirmative answers only.

\* Expanded data

One item that draws special attention is the fact that students say they dislike “most of the students”, since this results leads us to question the perception of school as a space of pleasant social interaction among youngsters.

The fact that students dislike their colleagues creates an atmosphere of pervasive discomfort and mistrust, weakening affective bonds among the members of the same class. In regard to the relations with colleagues, students mention lack of fellowship and solidarity, saying that there is no friendship or dialogue among them. This lack of empathy and commonality eventually spills over to other relations (between teachers and students, for instance), leading to closed groups, the so-called cliques, that keep other students away.

Finally, it is obvious that the relations among students influence their permanence in school, because that is the place where they enjoy social life and develop affective bonds with one other.

Regarding the teachers, they are pointed out as objects of dislike by a maximum of 29% of students in Florianópolis, and a minimum of 20%, in Belém and Rio de Janeiro). (Table 3). Among the reasons is the fact that the teachers, according to the students, create ways of stigmatizing them: “People who talk get labeled. They have a way of excluding people. If you go to them to ask some question, you get treated differently”. Consequently, students feel discriminated against and bothered by the fact that others get a differentiated and privileged treatment.

These data raise a crucial question: what is wrong with schools where significant proportions of students do not like their colleagues? Useful clues for answering that question can be found in the data obtained from asking students and members of the technical-pedagogical staff about the major problems in their schools.

The students point out as the major problems: “uninterested and unruly students”, “lack of material and human resources”, and “incompetent and absentee teachers”. On their turn, the technical-pedagogical staff mentions, as the three major problems, “lack of material and human resources”, “uninterested and unruly students”, and “uninterested parents”. It is worth noting that “uninterested and unruly students” were mentioned as a problem by both the students and the members of the technical staff.

A possible explanation for the students' lack of interest arises in their discussion of the curricular contents taught in class. There are students who

are ignorant of the usefulness of a specific curricular content, or evaluate it according to what they consider instrumental for their future:

*Geography sucks... I can't stand it. I think that the only people who want to learn geography in school (...) are those who want to become teachers, no one else. My father says that some things in mathematics are going to be useful. Now, square roots and things like that, only if you are a math teacher (...) Depending on your profession, mathematics is useless* (Focal group with students, in a private school, Rio de Janeiro)

The youngsters see themselves as overburdened with too many subjects, whereas other issues and courses of their interest are not offered by the school. They complain that the classes are monotonous and tiresome.

The facts pointed out by the students raise the issue of the attribution of blame and responsibilities in the educational process. It is worth mentioning that, whereas they acknowledge their own lack of interest and unruly behavior, the teachers, on their turn, do not feel responsible for educational failures, shifting blame to the students and their families, and also to the precarious work conditions.

Some members of the faculty affirm that the major problems in the school are lack of discipline, lack of respect, lack of responsibility, “because he students come totally undisciplined from their home environment”. Some teachers do not point out specific people as responsible for this situation, saying rather that indiscipline is caused by the absence of limits characteristic of our times! On the other hand, some parents who were interviewed think that indiscipline results from “the school being boring, the teachers being unprepared and unwilling to teach classes. They want to get it over with quickly, and the programs are obsolete.

### 3.2.1 RELATIONS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

In view of the attitudes and perceptions of students and teachers regarding one another and the school, it is worth asking how they relate within the school environment. In the case of the students, the teachers are important interlocutors, second only to classmates, regardless of their relations being cordial or not.

Many students report having pleasant and satisfactory relations with the teachers. Students value teachers who encourage them to continue their



studies, show interest in them, are concerned with their performance, give advice, and talk in a friendly way.

Attention and dialogue are underscored by students, because they create relaxed moments in the classroom and facilitate relations between students and teachers. To engage in dialogue, in the students' view, means dealing with subjects that arouse their interest, talking, and exchanging opinions on the major decisions to be taken by the school.

Concerning the way teachers treat students, the majority of the students report that the teachers give them advice and talk to them – between 57% in the Federal District and 75% in Maceió.

*I think it is all wrong the way it is, you know. It is too much humiliation for the students. She (the principal) humiliates the students all the time. Sometimes, this is even cause for violence in the school.* (Focal group with students, public school, Federal District).

The lack of communication between teachers and students provokes revolt among the latter, regardless of their age or grade. This attitude may influence the self-esteem of the students, who refuse to be ignored. The teachers who are concerned only with content teaching are sharply criticized for not being interested in interacting with the class: He just teaches classes (...) he doesn't talk at all. He never interrupts the lesson to ask if any of the students has doubts.

Classrooms situations are often uncomfortable for the teachers, too, since many of them think that the students do not treat them with due respect. The problem is graver in private schools, where there are students who think that, since they pay for their studies, they have the right to face up to the teachers and school employees.

*They use their financial status to impose upon the teachers. They often treat us as if we were their servants. (...) In this school, there are cases of teachers who simply are unable to teach classes* (Focal group with teachers, private school, Fortaleza).

Students, in some cases, behave in an authoritarian way, humiliating or insulting the teachers or, in extreme cases, using their parents' power and prestige to force the school to dismiss the teacher whom they dislike. According to an inspector: They respect no one, over here. The students do whatever they want, and even the teachers are afraid to take action.

### 3.2.2 RELATIONS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND PRINCIPALS AND OTHER SCHOOL ACTORS

Principals are praised by the students when they create the opportunity for dialogue, give advice and get involved with the students for different reasons such as:

- communicativeness;
- when they meet the students' demands;
- when they show flexibility in handling situations.

According to some of the parents, a good principal must have attitudes that demonstrate his or her concern with the students. They also emphasized the principal's talents and intellectual skills, as well as his/her being capable of commanding respect, both in and outside school.

The students do have complaints about the principals. Among the most frequent criticisms are:

- principals do not visit the classrooms;
- they do not meet with class representatives;
- they keep distance from the daily life of the school;
- they act in an authoritarian way;
- they do not treat the students equally, and they behave differently in the presence of the parents.

Despite relationship difficulties among the different school actors, the schools remains as a space of sociability for the youngsters, where important learning takes place, since the ways of life of the subjects who interact in the school environment propitiate material and symbolic exchanges.

From this perspective, it can be seen that the schools that base their organization on democratic principles, and take the students' opinions into account when stipulating rules and regulations attain a much higher degree of observance of these rules. In such schools, the student feels less tempted to test the limits of what the adults see as acceptable behavior. Since the rules were defined by the majority, he will feel the demand for good conduct as coming from them all.

## 4. THE SCHOOL, SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND RACISM

This chapter deals with the imaginary dimensions of the meaning of school in the lives of students, taking into account their strategic importance for the youngsters' future, as well as the evaluations by the different actors concerning educational quality and school performance. From the perspective of exclusion and social discrimination – with special emphasis on racism – the perceptions and attitudes of the different members of the school community are dealt with, and incorporated into the debate on symbolic and institutional violences.

Although the school is seen as the key to opportunities for a better life, it may also be a place of social exclusion. That means schools may discriminate and stigmatize, marginalizing the individual by formal or informal means in regard to his citizenship rights and access to study opportunities, professionalization, work, culture, leisure, among the other goods and services civilization can offer. Thus, with a view to contributing to the construction of an anti-violence culture, it makes sense to deal with the discrimination, intolerance and exclusion that occur in school, even when they do not degenerate into threats, fights and fatal episodes, that is, when they do not take the form of physical violence proper.

We must stress here the conceptual construction that is being presented in works promoted by UNESCO, in which social exclusion is understood as the lack of incorporation, or incomplete incorporation, of part of the population into the social and political community (Abramovay et al., 1999). Since these individuals are excluded from the mainstream of social contact, they are simultaneously denied their citizenship rights, such as equality before the law and public institutions, the protection of the State, and access to different opportunities, such as study, professionalization, work, culture, leisure, among the other goods and services civilization can offer.

In this research social exclusion is understood as more than economic inequality. It encompasses cultural and institutional dimensions and processes, by means of which several segments of the Brazilian society become and remain cut off from the social contract, deprived of the exercise of citizenship, unattended by public institutions, and abandoned by the State.

One of the sociocultural axes of exclusion is the racial issue, which is here dealt with in terms of perceptions, and illustrated by examples of discrimination. Racism is indeed a form of social exclusion embedded in Brazilian society in general, and in the school system in particular, sometimes explicitly and other times disguised as attitudes of pseudo-cordiality, as documented in the present survey.

#### 4.1. THE MEANINGS OF SCHOOL

School, from the students' point of view, can be seen as a means of access to the exercise of citizenship or, on the contrary, as a mechanism of social exclusion. In the first instance school, education, and the teaching-learning process function as a kind of moral safe-conduct, a passport for entry into society.

Moreover, in modern societies education is becoming progressively more important as a requisite for access to work opportunities, and the latter, no doubt, is the essential pre-condition for human survival. At this point, where study and work intersect, one of the gravest social exclusion problems is found, where good quality education opens up opportunities and bad quality education makes exclusion even more pronounced.

It should be noted that most of the students have a favorable opinion about school. More than half of them believe that school does teach them something, the percentages varying from a minimum of 50% in Salvador to a maximum of 68% in Cuiabá. Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore the other side of these data: the high percentage of those who affirm that school teaches little or nothing: 50% in Salvador, 49% in the Federal District, 47% in São Paulo. In other state capitals (around 40%), the segment of the student body having a negative perception of the education offered to them is high, seeing it as inadequate.

The greatest numbers of members of the technical-pedagogical staff affirming that school teaches much and well are found in Vitória (75%)

and Manaus (70%). In Recife (48%), Florianópolis (47%) and Salvador (43%), a more negative view is expressed.

Despite the critical perception of schools as a place for learning, they appear also in the students' imaginary as a place that is appreciated for several other attributes. In fact, in the opinion of these and other actors, school is a privileged space for socialization, attitude and opinion forming and personal development.

#### **BOX I – A better future**

##### **Focal group with students, public school, Recife; private school, Salvador**

*I want to study and to be able to work in a job with fair pay, to help my family, specially my mother, and to give a better future to the child I intend to have, in the future (...)*

*(...) I want to get a job, do something to help at home, to help my parents, to help my grandparents, to give a better life to my family, not just to buy things for myself.*

These expectations of a “better life” for the youngsters can also be found among some of the principals, teachers and parents, both in public and in private schools, stressing primarily the access to socially valued positions.

Other data show that four-fifths of the students believe that school does teach them things that will be useful in their lives and for their future.

## **4.2 SCHOOL AS A PLACE OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

The less privileged classes experience exclusion as a cultural, social and institutional phenomenon. Access to school does not invariably guarantee work and better salaries. When students realize this fact, they may lose interest in studies. “A friend of mine has already finished school, up to the last grade. He has taken a lot of courses, but he is still not working.” They also refer to teachers salaries: “What for should I learn? To make the same money you make? No, I don't need that.”

Nevertheless, schooling is seen as conducive to social ascension, since

the jobs that accept low education levels are underpaid and the most coveted positions require a degree. For that reason, many students see the university entrance exams as their main goal, and prefer to study in private, rather than in public schools. “If you intend to go to college, then it is more complicated if you went to a public school. The education is not so good, there.” The teachers also agree that private school students have brighter perspectives, due to their parents' economic power and to the fact that they have more time available for studying.

#### **BOX 2 - University entrance exams**

##### **Focal group with teachers, private school, Federal District;**

*As I see it, our students, with a little effort, will be able to pass the entrance exams, if not on the first try, then on the second. Their parents are very well-off financially, and can afford to send them to college. In general, I see very good prospects for their future. It is different for an underprivileged student, who has to work all day IN ORDER to pay for night school.*

The chances of public school students gaining admission to universities are rather flimsier, particularly in the case of the most prestigious and sought-after courses. According to a public school student from Fortaleza, “only private school students take the entrance exams for Medical School”.

#### **4.2.1 SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND DISCRIMINATION PATTERNS**

Social exclusion and discrimination manifest not only through disparities in educational quality, access to good schools and the availability of time and adequate educational material, but also through the attitudes assumed by the school itself and by fellow-students. In that sense, it is possible to distinguish three patterns of social exclusion and discrimination happening at school.

The first refers to the way public schools and their students are generally viewed. Many of them are regarded as “social outlaws”, ignorant, rude and, therefore, harmful to society.

They feel rejected by society when they study in a public school such as

ours, that is, a school working in very bad conditions. Then, as to prejudice regarding the school, I believe some people do have it, and not only in what refers to the structure, but also to the education offered, from elementary to high school. I think people have a prejudiced view of public schools. (Focal group with teachers, public school, Goiânia).

The second pattern refers to the relations between students of the same school system – either public or private – where unequal economic conditions can be found. There is reason to believe that the students who are discriminated against react by withdrawing or becoming aggressive.

### BOX 3 – Bumping from others

#### **Focal group with students, public school, Vitória;**

*It is [[plain]] EASY to see that the people who discriminate the most are [[the ones that]] THOSE WHO have more money. And the ones who don't have IT, so as not to be discriminated against by the ones who have, just lay low. Some never leave the classroom during recess. You don't want to hang around someone who is eating something, [[so as]] AND [[not to]] feel bad ABOUT IT. So that people won't say you are bumping from others. Really, these kids feel excluded during recess-time, they stay away from the ones who can afford going to the canteen. They withdraw a little.*

The third pattern happens in private schools, with students of lower economic conditions, such as those who receive scholarships and THE children of teachers and employees.

### 4.3 RACIAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND NOTIONS OF RACISM

Although institutionally disguised, violence related to discriminatory practices resulting from preconceptions concerning race are evident within the school community. Many students, in particular, report cases of discrimination. A testimony collected in a focal group with parents shows the existence of racial prejudice in the schools, in this case against a white student, who perceives herself as discriminated against by her Negro colleagues.

*My daughter is discriminated against at school, but it's the other way around. The majority of the students in her public school are black, and my*

*daughter is white. They even threatened to cut her hair, because she has long, blond, straight hair. They say: "What is this faded blonde doing here?"* (Focal group with parents, public school, Florianópolis).

Besides differences in access according to the administrative dependence of schools, whites and non-whites are also segregated according to shifts, the number of non-whites being larger in the night shift: from a minimum of 23% in Florianópolis to a maximum of 82% in Salvador.

In fact, many students, members of the technical-pedagogical staff and parents recognize that there is racial prejudice at school. The fact is stressed mainly by the students who were victimized, and are called by race-denoting derogatory terms, such as nigger, trash, stinky, and kinky-hair.

Private schools principals and teachers affirm that no race prejudice episodes occur in their schools, due to the small number of blacks studying there. "There is not much prejudice here, you just don't see any (...) Few students are black", which fact may be an expression of structural racism, demonstrated by the disparities in the access of whites and blacks to public and private schools.

The existence of racial hostility is beyond doubt, and, in stigmatizing and marginalizing the victims of prejudice, and this hostility may impair their academic trajectory. Many of the testimonies given by students and teachers show the predominance of an ideology according to which beauty standards are associated to characteristics of the white race: beautiful is being white, tall and blonde.

#### **BOX 4 – There is prejudice when you are black**

##### **Focal group with parents, private school, Goiânia;**

*There is not much I can say, so far, because my son has been in this school for only a month. Before I moved to Goiânia, I had chosen another school, but, as I found out, there seems to be some prejudice in that other school, maybe color prejudice, I don't know for sure. I had left the papers, so that the principal or the pedagogical coordinator could take care of the enrollment procedure, and they kept them for a week. After that, they called me and told me that they were having difficulty getting a vacancy for my son (they had told me before there would be no vacancy problems), and that I would have to enroll*



*him in another school. On the day I took the papers to the school I was not dressed up, I was moving into a new house and unpacking things, and, since I am black, that made things more difficult. I had heard about the other school, I went there and was very well received by the pedagogical director, who is a Japanese. He received me very nicely, gave me all the instructions, it was very good. Then, appearances count a lot when you are black. You cannot go around wearing sloppy clothes. Yes, my son did suffer prejudice, since he was not accepted at the other school.*

In the Brazilian literature on the theme of race, there is constant mention to the fact that racism manifests itself through complex forms, and that the majority of the population do not even admit to being racists (Guimarães et al., 2000). At a first moment, it is not very easy to detect racism in the schools. Much to the contrary, the existence of any sort of discrimination tends to be denied.

The students report that racial prejudice in the school environment comes from the school administration and from teachers alike, and is directed against students and teachers, and there is also prejudice among the students. Few interviewees admit to being racists themselves. Blacks put the blame on whites, blonde students accuse dark-skinned people, teachers point to students, students blame the school administration, and children blame parents. The conclusion is: prejudice is always on the part of someone else.

The Brazilian literature on racism stresses its banalization, in which racist attitudes are disguised by a pseudo-cordiality, the so-called “cordial racism” (Guimarães, 1999).

Many students say there is no prejudice, only kidding remarks. Nevertheless, nicknames such as “tar lollipop”, “pitch lollipop”, “Nescoa”, and “chocolate” are situated on the borderline between kidding and aggression.

## BOX 5 – You can hold hands with a little white thing

### **Focal group with students, public school, São Paulo;**

*It's true, I don't like blacks. Seriously, I don't like the color of my race. I don't like to hang out or to go out with black girls. You just can't face that black thing in front of you. With a little white thing it's different, you can hold hands with her, you can take her to the mall. How are you going to take a black girl to a mall? Malls are for pretty, well-dressed girls. They (his friends) think that I go the mall to show off my girlfriend. You've got to be with a pretty girl, that you can't deny. In the mall or anywhere, hanging out with friends. That's what I think, they like to go to their friends and say: "look, my girlfriend is real hot, she is white and has blue eyes". Now, how can you go to your friends and show off a dark-skinned or a black girl, with kinky hair and all?"*

Parents and some members of the technical-pedagogical staff, speaking in focal groups, have also observed that the use of adjectives disguised as kidding remarks can be the expression of racial prejudice.

*What I have to say is that my daughter still has to go through that (discrimination). She has curly hair, then her straight-haired colleagues call her "steel wool hair" (focal group with parents, public school, Florianópolis).*

Some of the teachers also stressed that, although racial prejudice is more often directed towards black persons, it is also important to mention the discrimination existing within the school environment against people of indigenous and Japanese origin, and also against whites.

The school community manifested different opinions about racism in their midst. The ways their perceptions were expressed, whatever their content, carry evidence that racism not only exists, but also has become acceptable and "natural" in the school environment.

## 5. VIOLENCES AT SCHOOL: EPISODES, AGGRESSORS AND VICTIMS

According to Debarbieux (1999), violence at school can be associated with three different dimensions:

1. to the great difficulties found in school management, resulting in inadequate structures;
2. to context, that is to say, the violence that originates outside the school and is carried into it. Schools become sieged and penetrated by gangs, by drug traffic and by the growing visibility of social exclusion within the school community;
3. to factors internal to the schools, that are specific to each unit. Safe schools can be found in notoriously violent neighborhoods and vice-versa.

This survey approaches violence in a broad sense, not searching for its universal meaning, but rather trying to understand its significance for the relevant actors – the groups that compose the school community in a number of Brazilian capital-cities. This chapter focuses on physical violence, small thefts, vandalism, verbal offenses, different kinds of rudeness, pushing, harassment and humiliation, that represent the more visible face of the phenomenon. Symbolic and institutional violences were dealt with in the preceding chapter.

This survey documents several types of violence, according to the testimonies of the different actors interviewed – students, teachers, other members of the school community and parents. In order to better understand the phenomenon within the school environment, situations were classified as follows:

1. violence against an individual, which may be expressed verbally or physically, or may take the form of threats, fights, sexual violence, coercion by the use of weapons;

2. violence against personal property, such as thefts, stealing and burglary;
3. violence against buildings, such as vandalism and depredation of school facilities.

## 5.1. TYPES OF VIOLENCE – VIOLENCE AGAINST AN INDIVIDUAL

### 5.1.1. THREATS

The first type of violence against an individual consists of threats, understood as explicitly vowing to cause damage or to violate the physical or moral integrity, the freedom or the property of another. The use of threats can occur among the students and among members of the technical-pedagogical staff, and they can also be directed against parents or employees.

Threats are more frequently mentioned by the students from São Paulo and the Federal District (40%), and less often by those from Belém (21%). With the exception of the Federal District, in all the state capitals the proportions of members of the technical-pedagogical staff who reported threats are substantially higher than those of students. This does not necessarily mean that the threats were directed at them, although that may also be the case.

Most threats by students against teachers are motivated by grades and lack of discipline in the classroom: If the teacher is not a little nice (...), he ends up getting in trouble. If the teacher is very strict about everything he gets in trouble. Threats to principals generally occur when the latter resort to stronger measures, such as suspension and expulsion. The agents of discipline and inspectors get threatened for issuing notes and warnings concerning undisciplined behavior and being late to classes. This type of threat is also directed against policemen from the school squads: They say they're gonna get me, they're gonna shoot me, but you can feel they just mean to scare you”.

Without stating it directly, the students react aggressively to routines adopted by teachers and viewed as violent, and, more generally, to the imposition of authority by the educational institution, in the form of rules of discipline and learning evaluation procedures. But they seldom explain the reasons or the parameters they use for viewing these school life rituals as violations to be countered with threats.

The threats may or may not translate into physical violence, generating an atmosphere of continuous tension. Cases have been reported where these threats actually degenerated into physical aggression committed by the students, which generally happens when they are expelled from the classroom, suspended or prevented from entering it, due to being late to class.

Teachers, principals, and other members of the technical-pedagogical staff often express feelings of insecurity on account of this atmosphere of intimidation that pervades the school.

Among the threats directed against the school community are bomb threats, mostly false, and aimed at disturbing the school routine.

### 5.1.2 FIGHTS

Fights are one of the most frequent types of violence occurring in the schools, and they range from expressions of juvenile sociability to brutal conducts. Among the students, this type of violence usually starts with verbal attacks. At this point, it becomes difficult to set precise limits between different types of violence, such as fights and threats. In the schools, the most common are limit-situations between verbal squabbles and arguments.

Fights are seen as commonplace, suggesting the banalization of violence and its legitimization as a form of conflict settling. Very often, play among students degenerates into fighting, with or without serious consequences. However, it can be seen that some types of play are intrinsically violent, they start as play and end up as brawls.

Everything is a motive for fights: football, food, grades, nicknames and taking objects belonging to others. Staring in the eyes is also seen as disrespectful and defying, and may lead to confrontation. Bumping into someone may be interpreted as carelessness or as a provocation, and may lead to violent fighting.

## BOX 6 – You can know for sure you're already dead

### Focal group with students, public school, São Paulo;

*He's the type of guy who, if you bump into him, you can know for sure you're already dead. Real dead! There was a fight here, they got the guy and rubbed his face against the wall, a stone wall, you know. They rubbed his face on it and it got all torn. Then they threw him on a thorn bush.*

Data indicate that the prevailing attitude among the students is to avoid resorting to police authority or asking help from the families. They prefer to solve conflicts through group violence, which may lead to more confrontation. This pattern of reacting to aggression seems to be an important component of a culture where violence gets incorporated into the students' universe. In that way, fights are started and accounts are squared. There are also rivalries among students of different grades: *They think that, just because they're in third grade, they can boss over the whole school.*

Rivalry also occurs between different school-shifts: *“No, not at night. But I have also studied here in the afternoon. I've seen guys carrying 38's. There are bad guys in the afternoon shift too, and not only in the night shift.*

Youngsters who study in the night shift report strong prejudice on the part of day shift students, and the fact was confirmed by members of the technical-pedagogical staff. It is said that, being older, night shift students would be suspected of dealing with drugs or being associated with robbers. (...) *Then a kid made a heavy joke, the other one felt insulted and they kicked up a fight. They're night shift students. (...) In day time, we never see confrontations, except with little kids, who fight all the time.*

Rivalry occurs also among students from different schools and different neighborhoods. There is also demarcation of territory, “ours” and “theirs”, leading to competition and fights among the groups. *We live here. (...) We can't cross over to the other side (...) people from outside can't come in.*

The presence of strangers within the school is perceived as a rupture of its physical limits and of its space. *I don't mean to criticize, but students from other schools are the ones who do it.* These patterns strengthen the dichotomy between insiders and outsiders. There's also “solidarity”, which compels students from the same school to fight students from another school, to defend colleagues whom they see as threatened.

### 5.1.3 SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual harassment may have grave consequences for young people, generating a permissive culture, in which such acts are not viewed as serious and subject to punishment. In this study, sexual harassment is understood in a broader sense, including several forms of sexual intimidation such as looking, making gestures, telling jokes, obscene comments, exhibitionism, and other forms of abuse, such as proposals, insinuations, and apparently unintentional physical contact, as well as gossip, words written on restroom walls, etc.

It is worth mentioning that sexual harassment is one of the most common forms of violence by teachers against students, particularly against women, although it may occur among youths and involve other school actors. It ranges from “only kidding” to rape. The “only kidding”, or jesting comments, may be addressed by students to teachers and vice-versa. They usually generate embarrassment in the person to whom they are addressed: *They're nothing like innocent playfulness. They're uncalled-for rudeness (...), but sometimes they reduce the person to silence and to pretending it doesn't matter.* This sort of sexual violence has become banalized, and is seen as “normal”, which contributes to its persistence: *That's pretty normal. The things they say!*

One of the testimonies in the survey reported a proposal, made by a teacher, concerning sexual encounters in motels and payment for “services provided”, thus encouraging involvement with prostitution.

*It also happened at my school, there were cases of harassment. There was a teacher I used to talk to (...) at school. I was out of work, looking for a job and in desperate need of money. Then he said to me: 'I know an easy way for you to make money'. I didn't care much, I thought that he was just kidding. Then I asked him: 'Teacher, what kind of work is that?' He said: 'It's something to do with some colleagues of mine. It's easy money' I said: 'Then, explain, cause I need to work'. (...) He said it was about homosexual dates, you know. (...) Then I put an end to the conversation. I didn't say anything to anybody, but I told him that if things like that ever happened again, I would get him into real trouble, I would tell the principal (...)* (Focal group with students, public school, Vitória).

In their remarks, many people shift the blame to girls, who supposedly provoke the boys by wearing “unusual” or “sexy” clothes – “tiny shorts,

mini-skirts. Women hardly wear blouses, nowadays...” Trying to have some control over the clothes worn by the girls, some principals adopt dress codes.

According to many reports, harassment by the teachers gives rise to more rigorous measures, such as law-suits started by the victims. Sometimes the threat of filing a complaint at the police department is not carried through, for fear of retaliation.

Rapes do occur in the school vicinity, resulting in fear and dropping out of school. Although most victims are girls, boys are also subject to it.

#### 5.1.4. THE USE OF WEAPONS

The use of weapons in fights and conflicts, in these times when violence is rampant in society at large, has come to the schools. Some students mention the need to command respect and to protect and defend themselves as justification for carrying weapons.

However, the availability of a weapon increases the risk of confrontation and homicides, as stressed by the national and international literature on the issue.

In Brazil, research data indicate that firearms represent only a small part of the weapons found at school. The others are the so-called “white weapons”, chains, bats and clubs. *Sometimes people think that weapon means guns, but there are several types of weapons.* Many say that a knife, a pair of scissors may also be weapons. Lots of kids go to school carrying knives, daggers, pen-knives. It's always been like that. According to one of the teachers: *I had a student in my class who came to school everyday armed with a small knife.*

Principals and other members of the technical-pedagogical staff report that it is common to find weapons of this sort among the students. Some parents think it is quite normal for the youngsters to carry white weapons to defend themselves.

Students say that it is very easy to buy firearms through the agency of friends or acquaintances. They demonstrate to be familiar with the purchasing procedure: (...) *you can pay for it later. You pay little by little, in installments.*



In many places a permit for acquiring firearms is not required. The police themselves appear as suppliers, in the testimonies collected. According to principals, many students carry toy weapons to school, so as to intimidate others. This resorting to toys suggests how important weapons are in the imaginary of the students.

As shown in Table 4, a proportion varying from 9% to 18% of the students reported having witnessed students, parents or teachers carrying firearms within the school grounds. On the other hand, the proportions found among the technical-pedagogical staff are much smaller, ranging from 2% to 8%, suggesting that firearm possession goes largely unnoticed and unreported.

**TABLE 4 – Percentage of students \* and of members of the technical-pedagogical staff who have witnessed weapon carrying by students, teachers or parents, according to capital-cities of the Units of the Federation, 2000**

Capitals	Witnessing of weapon carrying			
	Students		Technical-pedagogical staff	
	Firearms	Others	Firearms	Others
Federal District	18	15	5	10
Goiânia	11	14	7	18
Cuiabá	17	16	8	13
Manaus	9	12	6	13
Belém	9	12	7	10
Fortaleza	12	12	8	13
Recife	12	10	8	11
Maceió	11	14	2	8
Salvador	10	12	2	14
Vitória	12	15	3	12
Rio de Janeiro	10	9	5	6
São Paulo	15	14	7	10
Florianópolis	12	20	4	18
Porto Alegre	17	16	6	19

Source: National Research on Violence, AIDS and Drugs in Schools, UNESCO, 2001.

Observation: The students were asked: “Check if you have witnessed in this school: students, parents, teachers or employees carrying a firearm (guns, etc.) Students, parents, teachers or employees carrying other types of weapons (knives, clubs, daggers etc.) “. The percentages refer to affirmative answers only.

\* Expanded data

The presence of weapons of any sort on the school grounds indicates not only the existence of effective and explicit violence, but also that such violence has become commonplace, since these weapons, even when not used, are now part of the school scenario. To witness weapon carrying, whether these weapons are firearms or not, means to be on grounds that, at any moment, may turn into a battleground.

Table 5 demonstrates that the use of weapons at school seems to reflect the fact that these weapons tend to be accepted in the home environment. In the focal groups, several youngsters declared that, at home, they have access to firearms belonging to their parents or other family members, who keep them hidden or stowed away.

#### **BOX 7 – Then he drew a gun**

##### **Focal group with students, public school, Rio de Janeiro and Goiânia;**

*I used to play wrestle with a kid, here at school. One day, as we were playing, I hit him really hard. Then he said: 'I'm gonna fetch my uncle and he's gonna get you'. On the next day (...) 'hey, punk, you hit my nephew, now you're gonna suffer the consequences', and he drew a gun. Then I said: 'But I always play with your nephew. The other day, I just hit him a little harder. When he hits me harder I do not complain, but he did. That's what happened.' Then he called his nephew and asked: 'is that true?', and he answered 'yes'. 'For this time, you're clear. But next time, you won't be.'*

*Just because I didn't wait for him to walk to school, (because) he said he had to go somewhere else. When I got here, he cornered me against a wall, in the classroom, and he drew a knife at me (...) I told him: cut, cut, and you're gonna get your share. Then he pressed the knife against my face (...) Someone went to the school office to tell them what was happening (...) He keeps doing things like that, just for fun, but one mistake and someone may get badly hurt.*

**TABLE 5 – Percentage of students \*, by type of contact with firearms, according to capital-cities of the Units of the Federation, 2000**

Capitals	Your parents or family members have firearms at home	You have easy access to firearms at school or in the school vicinity	You know who sells firearms and where	You have or have had a firearm
Federal District	22	21	13	7
Goiânia	22	14	10	4
Cuiabá	30	17	14	6
Manaus	19	12	6	4
Belém	18	9	9	5
Fortaleza	22	11	6	4
Recife	24	10	5	2
Maceió	20	11	6	3
Salvador	19	13	7	4
Vitória	24	12	8	4
Rio de Janeiro	20	8	8	4
São Paulo	19	19	11	4
Florianópolis	21	14	12	3
Porto Alegre	32	13	14	5

Source: National Research on Violence, AIDS and Drugs in Schools, UNESCO, 2001.

Observation: The students were asked: "Check what is true:" (the answer categories are listed in the table). The percentages refer to affirmative answers only.

\* Expanded data.

The culture of violence is also sustained by coercion and by the active or passive complicity of many people. There is a cover-up on the part of students who know who sells weapons, who comes armed to school, and how to come armed to school. The law of silence is in force, and students are compelled not to say a word about these occurrences.

In the midst of a culture of violence, when the use of weapons has become widespread, the sexual differences relating to violence become blurred. According to members of the school community interviewed in the survey, there seems to be an increase in the number of girls caught with white weapons, particularly when involved in fights.

*Small pen-knives, knives. Sometimes, accidentally, you get to see them in the restroom. Because they hide them on their bellies. Once I caught her, and*

*I said: "Who are you gonna pierce, that you need to go around armed?" She said: (...) "I'm gonna get her in the classroom and pierce her belly open". Then I said: "Girl, why all this violence?" And she said: "I stab anybody who messes with me"* (Focal group with students, public school, Curitiba).

Among the students, there are complaints concerning the lack of effective measures to prevent the entry of weapons into the school. In some public and private schools, students are noticeably concerned with effective control of the access of armed people to the school. Formerly, there were the so-called searches at the school entrance, when students carrying weapons were caught, but these measures were discontinued: *There was a time when the principal had everybody searched at the entrance, men and women alike. They found a 38 and several knives.*

Reports by some of the teachers demonstrate the difficulties faced by the attempts to restrain the entry of armed students. They observed that the Tutelage Council prohibits the school to take measures of any sort towards armed students. The most they can do is to forward the case to the Council, who will be in charge of evaluating it and taking the appropriate measures.

## 5.2 VIOLENCE AGAINST PERSONAL PROPERTY

### 5.2.1 THEFTS AND STEALING

Judging by the testimonies, thefts and stealing seem to be viewed as normal. Both consist in the taking of others' property, although stealing takes place without the victim noticing it. However, in most testimonies, the term theft is used with both meanings.

Both students and technical-pedagogical staff members report the theft of cars and personal property within the school grounds, as shown in Table 6. Among the students, the percentages of those reporting thefts vary from 38% in Porto Alegre and Florianópolis to 20% in Belém. Among technical-pedagogical staff members, these percentages are higher, ranging from 62% in Porto Alegre to 30% in Maceió.

In the informers' opinion, the small pilferings are perpetrated by school insiders, which causes these acts to be regarded as normal, and students, coordinators and principals alike tend to underplay their gravity, and, in some cases, to disregard the acts as such: *There are some thefts in the class-*

*rooms, nothing of much value.* Just silly pilferings, taking things from colleagues, like school material. Some times money, small sums like one real. The disrespect to others, the violence that the theft represents to the victim, and the violation of ethical principles are thereby overlooked. Typical juvenile behaviors were presented as justification for small thefts, considered normal at that age. It's an adolescent thing. *Sometimes, the adolescent likes to dare, he just has to be different...*

**TABLE 6 – Percentage of students \* and of members of the technical-pedagogical staff who gave accounts of thefts of cars and personal property within the school grounds, according to capital-cities of the Units of the Federation, 2000**

Capitals	Accounts of thefts	
	Students	Technical-pedagogical staff
Federal District	36	58
Goiânia	27	46
Cuiabá	30	32
Manaus	29	42
Belém	20	41
Fortaleza	27	33
Recife	29	39
Maceió	26	30
Salvador	26	43
Vitória	29	41
Rio de Janeiro	24	32
São Paulo	26	46
Florianópolis	38	42
Porto Alegre	38	62

Source: National Research on Violence, AIDS and Drugs in Schools, UNESCO, 2001.

Observation: The students were asked: "Check if you know they have occurred in this school: thefts of cars, tape-players, tennis shoes, books etc.". The percentages refer to affirmative answers only.

\* Expanded data.

Among the informers, opinions diverge as to the degree and frequency of thefts and stealing at school, but the majority agree that the more serious occurrences are committed by persons from outside the school community, who enter at night, on weekends and during the vacation period. A dichotomy is thereby created between the truly violent space of the streets and the relatively less insecure space of the school.

When students are seen as perpetrators of thefts and stealing, the youngsters feel insecure about leaving their belongings in places out of their control: They have to take their knapsacks to the patio during recess, because there are students who remain in the classroom as their class is at physical education, and they take everything they can find: things, belongings and money that their classmates bring to school.

In the survey, the following occurrences were identified: small thefts of school material – pens, erasers, pencil boxes, small amounts of money, and also of cell-phones and purses.

### 5.3 VIOLENCE AGAINST SCHOOL FACILITIES

Damage to school buildings and equipment, without theft of property, consists in an act of social reaction against the school. Researches conducted in the United States demonstrate that vandalism is associated to school administrations that are either authoritarian or indifferent and remiss; as well as to principals and teachers who are not receptive to students, to a high turnover of teachers, and, finally, to the application of punishments. Thus, one must try to interpret the messages disguised in the acts of violence against school property, which may have several meanings: the need to call attention, to show off to school-mates, to express revolt or, according to Day (1996), *the wish to leave a mark in the world, since the students who do it are letting out their rebellion against the government or the parents, against society, against the school. They do graffiti to express their will, their desire.*

Graffiti, destruction of fences, windows, walls, and damage to equipment, together with thefts, appear as the most common forms of vandalism pointed out by the several categories of interviewees. As can be seen in Table 7, vandalism, in its many forms, is very frequent.

Graffiti occurs both in public and in private schools, particularly in rest-rooms, consisting in love declarations, messages about the legalization of

marijuana – “Yes, I smoke. Legalize” and “stoned with pot” – and, less frequently, protests against the government. There are also names, references to gangs, dirty words and pornography directed to some people in particular. In the women's restrooms, there are also sentences of this sort and love declarations.

**TABLE 7 – Percentage of students \* and of members of the technical-pedagogical staff who gave accounts of vandalism in the school, according to capital-cities of the Units of the Federation, 2000**

Capitals	Accounts of vandalism	
	Students	Technical-pedagogical staff
Federal District	19	45
Goiânia	16	48
Cuiabá	19	34
Manaus	13	41
Belém	8	31
Fortaleza	8	32
Recife	17	59
Maceió	7	32
Salvador	11	52
Vitória	17	41
Rio de Janeiro	11	34
São Paulo	16	49
Florianópolis	18	34
Porto Alegre	26	61

Source: National Research on Violence, AIDS and Drugs in Schools, UNESCO, 2001.

Observation: The students were asked: “Check if you know it has occurred in this school: vandalism”. The percentages refer to affirmative answers only.

\* Expanded data

There are accounts of explosion of bombs in restrooms, demonstrating the students' complicity in not denouncing the colleagues responsible for the act.

## BOX 8 – Who blew the bomb?

### **Focal group with students, public school, Vitória;**

*Someone blew a bomb last year (...) The kid put together a pile, put a cigarette inside and took it to the restroom. The minute the wick caught fire there was this terrible burst. Then they called the police, they came and investigated, but found nothing. The kids in our class kind of knew who did it, but we were not going to give them away. For quite some time, the kid stayed in the clear in the bomb case. But then they started suspecting another kid who had done nothing. Then we were in quite a dilemma, but, afterwards, the boy was found out and expelled from school.*

Besides the episodes of vandalism within the school, parents and teachers report having their cars scratched by students.

These testimonies strengthen the hypothesis that there is no respect for collective property – desks, doors, classrooms, etc. – and demonstrate that school is still distant from the students and the community.

But, as one of the teachers rightly puts it, the school environment should be taken good care of, especially since it influences the morale and the sense of belonging to the school. Also, in caring for the school, we may be able to put a stop to vandalism, to the culture of violence: *When the thing is nice, I preserve it. But when it looks bad, everybody damages it a little more. If the bus seat is torn, people start to rip off pieces from it, every one takes a little piece.*

## 5.4 AGGRESSORS AND VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

According to reports by the different actors, regardless of the type of violence, perpetrators are predominantly students and gang members, the latter equally divided in students and non-students. Policemen appear more as perpetrators than as victims of violence. Finally, teachers, employees and other adults associated with the schools are seldom mentioned in either category, namely, either as victims or as perpetrators of violence.

It is also worth noticing that students are the most frequent victims, followed by teachers, employees and principals. The least mentioned victims are policemen, in nearly all state capitals investigated.



Physical violence was the most common category in all groups of victims, followed by violence against property. Last came verbal violence, which, more often, is not perceived as a form of violence.

This chapter has intended to provide a synthesis of the notions presented and the points stressed in the accounts of violent episodes both by the victims and the aggressors, all of them involved, as agents or beneficiaries, in the Brazilian school system. It was possible to observe, by means of quantitative and qualitative data, that the schools have been going through situations in which transgressions, aggressive acts and episodes of different degrees of seriousness become ever more frequent.

It was observed that many youngsters are either victims or agents of violence. However, even those who were not directly involved reported several cases that had come to their knowledge or were witnessed by them within the school. This proximity contributes to the banalization of violent behavior, where the occurrence of thefts, stealing, attacks, rape, physical aggression, vengeance, homicides and vandalism, among others, is viewed as trivial. Gratuitous violence is regarded as a matter of fact, and fear is often expressed in the testimonies.

In schools, physical violence is the most visible aspect of the phenomenon. Confrontation, either corporal or armed, mobilizes a considerable part of the discussions, appearing as a point of reference for further debate on the issue, leading to mentions of other types of violence. In some situations, the resource to violence is justified as a form of personal defense or as a protective attitude towards friends, towards the weak, or as a response to the action of a stronger subject. In others, it appears as a thoughtless reaction to some provocation. Regardless of the justification employed, violence is a form of negotiation that excludes dialogue, even when it is motivated by multiple circumstances and cloaked in moral terms – as the protection of friends.

To deal with violence in the schools means to deal with an intersection of elements, namely, with a phenomenon of a new order, rather than the sum of two separate objects: “school” and “violence”. It is a phenomenon on its own right, since it involves social practices that, in order to be understood, must be seen in such a way as not to be reduced to mere extensions of violent practices or school issues.

## 6. THE REPERCUSSIONS OF VIOLENCES AND ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

The aim of this chapter is to map and identify the multiple repercussions of school violence. Firstly, an attempt is made to understand the causes and the processes through which school becomes the scene of violence or, reversely, stops being it. Next, access is given to the opinions of the school community as a whole on what should be done about school violence. Finally, proposals are presented taking as basis the results obtained in the present research, specialized literature and UNESCO's previous work.

### 6.1 THE REPERCUSSIONS OF VIOLENCES

Violent situations jeopardize what should be the identity of a school – a place for positive sociability, for learning ethical values and shaping critical minds, based on dialogue, in the acknowledgement of diversity and in the civilizing heritage of accumulated knowledge. Situations of this type affect learning and educational quality, for students as well as for teachers.

According to Table 8, nearly half of all students claim that the violences happening at school prevent them from concentrating in their studies. Also according to the same Table, between 28% (Rio de Janeiro) and 39% (Cuiabá) of the students report being upset and indignant with the violent situations that occur in their schools. The third most frequent consequence mentioned by the students is the loss of desire to go to school, expressed in numbers ranging from a minimum of 27%, in Rio de Janeiro, to a maximum of 34%, in Goiânia, Cuiabá, Manaus e Fortaleza.

**TABLE 8 – Percentage of students \*, by perception of the consequences of school violence on their performance at school, according to capitalities of the Units of the Federation, 2000**

Capitals	Consequences of school violence on academic performance		
	Unable to concentrate in studies	Gets upset, indignant	Loses desire to go to school
Federal District	46	32	31
Goiânia	46	34	34
Cuiabá	51	39	34
Manaus	52	33	34
Belém	46	28	28
Fortaleza	49	32	34
Recife	41	29	27
Maceió	46	33	29
Salvador	46	30	31
Vitória	44	34	31
Rio de Janeiro	42	28	27
São Paulo	42	32	33
Florianópolis	38	32	29
Porto Alegre	42	33	32

Source: National Research on Violence, AIDS and Drugs in Schools, UNESCO, 2001.

Observation: The students were asked: “How do you think violence affects your studies? (Check all true answers)”. The percentages refer to affirmative answers only.

\* Expanded data

Table 9 shows the percentage of students and members of the technical-pedagogical staff who miss classes on account of the violence occurring in the school environment. Students are the most affected by the consequences of non-attendance. Table 10 demonstrates the students' perceptions concerning the impact of violence on the quality of education. They were asked: “In your opinion, how does violence affect your studies? Does the atmosphere at school get oppressive? Do you feel that the quality of classes worsens?”

**TABLE 9 – Percentage of students \* and of members of the technical-pedagogical staff, by declaration of non-attendance to classes due to violence at school, according to capital-cities of the Units of the Federation, 2000**

Capitals	Non-attendance to school	
	Students	Technical-pedagogical staff
Federal District	7	1
Goiânia	7	2
Cuiabá	9	4
Manaus	8	3
Belém	6	1
Fortaleza	5	4
Recife	5	4
Maceió	4	2
Salvador	7	2
Vitória	5	0
Rio de Janeiro	7	7
São Paulo	8	3
Florianópolis	3	2
Porto Alegre	5	2

Source: National Research on Violence, AIDS and Drugs in Schools, UNESCO, 2001.

Observation: The students were asked: “During the last twelve months, did you miss school because of school violence problems?”. The percentages refer to affirmative answers only.

\* Expanded data

**TABLE 10 – Percentage of students \*, by perception of the impact of violence on the quality of education, according to capital-cities of the Units of the Federation, 2000**

Capitals	The atmosphere gets oppressive	Class quality worsens
Federal District	44	34
Goiânia	38	30
Cuiabá	42	30
Manaus	34	31
Belém	33	28
Fortaleza	36	30
Recife	35	27
Maceió	33	25
Salvador	39	31
Vitória	43	30
Rio de Janeiro	37	28
São Paulo	42	35
Florianópolis	48	29
Porto Alegre	44	30

Source: National Research on Violence, AIDS and Drugs in Schools, UNESCO, 2001.

Observation: The students were asked: “How do you think violence affects your studies? Does the atmosphere at school get oppressive? Do you feel that the quality of classes worsens?” (Check all true answers). The percentages refer to affirmative answers only.

\* Expanded data

As shown in Table 11, in what concerns the members of the technical-pedagogical staff the first consequence is the loss of motivation for work. Next comes a feeling of revolt, and the third is the difficulty to concentrate in class.

**TABLE 11 – Percentage of members of the technical-pedagogical staff, by perception of the consequences of school violence on their professional performance, according to capital-cities of the Units of the Federation, 2000**

Capitals	Your parents or family members have firearms at home	You have easy access to firearms at school or in the school vicinity	You know who sells firearms and where	You have or have had a firearm
Federal District	22	21	13	7
Goiânia	22	14	10	4
Cuiabá	30	17	14	6
Manaus	19	12	6	4
Belém	18	9	9	5
Fortaleza	22	11	6	4
Recife	24	10	5	2
Maceió	20	11	6	3
Salvador	19	13	7	4
Vitória	24	12	8	4
Rio de Janeiro	20	8	8	4
São Paulo	19	19	11	4
Florianópolis	21	14	12	3
Porto Alegre	32	13	14	5

Source: National Research on Violence, AIDS and Drugs in Schools, UNESCO, 2001.

Observation: The members of the technical-pedagogical staff were asked: “How do you think violence affects your work at school?” (Check all true answers). The percentages refer to affirmative answers only.

Teachers prefer to be transferred to safer schools, resulting in shortage of teachers in the more violent schools.

## 6.2 MEASURES AGAINST SCHOOL VIOLENCE: SUGGESTIONS PRESENTED BY THE SCHOOL ACTORS

The interviewees received a questionnaire containing an array of measures for curbing violence in the schools. The proposal for increasing police surveillance in the schools and their vicinities obtained the largest number of votes.

Also high-ranking were the proposals referring to “dialogue among students, teachers and principals” and “partnership between school and com-

munity”, the latter especially among the teachers. The data presented show that 66% of the students and 65% of the technical-pedagogical staff mention dialogue among students, parents, teachers and principals as an appropriate measure for fighting violence in the schools.

In the focal groups, students gave priority to the presence of police at school and in the neighboring area, but they are also critical of policemen as they are at present, and of the types of official security measures practiced in the schools and in their vicinity. Some students ask for more policing, while others stress their skepticism: *Nowadays, if the police gets this guy, all they'll do is to shove him into the car and then release him. If I rely on them for my own security, I'm dead”.*

In the focal groups with students, dialogue was described as direct relations among teacher, principal and students: (...) *They are feeling what we are doing here now: talk about the issue. Because when the person talks, he stops thinking silly thoughts, stops wanting to do justice with his own hands. It means sharing problems.*

Students, parents and teachers insist on measures related to the integration between school and community, aiming at curbing violence in educational institutions. One positive indicator that deserves mention is the fact that all these actors believe in a negotiated solution for the problem, since they indicate dialogue among students, parents, teachers and principals, as well as the partnership between the school and the community, as important mechanisms for curbing violence in schools.

Students insist on preventive measures of widened participation, based on the interaction between families and the school: *To improve education, both at school and in the family (...) I think dialogue also helps.* Apparently, school is viewed as an element of mediation between the students and their families, and as having the incumbency of coping with the meanings of violence both within and without its boundaries in order to fight it, dealing with aspects that extrapolate school grounds and school hours, and that are important in the students' lives.

Parents, students and the technical-pedagogical staff advocate stricter discipline measures, such as expulsion, to deal with students guilty of misdemeanor. Also mentioned as a security measure are higher walls or protection railings. In the discussions, attention was drawn to the entry

of firearms into the school grounds and to the need of searches at the school entrance, with the objective of curbing violence.

It is worth mentioning that, among many other measures, the support of psychologists is being widely used by schools, approaching violence from a psychological, rather than social perspective. Another important role is being played by culture and education, leading to the recovery of self-esteem, raising awareness about problems and inequality issues, making it possible to overcome these problems and to create solidarity. The strengthening of the students' self-esteem contributes to the fight against prejudice.

*I enjoy working with self-esteem. When the person is aware of his own worth, of his own importance, of his own capabilities, he acquires means of fighting and overcoming barriers.* (Interview with the principal of a private school, Federal District).

Two of the strategies employed in the fight against violence have yielded good results. The first is the improvement of the relations between the school and the community, and the other is the creation of channels for the students to express their views: *Students should be given greater attention, because (...) we spend most of our time in school.* Schools, therefore, are given the responsibility of dealing with violence through the creation of a more friendly and cooperative environment, in which all parties – students, teachers, parents, etc. – should be involved (Avancini, 2001).

The expectations placed on schools regarding their role as a privileged agency in the fight against both violence and the cultures of violence, on the other hand, are gaining support from experiences featuring professionals who combine the formal functions of teachers with the role of interacting with the schools and the families, and also of promoting dialogue among the students. The students also suggested the importance of more flexible curricula, that make room for artistic languages, among others that place emphasis on the lessons of life.

Also worth mentioning are the reports on the reduction of the number of cases of vandalism resulting from physical changes in the school environment attained through the direct participation of the students and the community. Such initiatives lead the students to value and preserve the school facilities, and to view them as a collective asset.



### 6.3 WHY DOES A SCHOOL BECOME VIOLENT?

Some schools are historically more violent than others, and some go through periods of violence upsurge. There are, therefore, instances of permanent and of temporary violence, depending on the internal and external conditions of schools.

Safe schools can be found in extremely dangerous neighborhoods. One such example is a public school located on the periphery of Rio de Janeiro, that is viewed as comparatively privileged. The reason for that, according to students and teachers, is that school facilities are well-conserved and kept in good repair, and both students and teachers *work together towards the common goal of good education*. The students enjoy an environment of friendship and mutual respect, and, consequently, help in conserving the school. In the students' opinion, the school has excellent security. There is a student body organization, and each class has a representative and an adjunct representative, and also a teacher who acts as a class mediator and represents the school in the parents' meetings. Also, they participate actively in school activities. The school administration has a democratic discourse, emphasizing dialogue as a means of interacting with students. Teachers express the same feelings, and they integrate their own children into the school community.

Another example is a relatively safe school on the periphery of Cuiabá, located within a neighborhood viewed as dangerous. The students live in that neighborhood, and so does the principal. The students understand that the school is a space for socialization, where affective bonds among teachers, students, school administration, and coordination are built and developed. The administration ensures strict control of the entry of strangers into the school grounds.

The establishment of links with the community brings about implications such as the need to cope with drug-dealers and gangs. The principal of a school on the periphery of Rio de Janeiro resorted to a "*good neighborhood policy*" with the drug-dealers, several of whom are ex-students. In spite of the rigid discipline rules, the students refer to the school administration in fond terms.

When a school changes typology, from more violent to less violent, the principal's performance must be taken into account. One example is a

school in São Paulo, located in a working-class neighborhood. According to the principal, he was invited to work in that school, then dubbed “*the circus of horrors*”. He accepted and stayed on, and eventually succeeded in changing the image projected by the school. The students reported that the former principal was never present at school and, therefore, did not monitor the students' development and even less did he look after the physical conservation of the building. According to the present principal, his main secret was to work closely with the school staff as a team, respecting the school's rules and regulations, valuing the students' opinions, and rescuing their self-esteem through dialogue. He included the physical conservation of the building into his practice, and became more present, combining respect with freedom. Now, the school is viewed as a model, and became one of the most sought-after in the neighborhood.

To state that school violences represent a condition, rather than a characteristic trait of one school or another or of the school system as a whole, means to realize that this condition changes according to the processes to which the school is submitted, especially changes in administration and in the relations with principals and teachers. Data suggest that some alterations made by the school administration resulted in changes in the school's profile concerning violence issues: less tolerance regarding conformity to rules, the democratization of the school environment and a better maintenance of its buildings and adjoining grounds.

Perceptions of the school violence phenomenon result from the episodes experienced and the stories collected from the different actors who share the same environment, as well as from the relations these actors establish among themselves. These violences, therefore, are perceived as commonplace features of the daily lives of those who have experienced situations related to thefts, threats, attacks, discrimination, vandalism, authoritarian attitudes, fights, etc. To avoid the perpetuation of violence, it is indisputably necessary to identify measures that allow the educational institutions to become a safe space for the members of the school community, since violence affects the physical, emotional, and psychological integrity of students, teachers, employees and parents.

In this context, national characteristics should be taken into account in the design of public policies, which should be based on actions aiming at protection from violence, rather than on repressive measures. In what

concerns the schools, their pedagogical proposals should be closer to the language of youth and view the students as the protagonists of public policies.

#### 6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICIES, STRATEGIES AND MEASURES AGAINST VIOLENCES IN SCHOOLS

Considering the literature on school violence, the collection of essays and research studies promoted by UNESCO and the contents of the present research, it is possible to systematize a set of recommendations to be followed by the public powers at the federal, state and municipal levels.

These measures against school violences start from three general premisses: conduction of diagnoses and research work with the aim of getting to know the phenomenon in its concreteness; legitimization by the actors/subjects involved (which presupposes the participation of the school community); and the permanent monitoring of the actions undertaken in the schools.

Another premiss is the fact that, more and more, the prevention and eradication of violence in schools require the interrelation of sensitive and ethical knowledge with the appreciation of young people, the creation of a pleasant and participative atmosphere, where both specialized and trans-disciplinary knowledge are included, as well as analyses concerning public security and school security.

The importance of a *Culture of Peace* must be assumed, “a culture based on tolerance, solidarity and sharing in the day-to-day, a culture that respects all individual rights – the principle of pluralism, that ensures and supports the freedom of opinion – and that strives to prevent conflicts, resolving them at the source, which encompass the new non-military threats to security such as exclusion, extreme poverty and environmental degradation. The Culture of Peace tries to solve problems through dialogue, negotiation and mediation, in order to render war and violence unfeasible” (Werthein, in Noletto, 2001: 6).

The *Culture of Peace* presupposes the fight against inequalities and social exclusion, as well as respect for rights and citizenship. Schools may be privileged places for the fight against violence, provided their staffs include respected professionals, with proficiency in pedagogy. It is incumbent on the public powers to invest in the training and further qualification

of these professionals, as well as to adopt strategies to foster the rights and duties of teachers.

School characteristics that enable it to fight violence:

1. A place of sociability and cultural diversity, capable of creative forms of solidarity;
2. Strategic potential for establishing relations with the community, primarily with the families, having the parents as partners in that pursuit;
3. Open to experimentation with preventive measures and with monitoring both the target-population and the experiences implemented by the public policies;
4. The capacity to form values and transmit knowledge, an activity that also takes place in the interaction processes between teachers and students and, among the students themselves.

Several projects aiming at the fight against violence have been implemented in many countries. For instance, the Sevilla Project (Sevilla Anti School Violence – SAVE), initiated in 1995. The model employed in that Project starts from a psycho-educational perspective, viewing school as a place where young people live together, and where all members of the school community – families, teachers and students – should be represented.

At present, SAVE is active in 28 American states and in Canada, promoting discussion groups in which volunteers guide the students in the discussion and development of alternatives for conflict resolution, and teach them how to apply what they have learned in projects aimed at fighting violence in school and in the community.

In Brazil, the program *Opening Spaces: Education and Culture for Peace* (Abrindo Espaços: Educação e Cultura para a Paz), created by UNESCO, results from several research studies on violences involving young people in Brazil, both as victims and as direct agents. One example of this work is the Peace School Project (Projeto Escola da Paz), a joint initiative of UNESCO and the state of Rio de Janeiro, in which 250 public schools open on weekends, taking advantage of the talents and the cultural production of the community, in areas of greater social vulnerability. This same project is being reproduced in other Brazilian states such as

Bahia (under the name *Opening Spaces: Education and Culture for Peace*); in Mato Grosso (*Opening Spaces*); and in Pernambuco (*Open Schools*).

## 6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations concern the implementation of public policies focusing on school violence, and require the support of federal, state and municipal governments, as well as of civil society. Within the schools, it requires involvement of the faculty, the students, parents, employees, the media, the police, etc.

State and municipal Secretariats of Education should monitor the process of the implementation of these measures against school violence, contributing with the qualification of personnel and the preparation of material for training school employees, as well as discussing administrative and security policies with school authorities and with the community.

### **Measures concerning the school vicinity – safe zones**

- installing traffic lights, footbridges, pedestrian strips;
- ensuring the good state of street lighting;
- controlling the sale of alcoholic beverages in the neighboring areas;
- prohibiting gambling places in these areas;
- curbing the circulation of illicit drugs.

### **Leisure – opening up the school space**

- implementing projects for opening the schools on weekends, with the aim of involving the community, the families and the students in cultural, artistic, sports and leisure activities, stressing education for citizenship and the construction of a *Culture of Peace*;
- promoting activities (arts, sports, etc.) that involve the students, the community and the families.

### **Interaction of school, family and community**

- promoting the socialization of families and of the community where the school is located, aiming at the reduction of violence;

### **Activities of a transdisciplinary nature**

- awareness-raising among the students concerning the consequences of the use of weapons and drugs, and of thefts and burglaries, prejudice against homosexuals and discriminatory attitudes regarding ethnic and gender differences;
- campaigns for fighting violence, with the support of mass media and other institutions working with public mobilization.

### **The school's atmosphere**

- looking after the physical condition and the cleanliness of the school; creating a pleasant environment, with good ventilation and lighting, furniture in good condition and adequate space for leisure activities at school;
- developing a sense of belonging to the school, incorporating the participation of all of the school community;
- creating spaces for chemistry labs, computer classes and for the development of artistic activities and sports;
- encouraging graffiti and restoration courses, in order to strengthen the sense of belonging to the school and to fight vandalism and defacing of school property.

### **Rules**

- having clear discipline rules and straightforward expectations in relation to behavior and performance of students, teachers and employees;
- having explicit rules on punishments such as suspensions, transfers, and expulsion in extreme cases;
- having rules regarding punishment of violences committed by teachers and employees against students and vice-versa;
- having rules concerning the duties of teachers and employees towards the student body, such as assiduity and punctuality, teaching classes of good quality, avoiding abuses of power by teachers and employees – such as those in the security area – against the students.

### **Awareness-raising**

- raising awareness among the faculty on issues related to violence, either among students or between students and teachers/employees;
- enhancing programs concerning the cultures of youth, sexuality and drugs, among other issues, directed at the school's technical-pedagogical staff and other actors in the school environment;

### **Security**

- ensuring effective policing;
- apprehending weapons at school, combining preventive and punitive measures;
- providing security not only in school, but also in its vicinity;
- raising awareness among the police in relation to human rights, in order to avoid authoritarianism and abuses of power;
- giving priority to security and surveillance during entry and exit hours, and also during recess.
- having explicit rules on the use of uniforms, as an aid to the identification of the students.

### **The media**

- promoting debates and meetings with journalists and other media professionals, with a view to disseminating information on successful Culture of Peace cases, as well as on other problems faced by the schools.

### **Appreciation and organization of youths**

- appreciating the youngsters' opinions, respecting their autonomy and, in cases of conflict, discussing directly with the parties involved;
- stimulating the establishment of student body organizations or other entities with different formats;
- discussing the issue of violence with the youngsters in their own language and in terms of their own experiences;
- stimulating the use of the bulletin-board organized by the students.

## **Interfacing**

- Creating interfaces between the Secretariats of Education and the Tutelary Councils, whenever they exist, and, alternatively, with the Public Prosecution, with a view to formulating measures for the protection against violence and its prevention.

## **Specialized support for the process of implementing these measures**

- discussing with the parents, the community in which the school is located, the technical-pedagogical staff, the students and the employees the measures to be implemented in the school;
- promoting research lines on school violence, to be conducted by the State, with the cooperation of different experts and entities;
- learning about the experiences of other schools engaged in the fight against violence;
- evaluating the situation related to violence in schools by means of reports given by teachers, principals, students, parents and employees, and also by members of the community; collecting data on the daily activities in the school environment, and also with police authorities;
- preparing teaching materials, both written and audiovisual, in order to cooperate with teachers, principals, employees and art groups who wish to perform in the schools, especially among youngsters who have proposals to that end.



## CONCLUSIONS

The basic theme of this research is violence, understood as physical or symbolic damages imposed on individuals or groups. On a broader scale, violence tends to be associated to poverty, social inequality and communication failure. It is also seen as contrary to reason, consent and dialogue, and related to abuses of power occurring in different types of social relations, as well as, in many cases, resorting to power gained through the use of weapons, to fear, to intimidation and to disrespect for others (Arendt, 1994). There are, therefore, several types of violent environments, making it impossible to reduce violence to a single factor. In this research, it is understood that it is not enough to refer to violence in general, since there are many types of violence that must be specifically mentioned. For that reason, the term is used in the plural: violences in the schools.

In the schools, physical violence is characterized by fights, aggressions, invasions, destruction of property, wounds, and even death, and the conflicts happen among the various actors: students and teachers, students and employees, etc.

Symbolic violence is more difficult to be perceived. It is often exerted in subtle ways, and is not necessarily seen as violence by the victim, that is, in some cases, the victim neither realizes his or her impotence in the face of such powers, nor makes use of his or her own critical capacity to deal with such dynamics. For instance, symbolic violence is exercised by society when it does not make space for youths in the labor market, and denies them opportunities to develop their own creativity and to pursue leisure activities. It also happens when schools impose contents devoid of interest, or when teachers do not strive to achieve quality in their classes, and disrespect students, demeaning them with derogatory words and attitudes. It also denotes the violence suffered by teachers who are offended in their work and in their professional identity by the lack of interest and the indifference of students.

These violences are expressed in different ways, and affect all actors involved, both aggressors and victims. Physical violence is the more visible face of the phenomenon, with emphasis on threats, mainly by students, with vows of retaliation after class. Fights are trivialized and viewed as commonplace, and often, they are encouraged by colleagues.

Violences with the use of firearms or firearm carrying are perpetrated by students who bring these weapons from home, most of the times, or who had easy access to them – even paying for them in installments. Reportedly, sexual abuse is practiced both by students and by members of the technical-pedagogical staff. Thefts and stealing in the school, characterized as violence against school property, often occur.

Acts of vandalism happen in both public and private schools, although in greater number in the former. These incidents are frequently associated with bad school administration, with absent, authoritarian and remiss principals, and, on the part of the students, with the lack of a feeling of belonging in the school and a sense of shared ownership of collective property.

Usually, schools deal with fights, acts of aggression and several types of violence by means of rules and regulations. Among the various procedures, the most important are reprimands, suspension, transference/expulsion, depending on the gravity of the case. Discipline, both as a duty and a commitment, appears as the basic condition for the maintenance of order, but the rules are often questioned by the technical-pedagogical staff and by the students, such as the use of uniforms, schedules, etc.

In spite of the criticisms, especially to rules and regulations, students tend to like the school where they study. Students complain mostly of the lack of discipline and interest on the part of the colleagues, of the physical conditions of school buildings, of the lack of human and material resources and of the absenteeism and incompetence of teachers. Other issues are mentioned, such as abuses of power and authoritarianism, arbitrary punishments, etc.

School stands out as a place of symbolic violence, manifested in several ways. Students often complain of teachers who use the power of giving grades to manipulate, to ignore the students and their problems, to mistreat them, to resort to verbal aggression and to expose them to ridicule when they do not understand some topic taught in class. Teachers also suffer when they are attacked in their work and in their professional identity by the students' indifference and lack of interest, generating an atmosphere of

constant tension. Many of them say that they dislike the classes, the workload, the work conditions and the salary, and many others criticize the students for their indiscipline and for their lack of interest and dedication to studies.

In their testimonies, students demonstrate that they are not certain that the education offered to them will guarantee better qualifications for the job market. It is evident that youngsters from the lower classes view school as a means to social mobility. Some believe that school teaches them things that will be useful for their lives and for the future.

Emphasis must be given to the various types of discrimination as forms of violence. Racism may be expressed through behaviors disguised as “jokes and kidding remarks”, or as pseudo-cordiality, and many of those who resort to such practices do not see them as racism, although the person targeted by these remarks may feel otherwise. However, there are students who acknowledge having racial prejudice and declare that many fights are motivated by racism.

The survey results afford important evidence as to how youngsters deal with violence. It must be kept in mind, however, that there is no monolithic opinion on these issues: some view violence as commonplace and trivial, while others see it as resulting from racial discrimination and social exclusion. Many identify violence exclusively with physical damage, whereas others realize that violence also includes behaviors that cause suffering, fear, sadness, low self-esteem, mortification, that offend dignity and lack the respect deserved by all.

Students claim that school violence is one of the causes of the lack of interest and concentration in studies, of missing classes and losing desire to go to school, since it makes them nervous, indignant, fearful and insecure, with harmful effects to their personal and academic development.

Among teachers, absenteeism is one of the direct consequences of violence and of the lack of recognition of the merit of their work. Other results are loss of motivation for work, a feeling of revolt and difficulty in concentrating in class.

The effort undertaken in the present research study, aimed at presenting a broad view of the situation concerning the different types of school violence, intends to contribute to the reflection and to the search for strategic measures for overcoming these violences.

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