

(In)discipline and violence in schools: a case study

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Abstract

This article draws on the results of an ethnographic study on indiscipline and violence in schools, conducted in a public school of São Paulo municipal system.² This case study examines how the school dealt with these phenomena, which have become the frequent object of school complaints and acquired relative prominence in research and publications of the field. Its objective was to identify factors capable of producing discipline and minimizing violence, as well as to obtain more clarity on the processes through which this order can be produced. We did the inventory of the educational actions and interventions that led to the transformation of an institution characterized by high rates of violence and indiscipline into a school that, in five years, came to be considered highly prestigious by the school community. Attention to the needs of the different school segments, collective and solidarity work, curricular organization, and support for students with learning difficulties contributed to prevent social inequalities from turning into school disadvantages. Research findings are accompanied by theoretical reflections, which seek to translate what we captured in the study into more comprehensive terms.

Keywords

Indiscipline - Violence - Learning - Participation.

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Indiscipline and violence concepts: objects under construction

The cultural good to be socialized by the school is still not available to all, despite universal access to primary education.³ It is known that in the school a significant proportion of its population is unable to gain full access to the knowledge conveyed in compulsory education, which suggests that part of the recurring conflicts in everyday school life may have to do with this issue. But they are also related to the socialization and the autocratic nature of school organization. In this context, for teachers to establish their authority, it is not enough to hold a teaching position or to master the content. These days, they have to earn respect from students, which implies treating students differently. Respect is not automatically due to someone just because s/he is a representative of a recognized culture.

The themes of indiscipline and school violence have become increasingly important in Brazil, a phenomenon seen since the late 1980s in the academic sphere, when the production of theses and dissertations grew exponentially. However, there are indications that efforts to understand these phenomena are still insufficient and that analyses of academic work tend to differ little among themselves (AQUINO, 2011, 2016).

In a 2014 study, Zechi (p. 28) asserts: “Indiscipline in schools is a complex subject. Its concept, like that of violence, is neither uniform nor universal. It relates to a set of values that have varied in different sociocultural contexts throughout history.” Despite the literature pointing to the construction of indiscipline and violence as particular phenomena with specific semantics – which ensures their singularities –, in the discursive field these phenomena continue being treated as interconnected problems, as can be seen in a report coordinated by Ferraz and produced by Sindicato dos Professores do Ensino Oficial do Estado de São Paulo (Apeoesp [Union of Sao Paulo State Teachers]) and by Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos (Dieese [Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies]) on school violence. It notes that, “since the 1990s, teachers have been facing growing violence in schools. What we used to call indiscipline has suddenly assumed an aggressive character” (FERRAZ, 2007).

In this argument lies the idea that these two terms or concepts are confused, that there may be a shift from one phenomenon to the other, and thus an act of indiscipline can unfold in an act of violence. This may reveal, in part, both the absence of these themes in the teacher professional development agenda, and the disregard, on the part of the school, of socialization in schools. It happens that neglecting the importance of socialization as a social function of the school implies not preparing the subjects for the purposes for which the school is intended and, therefore, neglecting construction of an educational relationship aimed at student school success. Conscious of the specific role of the school, Dubet and Martuccelli (1998, p.27) affirm:

3- The term *ensino fundamental* has been translated as primary education. In Brazil, primary education includes 8 (or 9 years since 2010), which are attended by 7 (or 6) to 14 year-olds, when there is no age-grade distortion.

[...] at the same time that the school is an apparatus of distribution of social positions, it is an apparatus of production of actors adjusted to such positions. [...] School socialization, which is not all socialization, develops in a school organization characterized by a school “form”, a set of rules, exercises, programs and pedagogical relationships resulting from the meeting of an educational project and a structure of social “opportunities”.

To consider these arguments means to admit that, in the production of indiscipline or violence, there is no one-sidedness, or that they are not student personality traits. It fundamentally means to recognize that such phenomena are produced in socialization, for which professionals have great responsibility, as Ratto (2007, 256) asserts, even though the author refers specifically to the production of indiscipline:

[...] if we assume the perspective that discipline and indiscipline are daily produced by the school, from the specific configurations acquired by power relations and by the type of logic that, in each context, it establishes to both, it is possible to denaturalize them, to withdraw them from a dimension of inevitability.

In the conceptualization of these objects, therefore, we start from the assumption that indiscipline and violence in schools are social phenomena and, consequently, school phenomena that must be studied based on interactions and not only considered as a consequence of deformation or deviation of the students. Such phenomena are not inevitable either, as noised by naturalized views of conservative sectors. The processes of socialization are regulated and the school, besides being a place of learning of knowledge, is a place of construction and exercise of forms of power:

First of all, it is necessary to emphasize that the school is not only a place of knowledge learning, but also a place of learning forms of exercise of power and relations with the power. The school, as a universe where the impersonal rule reigns, “opposes all forms of power resting on the will or inspiration of a person.” (LAHIRE, 1995, p. 59).

From this assumption, we return to the demarcation of the boundaries between indiscipline and violence about which the distinctions of Aquino (2011, p. 467-68) are enlightening:

Despite the recurring apprehension that these phenomena are related or interdependent, it cannot be assumed that violence and indiscipline have similar characteristics or a common causality, since disciplinary setbacks are defined not by the use of force, but only by conducts considered contrary to the normative conventions used there.

Aquino circumscribes the notion of indiscipline “to bending the regimental order in force in a certain institutional scope or to the invalidation of such order” (AQUINO, 2011, p. 468), whose effects are immediately felt in the teacher-student relationship.

As for the concept of violence, it is possible to affirm that there is an apparent consensus about a core that is preserved in great part of the definitions, such as: rupture of the relationship, destruction of the other, disrespect, negation of the other, in which the action can occur in the physical, psychological or ethical levels (GALVÃO, 2004; CANDAU, 1999; SPOSITO, 1998).

In spite of the need to distinguish between these two concepts, we warn of the risk of falling into the essentialist trap of thinking that there is real discipline (CARVALHO, 1996), a climate of order and peace that, in order to be achieved, requires only following the prescriptions of the legitimate canons. Considering indiscipline as a social phenomenon, its manifestation entails contingencies of a given context.

Presumed determinants of indiscipline and violence

Although the research this article draws on did not aim to identify the causes of these two phenomena (SILVA NETO, 2011), in the light of the studies used, it became inevitable to distinguish some of their possible determinants. Special care was also taken not to succumb to the logic of reducing school indiscipline to the stigma of the undesirable, and not to disregard the school complaints expressed in discourses that may reflect an “incontestable enunciative circularity”, which consists of “the juxtaposition of generalizing theoretical screens and certain topical empirical circumstances, which often results in judgments that disqualify the copiousness of the forms of life in schools” (AQUINO, 2016, p. 688).

Regarding indiscipline and violence in schools, there is abundant discussion in the literature about its relations with the wider violence that permeates societies and, in particular, with the deep social inequalities that feed them (TEDESCO, 2002; DUBET, 2003, 2004; SPOSITO, 1998; ÁLVAREZ-GARCIA et al., 2010). It is easy to admit that schools are not islands of peace in this context, and that society’s violence can also permeate relations within them, without disregarding that educational work can minimize macrostructural influences, as some studies show (CODO, 1999; SPOSITO, 1998).

Research has often highlighted the relative loss of meaning of the role of the school for the population that attends it and students’ relative lack of knowledge of the norms underlying the school culture, that is, of the school’s hidden curriculum, impregnated with values from other times and social places (AQUINO, 2003; DUBET, 2003; GALVÃO, 2004; SPOSITO, 1998, 2001). Academic work has also evidenced that the school does not treat students properly, especially adolescents and young people:

To what extent isn’t school violence, using an expression of Henri Lefebvre, the *telltale element* of situations, the privileged access door to a more dense analysis of the very meaning of school in contemporary world? What is the place occupied by the school institution in the socialization of children, adolescents and young people? (SPOSITO, 1998, p. 71).

This inadequacy, sometimes unrecognized, sometimes not sufficiently taken into account by a significant portion of teachers, has much to do with the culture valued by the school, which, in its ideal of intellectual, artistic, social, and aesthetic production,

provides the construction, maintenance and strengthening of an institutional identity that has little to do with the culture of a significant portion of its users, who have been historically expropriated of this ideal of production.

The imposition of school culture on the whole population by massive schooling is often traumatic and violent, especially because the institution tends to ignore and distance itself much from the social experiences of students and their families. Intercultural studies, such as those conducted by Candau (1999), have provided in-depth reflection from this perspective.

Arising from this same logic are also conflicts between generations. The analysis of what we find in the literature and in school practices, especially at primary and secondary levels, leads us to recognize the negligent attention given to youth. The school does not see the youth as an object of study, which makes it easily relegate youth to the stigma of difficult, justifying the preaching of a school crisis that derives from the conflicts between its protagonists (AQUINO, 2011).

Another quite widespread perspective has to do with gender socialization that affects behavior and influences success or failure in school, especially that of boys. Gender models and attitudes towards literate culture and the roles played by men and women have a large repercussion on school trajectories and also, as we have reasons to believe, on the phenomena of indiscipline and violence:

[...] In more than one case, boys are having more difficulties at school insofar as the constitution of their sexual identity within the family configuration must fit a father who is often on the side of the most dissonant family principles of socialization in relation to the schooling principles of socialization. (LAHIRE, 1995, p. 345, free translation).

In his research, Lahire (1995) finds that, the children of the parents of the lower classes who cultivate habits compatible with the literate culture – such as reading, writing notes, keeping appointments on schedules, reading to children, monitoring their school activities, and filling in household documents –, are less likely to experience school failure.

Authors who discuss more specifically the problems of indiscipline and violence affirm that these phenomena can be used as resources to affirm masculinities (CONNELL, 2000; CARVALHO, 2003), especially those defined as protest masculinities:

Protest masculinity is a case in point. The majority of boys learn to negotiate school discipline with only a little friction. A certain number, however, take the discipline system as a challenge, especially in peer networks which make a heavy investment in ideas of toughness and confrontation. (CONNELL, 2000, p. 162).

Finally, it is necessary to also take into account the autocratic nature of the school, a heir of the religious organization and morality, and strongly linked to a model of schooling historically shaped to serve the most favored classes. Along with these and other processes, such as subtle modes of control, let us consider, as Aquino (2011, p. 471) does, that:

Notwithstanding the recurring allegation about the spreading of animosity, disrespect or apathy on the part of the student body, such complaints, if observed from another angle, seem to paradoxically point to a kind of normalizing triumph of contemporary school practices, embodied in the ambition of a daily management of conducts, as well as of the future destinies of the lives at stake in school by means of the standardization not only of the gestures but also and above all of the intentions underlying them.

The mode of control of the logic that normalizes social and school practices of contemporary society involves both students and teachers, which leads to a gloomier scenario from the point of view of awareness, since the subtle modes of control of the steps of students and teachers are converted “into a population niche just like any other, thus responding to a movement of flattening school specificities in favor of a normalizing turn⁴ common in other social spheres” (AQUINO, 2011, p. 471).

Power relations are fundamental to understanding the issues of indiscipline and school violence. The hierarchies produced by gender, race, class, and generational inequalities are present in society, especially in societies as unequal as the Brazilian one. Under these circumstances, one may presume that social inequalities are converted to some degree into school disadvantages (DUBET, 2003).

Undeniably, interpersonal relationships in schools are subject to institutional regulations expressed in terms of the rights and duties of faculty and students, and are subjected to functional hierarchies in which the balance of power formally tends to benefit adults, especially the technical-administrative staff and, in particular, the management. In principle, students and parents hold a smaller share of this power.

Research design

This qualitative research was inspired by an ethnographic method and consisted of a case study in a municipal public school located in the Western area of São Paulo city, Brazil, with 1,200 lower-class students enrolled in three shifts and the majority of the faculty composed of permanent teachers.

Fieldwork lasted 17 months, between May 2009 and October 2010, and systematically followed the routine of the school for approximately 132 hours, for periods longer than one hour, for two or more days per week. The institution was chosen intentionally, because it had had a history of violence and indiscipline that it managed to overcome. We sought to construct an ethnographic narrative based on the characteristics pointed out by Geertz (1989, p. 31), so that it was *interpretative* and able to interpret the flow of the social discourse of the environment researched; in addition, the interpretation should consist of “trying to save the said in a discourse from its possibility of being extinguished, and fix it in researchable forms”.

4- The concept of normalization used here comes from the theory of governmentality, postulated by Foucault, which: “[...] refers to the type of ethical and political rationality, by which, on the one hand, the living conditions of the population are regulated and, on the other, the existence of its individual components is disciplined” (AQUINO, 2011, p. 471, free translation).

The study included observation in classrooms and during recess, interviews with teachers, students, parents, and the management team, as well as participation in School Board meetings, planning meetings, regular classes, and remedial ones. Ten hours of interviews were recorded, with four members of the management team, four teachers of the remedial classes of the first, second, third and fourth grades of primary education, four teachers, six mothers and 19 students. Interestingly, only mothers attended the interviews, although some of them had been arranged with fathers.

In this case study, the data were produced through observations of everyday school life, recorded in a field notebook and complemented with semi-structured interviews (TURA, 2011; ZAGO, 2011). The analysis of the empirical material prioritized the meanings attributed by the subjects to school practices, through connecting the observed and the said (FONSECA, 1999).

The research sought to relate the evidences of the empirical material to the discussions and studies of the area. The option for the ethnographic approach, although it was originally used in the human sciences by classical anthropological studies, was mainly due to its meticulous and dense description, as well as its substantial and particular observation of a culture. In the case of research in the school environment, the so-called school culture is also recognized, the one that is woven in the school's everyday life, aiming to understand the social reality observed, as pointed out by Almeida (2004). In research on education, ethnographic procedures have been widely used, despite the fact that the approach was very different from that adopted by anthropologists, whose contact with the subjects is prolonged and essentially of immersion.

Findings

Among the results obtained, we highlight some measures as indicators of the collaboration culture established in the school, which made its reality different from many others that became entangled in the phenomena of indiscipline and violence.

This school is an example of change. With high rates of violence and indiscipline, it became an institution capable of producing a climate of harmony and of meeting the expectations of the school community. Before 2005, its history was marked by a context of disorganization, anomie and instability. Many principals tried to establish themselves in the position and were unable to construct consistent educational work; they did not stay in the school for long. Conflicts, indiscipline and violence prevailed. The fraying of relationships in the institutional environment, even among its professionals, occurred openly.

Internal conflicts, power disputes between teaching groups and the management, reports of violence appeared in several accounts. In the most serious episodes, there was even machine-gun fire at the walls of the school. Parents physically assaulted the assistant principal and a teacher. Restrooms were blown up delayed-effect bombs. There were also serious cases of violence involving teachers and students, as the principal recalls:

One of the things that marked me a lot in 2003, when I started working here as school supervisor: a boy threw a teacher down the stairs and she broke her leg. He was a fourth-grader. She took several sick leaves, always saying that she could not take the kids. (School's principal).

The atmosphere of discord and other equally serious problems were part of the school's routine. Age-grade distortion and school dropout were also very high. The role of the management can be considered fundamental for the change due to what was verified in the fieldwork and in interviews. Based on the ethnographic immersion in the school, one can say that the success achieved is largely due to the principal's ability to bring together the expectations and efforts of the different school segments, in order to constitute a collectivity capable of ensuring an environment conducive to the learning of all students. According to the assistant principal, since the arrival of the principal, five years ago, the professionals were called upon to "think about all the problems that the school has. So, this idea of collectivity and of rethinking the school's political project arose".

The conception of collective action reflects the position of the principal, who, since she returned to the school and took office, invested heavily in the dialogue with the different segments:

I observed, listened to everyone, heard the parents a lot. I invited the parents for a coffee several times, I liked to call such occasions coffee with the principal. I organized several forums to see what the children thought of the school. How they felt at school. What they would like. I kept listening to the teachers. Then I found out that each person had a story, needs, and many suggestions. (School's principal).

In addition to recognizing the strategic role of management – also confirmed by other studies (GALVÃO et al., 2010; SOUZA, 2012) –, we identified positions and measures, attested by the educational team and families, which contributed to make the school reverse its poor performance to the benefit of the students.

First, the political and pedagogical perspective assumed collectively by the group, allied to the growing awareness among social actors that school discipline improved when the school improved the quality of educational work. Not only the principal, but also several teachers affirmed more than once that denying students' right to knowledge – the primary function of the school – leads to their exclusion. And the strong feeling of exclusion that invades students leads them to challenge and subvert the rules of coexistence in the school environment, as Dubet admits (2004).

Agreements and Parent Council

The first step was to establish *agreements* – or pacts with the various segments of the school –, whose starting point was listening to suggestions and demands, which were met through establishing rules of reciprocity by common consent. Students and teachers held forums to make decisions on rules regarding the management of the day-to-day life of the

school, which should be complied with by all: adults, children, faculty, and staff. Among the rules – in which obligations were paired and published for general knowledge –, there was one according to which everyone committed to attendance: adults and students. After agreements were made, the school sought to make them clear to the community and also to obtain parents' engagement, so that compliance with the rules became school culture.

Agreements culminated in the involvement of the school community in the educational project and the collective assumption of responsibility for it. All alike contributed to reconstructing the institution's respectability. At the most critical moments, until mid-2008, when teacher absenteeism was high, all teachers, regardless of their position or function, were willing to teach: the teacher in the library, the school supervisor⁵, the retired teacher who lived near the school, and even the principal, demonstrating flexibility and solidarity in performing roles for a shared purpose.

Once agreements were established, the school began to create the Parent Council. There had previously been a disciplinary commission in the school, which was a kind of repression forum. In the meantime, an understanding was built that this commission should actually be a mediation space. Finally, a period of the teachers' workday originally assigned to teacher collective work started being used to serve the community every week. A fixed schedule was established for attending to students and their families, so that parents knew that during this period the technical team would be available. The first movement of the school was to request the presence of parents aiming to *guide them* on how to guide their children through educational activities. During the study, however, it was found that many parents attended the meetings and that the purpose of those meetings had been reversed: parents began to inquire about what was happening and question certain situations!

The Parent Council contributed to creating shared responsibility also in relation to indiscipline. There was an improvement not only in the relationship of the shift assistant (responsible for promoting discipline) with the students, but also in the relationship of teachers with students. When there was a situation of indiscipline, the family was called and teachers had an opportunity to understand the context in which the student lived – which they normally did not know. The student presented his or her views, and so did the student's parents and teachers. Educators, students and their families sought to reach an understanding from there, which greatly helped to improve relationships between all of them and thus diminished indiscipline.

Carrying out the educational project

Responsibility for conducting the school's educational project also came largely from the appreciation of the work of all through the articulated action of the management group and especially the encouragement of teachers' activity. This was organized in ways that allowed them to perceive more clearly what they had to do to ensure the learning of their students; the school, in turn, offered them the support they needed to perform their duties better.

5- Translator's note: The term used in Portuguese was *coordenadora pedagógica*.

Teachers' timetable was organized so that they could meet twice a week in class periods – since many teachers also worked in other schools –, encouraging the exchange of ideas and experiences, and joint planning.

Projects designed by teachers were encouraged, gained visibility and were appreciated by the management group, which stimulated their multiplication. All the teachers were called to offer their contribution, and the activities that they developed with the students were published in the school newspaper and widely disseminated in the school community; such initiatives were equally valued by parents. The newspaper, published at the end of the first and second semesters of the school year, informed not only on management work but also on pedagogical activities: what had been done, the results achieved and what had yet to be done, which increased parents' awareness and motivation.

Recovering the meaning of the learning cycles⁶ by supporting the students with difficulties

One of the great challenges was to support students who had difficulty reading and writing. The school was the one that most failed students in the region! Some students had failed the same grade for four or five years and were still illiterate; adolescents with special needs attended classes with 7-year-olds, and there were many problems of coexistence in the same space, including sexual abuse by older students. Initially, the conversation with teachers about grade repetition was rather difficult, since merely failing students is not a child support measure.

After clarifying and examining in depth different aspects of grade retention, it was agreed with the teachers that only one year of retention would be accepted and only for immature students, because learning had to be ensured during the process. The important thing was to ascertain the diagnosis of difficulties and define the type of work to be developed in a shared way, not at the end of the cycle⁷, but throughout the entire school trajectory.

Among the measures instituted were: Productive Groups for the initial years (cycle I), and Tutoring Groups for the final years (cycle II). Students in grades 1 to 4, held back in large proportions at the end of the cycle, were reorganized into groups according to their level of competence in reading and writing; adding efforts of complementary systematic work for a few hours per week, they were able to become literate. For students who were already literate, more reading and writing skills were developed, so they could read more, write more and even write their own texts; teachers revised their texts and tried to make them more complex. In the Tutoring Groups, students in grades 5 to 8 with difficulties were assisted in a more individualized way by the teachers of the cycle. Such activities, both in the initial and final years, were deliberately carried out during regular classes, during which students

6- A learning cycle is a period of two or more years during which students can be officially failed only once..

7- In São Paulo city school system, primary education had two learning cycles till 2013. Cycle 1 comprised the first four or five grades of primary education, and Cycle 2 comprised four more years. Cycle 1 was attended by 7 or 6 to 10 year-olds and Cycle 2 by 11 to 14 year-olds when there was no age-grade distortion. .

were taken to remedial classes for some time⁸, because they were rarely able to return to school for remedial classes taught after or before school. The legally established Pedagogical Support Rooms did not meet the demands.

It was also created a portfolio of the child's writing by bimester, with teachers' notes since the first grade, the student's progress and difficulties, possible referrals to psychologists, speech therapists, etc., and groups of remedial classes s/he had been in. This was an important resource for information to flow and for teachers to be able to serve students from the point where they were in the previous year.

At the first moment, priority was given to the recovery of older pupils, so that they could pursue schooling successfully. The so-called *readaptados* (teachers who had gone on medical leave and were settling back in) gave a key contribution to this. One peculiarity of the school is that it had a large number of teachers under these conditions: 11 teachers, who began to help with remedial work and the activities of the Productive Group. Once a week these teachers attended to children.

Another guarantee given to the teachers was the continuity of this service in grades 5 to 8. When the remedial and monitoring actions in the second cycle also took place, teachers' resistance diminished, since they no longer felt that the solution was making students repeat a grade.

After solving the major problems related to normalizing the flow of students through learning cycles, the school started to develop preventive actions. The Productive Groups were discontinued as they were no longer needed.

Regarding the mechanisms for strengthening and monitoring school learning, it remains to be noted that, in spite of the progress made by the school in order to ensure that everyone had the right to learn, male, less white and poorer students were still predominant in the remedial groups. Not infrequently we also realized that several students were being led into these groups not exactly because of learning problems, but because their divergent behavior made classroom dynamics difficult, as other studies, such as those by Martuccelli and Dubet (1998), found.

In addition to literacy, the challenge of improving quality

In addition to successfully teaching how to read and write, the school was able to take a leap forward in terms of access to other cultural goods. Students started visiting museums – Museu da Língua Portuguesa, Museu de Arte de São Paulo (Masp), Museu de Arte Contemporânea (MAC), Bienal –, places that people from the neighborhood did not usually go to, attended dance performances, used the internet as a tool for broadening culture.

But the main concern was to implement the school program, which was published quarterly and communicated to parents. The idea was for teachers to know clearly what was to be taught and learned in that period. Some teachers were very responsible, but not all of them; teacher absenteeism was sometimes very damaging to students. In some cases,

8- As Crahay (2007) recommends..

the school succeeded in rescheduling classes. The school supervisors began to support teachers in the use of didactic resources, and new methodologies.

For the school, it was not enough that students were interested in participating in the band and in the drama and sports groups; the challenge was to interest them in mathematics, geography, history. Teachers received incentives for professional development. The school was clearly committed to the implementation of a curriculum capable of promoting the acquisition, by all the students, of disciplinary knowledge, which, in Young's words (2007), is *powerful* knowledge. For the author, this is the knowledge that allows having access to more reliable and more broadly generalizable information, or to new forms of thinking the world; knowledge to which most children in most social classes cannot have systematic access to but by attending school.

The political and pedagogical vision based on the right to education and the conception of democratic education that came to mark the institution turned it into a very prestigious school for the community. At the time of the research, there was a climate of peace and educational results were encouraging. Far from reducing educational practices to motivation to pass tests, the school moved from 2.2 in the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB)⁹ to 5.4 after five years. About the school's concept, a mother says: "this school is very good! So much so that I have a daughter who's now leaving early childhood education and I've been trying to enroll her here. For me it's a school that interacts well with the community. [...] Instruction here is also very good!" (Mother of a student).

Mothers of students with learning difficulties also expressed their appreciation for the school and confidence in the work of its professionals: "Oh, I like this school. Interaction's very good between the teachers and the students, and between the principal and the parents. Teaching is also very good." (Mother of a student).

Small incidence of acts of indiscipline and violence

Fieldwork also evidenced that the incidence of cases of indiscipline and violence in the school became small, that acts of indiscipline are less frequent than those of violence, and the latter are not serious. Violence manifested itself in a variety of ways, depending on age group, gender, ethnic-racial affiliation, and particularly on the education level of the students.

Among the children from the 1st to the 4th grade, physical aggression and cursing prevailed, more on the part of boys, while, among adolescents in grades 5 to 8, *bullying*¹⁰ was the most present form of violence in the school, especially among girls; with lower-incidence rates there was physical aggression. We also noticed the existence of cyberbullying and that symbolic violence became more present, with a special emphasis on homophobia and the manifestation of sexist and color prejudices, among others.

9- Translator's note: In Portuguese, Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (IDEB). In Brazil *educação básica* (basic education) stands for early childhood, primary and secondary education.

10- Silva (2010, p.7) states that one can only "talk about bullying when maltreatment becomes persistent and involves subjects who are in unequal positions of power. These conditions seem to be fundamental so that jokes and mockery can become real fences, capable of imposing physical or psychological damages on subjects who are unable to escape from them".

These manifestations usually occurred in free areas or open spaces, such as sports courts and play yards, at the moments of entering and leaving school, and recess. Classrooms were considered the most preserved and secure places for students, which coincides with Peralva's (1997) statement that French teachers pointed to the classrooms as the places in which they felt more at ease, as they saw them as a regulated space.

The forms of violence in cycle 1 and cycle 2 of primary education varied, mainly in relation to gender and the age groups. In cycle 1, argumentation and persuasion were not frequently used for resolving children's conflicts with each other; however, among teenagers, physical assaults were rarely present within the school, although they continued to occur outside school walls among some students.

From 1st to 4th grade, physical aggression was more frequent among boys than girls, and motives were considered futile or of little importance by adults. From 5th to 8th grades, girls used to be more aggressive than boys; they sometimes used physical violence. Bullying, especially cyberbullying, became the most significant form of violence.

There were no reports of violence against teachers or school staff. However, the interviews revealed students' complaints about certain authoritarian or discriminatory behavior on the part of teachers, as well as adult complaints about certain students.

Although social inequality did not appear as explicitly as social markers of gender and age, it was also a constitutive mark of subjects, often expressed by laughing at a colleague's torn sneakers, calling "sem terra" (landless) those in the housing movement. Even in a low-income population, it is necessary to observe social class symbols, because gender and race are insufficient to understand the complexity of the mechanisms of discrimination and domination present also among students. Although, because it was considered good, the school also attracted students from better economic contexts, among the disadvantaged some had greater economic, social or cultural deficiencies. The fact was that the poorest tended to be more discriminated against by their peers.

Bullying was present among children and adolescents, and cyberbullying was a more characteristic expedient of older students, particularly girls. In this case, the action of the school was limited to receiving the complaints of the students who suffered aggressions; this was how it became aware of these conflicts, which leads us to conclude that many cases were unknown to the management. The absence of records of these phenomena reveals that, although the school professionals showed concern about these two forms of violence, there was no systematic approach to the issue.

Final thoughts

As a result of the research, some assertions about overcoming the violence experienced seem fundamental. The first is that it is possible for the school, through its socialization processes, to protect itself, at least in part, from the violence and social disorganization of its surroundings. Although macro-structural aspects, predominant in sociological analyses – which are based on the assumption that the school is susceptible to the influences of events and changes in society –, may affect the dynamics of school relations, this study indicates that the school can do something to minimize outside influence.

The second assertion is that, unlike what is commonly believed, discipline proves to be a product of the effective access of the school population to knowledge and of students' academic success, which leads, in a way, to relativize the assumption that the construction of discipline in classrooms is a *sine qua non* for learning. The pursuit of improving the quality of educational work and especially its realization through the construction of meaningful collective processes enabled the creation of a climate of harmony and the success of the institution. Therefore, it is more appropriate to say that the construction of discipline and the realization of learning are concomitant processes.

The third assertion is that the strategies pursued by the institution, which characterized its change, did not include any specific measures of disciplining and of fighting violence itself. On the contrary, the school invested heavily in reversing its way of operating as a whole and in changing its culture. Although there were discussions on the regulation of institutional and interpersonal relationships and the creation of devices such as councils and student forums, the school's central role was played in the didactic and pedagogical level, in the sphere of the curriculum. And, when it comes to the curriculum, our attention was drawn by the resumption of the diagnostic character of school evaluation in pedagogical processes, a measure that may not be so obvious for many educational institutions.

The fourth assertion is that the prestige achieved by the school and the tranquility with which the educational actions came to be developed there resulted from a combination of factors such as: the institution's clarity regarding its role, awareness of its social function, definition of clear objectives, and the ethical and political commitment of its professionals. These characteristics allowed the construction of a favorable climate for learning, as well as the satisfactory development of the curriculum and evaluation processes. As a practice carried out in a context whose work quality has much to do with the type of culture that develops in it, the curriculum regains the social relevance of knowledge for all.

We also noticed that, in this context, possible teacher education deficiencies or individual difficulties of some of the teachers were overcome through collaboration in a sharing environment that was created among the professionals of the school. Thus, the professional competences of the faculty, as a collectivity, could be articulated through the pedagogical service and the care given to each student, according to his or her needs.

The fifth assertion is that, despite the good work carried out by the school, there were still forms of inequality in the treatment of students, especially those related to gender, race and social origin. Despite the efforts of the school community, boys failed more than girls, or girls had more successful educational trajectories. It seems that the color mark also contributed to keeping remedial classes *darkened*, and the characteristics of gender, color and poverty continued combined among students who tended to have greater learning difficulties.

In short, indiscipline and violence were no longer central issues on the school agenda. These issues, whenever problematized, came to be permanently treated through the dialogical interaction of various actors, by establishing democratic mechanisms of participation and by the educational action of solidarity and commitment to the learning of all.

We hope that this work can contribute to the discussion on how the school operates, in order to face the challenges of indiscipline and violence in schools using the principles of democracy, ethics and justice, as demanded by social interactions and socialization in schools.

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