



# School Violence, Childhood and Poverty: Perspectives of Primary School Students

## Violencia escolar, infancia y pobreza: perspectivas de estudiantes de educación primaria

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### Abstract

School violence must be understood in terms of its relationship to the people, organizations, and cultures that surround it. It is interesting to be aware of the views of elementary school children on this subject, particularly in social segments that are marginalized and vulnerable due to conditions of injustice and poverty, since their voices are often less represented in the school culture. Considering this scenario, we conducted a qualitative investigation in an elementary school, in which 100% of the students were in conditions of social and educational vulnerability. Acts of violence also occurred frequently at the school. The objective was to find out about the meanings constructed regarding violence and how it is managed in the school. The results indicate everyday experiences of boredom in the classroom, which some students accepted, while others sought to abscond from classes or interrupt them through fights or destruction of furniture. The students who took part in these actions were attended to by teachers and support professionals, unlike those who observed or received aggression. The participants expressed proposals to improve coexistence in the school and in the classroom. These results are discussed in relation to the needs of identity and cultural recognition of the students

*Keywords:* elementary school, school violence, social exclusion, disadvantaged childhood

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## Resumen

La violencia escolar debe comprenderse en su relación con las personas, organizaciones y culturas que la enmarcan. Resulta interesante conocer la perspectiva de los niños y niñas de enseñanza primaria al respecto, especialmente en los segmentos sociales marginados y vulnerados por condiciones de injusticia y pobreza, cuyas voces suelen estar menos representadas en la cultura escolar. Considerando estos antecedentes, realizamos una indagación cualitativa en una escuela básica, en la que el 100% de los estudiantes acreditaban condiciones de vulnerabilidad social y educativa. Asimismo, en el centro escolar solían ocurrir hechos de violencia. El objetivo fue conocer los significados construidos respecto de la violencia y su gestión en la escuela. Los resultados refieren a una experiencia cotidiana de aburrimiento en el aula, ante la cual algunos estudiantes se conformaban, en tanto que otros buscaban fugarse de clases o interrumpirlas a través de peleas o destrucción de mobiliario. Quienes protagonizaban estas acciones eran atendidos por profesores y profesionales de apoyo, a diferencia de aquellos que observaban o recibían agresiones. Los participantes manifiestan propuestas para mejorar la convivencia en la escuela y el aula. Estos resultados son discutidos en relación con las necesidades de reconocimiento identitario y cultural de los estudiantes.

*Palabras clave:* escuela primaria, violencia escolar, exclusión social, infancia desfavorecida

## Introduction

Many schools face the everyday challenge of having to work with students who seem difficult to educate (Bonal & Tarabini-Castellani, 2013; Díaz et al., 2019; Jiménez et al., 2018; Kaplán, 1992; Muñoz et al., 2020; Núñez & Litichever, 2015). Their language and behavior frequently deviate from institutional standards, they become bored with tasks easily, and they fight with their peers. Reprimands and systems of behavioral control are ineffective with these students, who react aggressively when rebuked, sometimes absconding from the classroom or school (Bickmore, 2015, 2017; López et al., 2019; Parada et al., 2016). When this situation is repeated year after year and generation after generation, questions emerge regarding the school institution itself: Why are the measures adopted by the school not effective? How does the organization of the school contribute to the emergence and ongoing existence of these problems?

Studies in this area note that there is no gene that explains indiscipline or violence at school (Kaplán, 1992; Kaplán & Szapu, 2019; Sáez, 2017). That is to say, these phenomena do not respond solely to the intrinsic individual characteristics of students, but should be understood considering their relationship with the people, organizations, and cultures that surround them (Carrasco-Aguilar et al., 2016; Fierro, 2007; Mutchinick, 2018). In this vein, studying the perspectives and cultures of children and young people is not only interesting, but essential for the production of knowledge, designs, and interventions in schools. This is the case because the literature shows that research and development in these matters have been hegemonically based on instruments proposed by adults and experts (Argos et al., 2011; Pacheco-Salazar, 2018).

While some progress has been observed in studies that have delved into the experiences and views of secondary school students (Bayón & Saraví, 2019; Díaz et al., 2019; García & Madriaza, 2006; Grinberg, 2015; Kaplán et al., 2012; Melo, 2007; Molina, 2013; Muñoz et al., 2020; Núñez & Litichever, 2015; Rasse & Berger, 2018; Villalta & Saavedra, 2011), there is less research on the perspectives of elementary education students (Pacheco-Salazar, 2018; Ramírez-Casas del Valle & Alfaro, 2018; Yáñez et al., 2018). Knowing the views of students about

problems of violence and indiscipline in school is not only essential from a scientific point of view, but is also aligned with the commitment to educational justice (Giroux, 1986; Grinberg, 2015; Ramírez-Casas del Valle & Alfaro, 2018; Rojas et al., 2019; Susinos & Ceballo, 2012; Tomasini et al., 2014).

Students, and particularly those most vulnerable to school exclusion, have historically had a hidden voice (Ainscow et al., 1999; Bayón & Saraví, 2019; Díaz et al., 2019; Kaplán et al., 2012; Molina, 2013; Muñoz et al., 2020; Yáñez et al., 2018). Their participation in research can contribute to the discussion of concepts and interventions regarding school violence. In this respect, our study was carried out by a team of teachers from a school, together with academics from a research center, linked in an action research process. The aim was to analyze the meanings constructed by socially vulnerable elementary school students regarding violence and discipline at school.

## Literature Review

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### School violence

The school culture usually simplifies the phenomenon of school violence, reducing it to a problem of certain students. Violence is thus only visible in the behavior of students, as individuals or groups that do not comply with the—explicit or implicit—regime of work and coexistence in their school (Kaplán, 1992, 2006; Kaplán & Szapu, 2019; Mutchinick, 2018; Sáez, 2017). Analysis of such situations usually focuses on the consequences of violent behavior, insofar as they affect the regular activities of teachers and the institution in general (Viscardi, 2008), and possibly cause damage to people or property. The measures adopted from this perspective are oriented towards control of behavior or punishment of the students involved (Bickmore, 2015, 2017; López et al., 2019).

Meanwhile, students' personality characteristics and customs of origin are often claimed to be possible causes (Bayón & Saraví, 2019; Muñoz et al., 2020; Mutchinick, 2018; Núñez & Litichever, 2015; UNICEF, 2014). Behavioral control is accordingly sometimes complemented with other types of individual intervention, such as counseling and psychological support for those involved (Cortez et al., 2019; López et al., 2011). The results of individual interventions lead to stigmatization of the students targeted, related to them being labeled with adjectives such as aggressive, violent, or maladjusted (García & Madriaza, 2006; Grinberg, 2015; Kaplán, 2009; López et al., 2011; Melo, 2007).

The results of these types of interventions are usually ephemeral and narrow in scope (Fierro & Carbajal, 2019) in the case of control and punishment, as they depend on the contingent and relevant action of the educational authorities that administer the measures. Meanwhile, although individual support may result in strengthening and developing the students targeted, the relational and organizational elements of the school that contribute to the problem are ignored in the diagnosis and intervention. It is necessary to expand the focus, both to study the phenomenon and for effective intervention.

Analyses with a broad scope have shown that student violence and indiscipline may involve opposition to the academic regime (Kaplán, 2009; Kaplán et al., 2012; Mutchinick, 2018), which establishes a uniform learning procedure. This is sustained or aggravated when the regime is inflexible, authoritarian, and detached from students' values and interests. The routines and forms of the institutional regime are often organized by hegemonic ideologies and values. These often correspond to those held by administrators and teachers and, to a lesser extent, by students and their families (Rasse & Berger, 2018).

It is therefore assumed that the entire school community should aspire to think, express themselves, dress, and proceed as established by the school, without question. This power is established from their position as adults, workers, professionals, and education specialists, conferring cultural hegemony upon them and

directing symbolic violence towards members of the school who are different from them (Kaplán, 2006). A situation of institutional violence is also established insofar as restrictions and punishments are applied to the behaviors, capabilities, and expressions of the culture of students and their families (Carrasco-Aguilar et al., 2016; Melo, 2007; Mutchinick, 2018).

In contexts such as those mentioned above, behavior that does not conform to the academic regime may involve a search for reaffirmation of the identities of children and young people, which is delegitimized by the hegemonic school culture (Giorgi et al., 2012; Jiménez et al., 2018; Lalueza, 2012; Susinos & Ceballos, 2012). Confronting or questioning school authority and its standards can provide esteem, belonging, and prestige among the peer group, despite the reprimands and punishments that may be received by those who do this (Giorgi et al., 2012; Viscardi, 2008). Actions linked to the phenomenon of school violence can therefore have a meaning in their cultural and institutional context (Rasse & Berger, 2018).

Considering these factors, in this study we proposed to analyze not only the violence that occurs between students *in* school, but also that which takes place *towards* the school and its regime, and *from* the school—as an institution—towards the members of the school community and their culture (Kaplán, 2006, 2009). With regard to the latter, it should be noted that the participants represent a segment of the population that has historically been on the margins of the hegemonic culture: children in poverty (Bayón & Saraví, 2019; Melo, 2007).

### School, poverty, and exclusion

To address this point, it should be considered that the Chilean school system follows a market model. In this framework, schools are operated by private entities with public funding, which compete to attract students. Some schools have zero costs for families, while others charge a co-payment. There are also private education providers that are fully financed by students' families via high fees. This model corresponds to neoliberal policies (Murillo et al., 2018) that, after 40 years of application, have resulted in the dismantling of the sector that is 100% financed with public funds—which serves the lower-income population—and there is marked socioeconomic segregation between schools (Bonal & Bellei, 2018).

If we consider that policies of this nature have been applied to the various rights that should be guaranteed by the state (housing, health, work, justice, access to water, child protection, pensions, etc.), the resulting situation is that the country experiences widespread precariousness and profound social segregation (Bonal & Bellei, 2018). This constitutes structural violence, insofar as the inequitable distribution of resources, power, and guarantee of rights is covered by the country's legal framework (Carrasco-Aguilar et al., 2016; Kaplán, 2006, 2009; Tomasini et al., 2014). In the educational field, this has impacted school life, since students who come from lower-income families experience “an ambivalent reality: the promise of integration and threat of exclusion simultaneously” (Gómez & Zurita, 2013, p. 186).

Consistent with the neoliberal model, the Chilean state operates as a subsidiary body regarding access to rights, providing assistance with extra funding in cases where students show they are at risk of exclusion (Bonal & Bellei, 2018). In order to demonstrate this, instruments are used to record the socioeconomic and academic information of the student and their family. Their results indicate the category of vulnerability of the student, as well as an aggregate index with the percentage of vulnerable students in each school. A vulnerable person is considered to face the possibility of suffering a detriment to their rights, due to personal circumstances and those of their social environment (Grinberg, 2015). This is an unstable position, with low academic results, precarious working conditions in the family group, in conjunction with fragile social support (Álvarez, 2010).

The situation of social vulnerability has symbolized the individuals considered to be in need of assistance and social support (Bonal & Tarabini-Castellani, 2013; Grinberg et al., 2014; Infante et al., 2011; León, 2011; Llóbet, 2006; Villalta et al., 2011; Villalta & Saavedra, 2011). In the case of Chile, it has become a mechanism of integration, which reveals the injustice in socioeconomic distribution (Julio, 2009). It is also a euphemism to refer to the supposed condition of difficult educability (Infante, et al; 2011; Jiménez et al., 2018; Julio et al., 2016) and the likely fate of school failure for children and young people with fewer resources (Bonal & Tarabini-Castellani, 2013).

We should emphasize that this link is assumed, since it has not been possible to prove there is a direct relationship between poverty and school failure, which is strongly mediated by cultural factors (Álvarez, 2010; León, 2011; Melo, 2007). This relationship is more of an institutional mandate (Melo, 2007) that serves to maintain the status quo in the school system, at the cost of stigmatizing the poorest sectors of the population. This affects subjectivity, insofar as it involves the construction of an identity of the deprived student (Grinberg et al., 2014; Julio et al., 2016). The success of this mandate resides in the gap between teachers' and students' ideals about the educational trajectory (Burke & Whitty, 2018; Fierro, 2017; Julio et al., 2016; Melo, 2007), as well as in the low flexibility of the school organization to adapt to the context and its changes (Jiménez et al., 2018) and in the weak promotion of social bonds in the educational center (Garcés-Delgado et al., 2020).

This situation is a barrier to learning for stigmatized students, who are not recognized as legitimate learners (Ginberg, 2015; Julio, 2009; Llóbet, 2006), their potential is hidden (Grinberg, et al., 2014), and their culture of origin is devalued (Jiménez et al., 2018; Lalueza; 2012). Similarly, families' participation in and contribution to education is also limited and their previous knowledge is discredited (Julio et al., 2016). On the other hand, this reveals the narrowness of pedagogical knowledge and the rigidity of the curriculum, being dissociated from the interests, participation, and developmental needs of students (Giorgi et al., 2012; Jiménez et al., 2018; Lalueza, 2012; Ramírez-Casas del Valle & Alfaro, 2018; Rojas et al., 2019; Susinos & Ceballo, 2012).

In our study we analyzed meanings of school violence (Kaplán, 2006, 2009) from the perspective of elementary-level students in a school with 100% vulnerability. This sector of students has participated to a lesser extent in qualitative studies on school violence (Fierro, 2007), and they are of special interest because they have at least two conditions that the school culture positions as being inferior: being a boy or girl and living in a situation of social marginalization.

## Method

This study was part of a participatory action research project (Flores et al., 2009) from a transformational research paradigm (Suárez, 2002). This perspective considers the school as a laboratory and professional action as a hypothesis to be contrasted (Díaz-Bazo, 2017). This type of research usually explores the limits and possibilities of transforming the school and of transforming oneself at the same time (Rowell et al., 2015). Action research thus aims at the development of the school and, in turn, at the development of the capabilities of those involved (Flores et al., 2009). Díaz-Bazo (2017) contends that the participatory aspect lies in the fact that the members of the research team collaborate in the methodological decisions for the process.

The action research team in this study was formed by three teachers from the school, who held the positions of general inspector, head of school coexistence, and school librarian. The team also included the school psychologist and two external professionals from the Research Center for Inclusive Education (Centro de Investigación para la Educación Inclusiva) at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso. The school sought a partnership with the Research Center after facing recurrent episodes of verbal and physical abuse between the students, from students towards teachers, absconders, and expulsions of students from the classroom, who subsequently kicked the doors.

The six team members were formed as an action research team in April 2018, dedicating three hours of work per week to team tasks. The work began with a reflection on the conceptions and daily practices of the action research team considering situations of violence, aggression, and school disruption. From this, the team created the hypothesis that their daily management decisions did not consider the experiences or opinions of their subjects: the students. With the aim of checking this hypothesis, a study was designed to learn about the students' interpretations of school violence and how it is managed, which we report in this paper.

## Data production techniques

To find out the students' views, the study design considered the application of two techniques: semi-structured individual interviews (Prieto, 2001) with students and a brief survey after absences or expulsions from the classroom during class hours.

The semi-structured individual interviews asked about the students' experiences at school and the meanings they gave to the episodes of violence that took place there. They were distributed among each of the members of the action research team, recorded, and later transcribed. These interviews were conducted individually in resource rooms, preventing any third parties from being present or interrupting. Prior to the questions, the students were offered a board game to generate rapport with the interviewer.

The brief survey on student absence and expulsion from the classroom asked students who left the classroom during class hours (school period) about the reason for their departure, which was recorded in a field notebook. Similarly, support was provided in another room for continuation of the interrupted pedagogical instruction, mediating with the teacher so that the student could return to class. When necessary, support was provided for emotional regulation of the student. This was done on Tuesday and Thursday of the second week of October 2018, between 08:00 and 13:00 hours. This schedule was drawn up in accordance with the availability of the inspector and the head of coexistence, who applied the instrument because their work took place outside the classroom, in yards, corridors, and administrative offices, where students usually went after absences and expulsions.

## Participants

The school in which the study was carried out is a private-subsidized school, that is, it is financed with public funds administered by a private non-profit foundation. The institution does not charge co-payments to the families of enrolled students. The educational quality measurement system (SIMCE) ranked this school in the category of insufficient performance in 2018, the period in which the research was conducted. This category is the lowest according to Chile's Law N° 20,529. Total enrollment for the year in which the study was conducted was 120 students (20 females), with one grade per level, from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade of elementary education. According to the national school support system (SINAE), 100% of the students and their families were in a situation of vulnerability, showing indicators of poverty.

For the interviews on the school experience, the action research team decided to work with a sample of three students per class, selected at random. This decision was based on three grounds: 1) feasibility, since the work time did not allow the total student body to be interviewed; 2) maximum variability, to collect the experience of a diversity of students, and 3) contrast of professional action, seeking evidence to problematize the usual focus of the school coexistence team's work: the disruptive or aggressive student.

The sampling procedure was developed during two action research workshop sessions. First, in order to problematize the conceptions and usual practices of coexistence management, students were identified who were repeatedly—at least twice a week—attended to by the coexistence team professionals due to absences

and disruptions in class. As a result, a list of five male students was obtained, one for each grade from fourth to eighth grade. Given the criterion of maximum variability adopted by the team, it was decided not to rely solely on the five students categorized, but to include any student in the school. For this reason, the identification numbers for each student in the registration lists for their courses were used, randomly selecting those who would participate in the study, with 18 chosen. Of these, 15 participated, as one student who was selected was removed from the school and two others were intermittently absent during the information collection period (October 2018). Of those who participated, there were four females and 11 males, one of whom was categorized as a disruptive student. This coincidence was not intentional.

Meanwhile, on the first day of registering pupils leaving classrooms during lesson times, eight children left the classroom and we were able to find out the reasons for seven of them. On the second occasion, 12 exits were recorded, with accounts for eight of them. The production techniques and number of participants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Participants and data production techniques*

Participants	Data production techniques
15 students	Semi-structured individual interviews
15 students	Brief survey after absences or expulsions from the classroom during class hours

*Source: Prepared by the authors*

## Information analysis

The information was transcribed and processed using content analysis (Saldaña, 2009). The first phase of the analysis involved selecting the recording units, creating codes, and drafting instructions for their application. The codes were subsequently grouped, resulting in four thematic categories, according to the semantic content of the quotations.

To ensure the validity of the data, an internal dependency audit was carried out (Ruiz-Olabuénaga, 1996), triangulating the information analysis carried out by the action research team with experts from other schools and the academic world. First, the data analysis and the results of the analysis were examined by the teachers' council of the school where the research was carried out and then by other researchers and employees of the Research Center for Inclusive Education (Cornejo & Salas, 2011; Johnson-Mardones, 2017).

## Ethical aspects

The research team assumed the position of a learner regarding the students and their culture. This entailed monitoring the pedagogical relationship and trying to make it flexible and respectful of the experiences, views, and expressions of the participating children (Vergara et al., 2015).

The study included the informed consent of the school administration, as well as that of the teachers and parents of the students who participated. All school students and parents were informed about the research project through mass communications at meetings. Prior to the interview, the selected students were asked for their consent to record and analyze the information, ensuring that anonymity and confidentiality would be protected. To respect this commitment, the material was blinded for the transcription, with personal names omitted.

## Results

The first thematic category refers to a daily occurrence in classes that the participants described as boring, with few opportunities to cultivate bonds with most of the teachers. The next two categories communicate the different possible experiences considering this distance: while some students sought to abscond from classes or interrupt them by fighting or destroying furniture—and were later attended to by school professionals—others were content to remain silent, despite being affected by the situation. The fourth and final category refers to proposals for improving school coexistence made by the children.

### Category 1. The context: the classes are boring

In both the interviews and the brief surveys, the participants stated that the classes were tedious. This situation was due to conditions of form and substance. In terms of form, the content and activities were not interesting to the students.

Similarly, the difficulty of the tasks was seen as a cause of disengagement and even abandonment (Figure 1). “It has happened to me that sometimes I don’t understand and sometimes they don’t repeat the explanation twice, or sometimes they do, but you’re already frustrated” (student, 8th grade).

Course	Situation	Reason
6th grade	Expulsion	"I'm bored"
8th grade	Abscondence	"The teacher is very boring"
6th grade	Abscondence	"The activity was boring and I didn't like it, so why be there"

Figure 1. Copy extracted from the register of student exits during class hours, Tuesday, October 08, 2018.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the register of exits from the classroom.

Another aspect of form is the confinement of the classroom, the monotony of the tasks, and the corporeality of the teachers when teaching, which transmits apathy and lack of enjoyment.

I: Because the classes are really lame, because they’re the same every day, copying from the blackboard, locked in the room, sometimes they don’t even open a window. Also, listening to the teacher, because they speak as if they’re not happy, they speak as if they’re dispirited.

R: How can you tell?

I: By their face ... (student, 3rd grade).

The participants associate boredom in class with the appearance of indiscipline and school violence, which we develop in the following category.



## Category 2. Being *choro*<sup>1</sup>: school violence hides/reveals vulnerability

The participants stated that in each course there were students who engaged in fights between each other, explaining that, on the one hand, it was due to individual factors, such as demotivation and irritability (Figure 2). On the other hand, it responded to classes being tedious and monotonous, which could increase demotivation and make it easier for students to become annoyed with each other. Thus, fights among classmates can be understood to a large extent as violence that occurs *at* school, mediated by the pedagogical proposal.

Course	Situation	Reason
7th grade	Abscondence	"I don't want to work
5th grade	Expulsion	"I don't feel motivated to work"
4th grade	Expulsion	"Little motivation in classes"

Figure 2. Copy extracted from the register of student exits during class hours, Thursday, October 10, 2018

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the register of exits from the classroom.

The participants considered that there was a relationship between indiscipline in classes, abscondences, and the school as an institution. For them, actions of disobedience implied a protest at not understanding or being at ease in class, and could be understood as forms of violence *towards* the school.

I: There are some classmates who sometimes turn over the tables, hit classmates ... and they cuss ...

R: How often does that happen?

I: Every one or two days.

R: And why do you think that happens?

I: Because they don't want to study (student 3rd grade).

"That's when [the students] get frustrated and think it's boring. They explode. Most of the time they leave because they want to" (7th-grade student).

In the following quotes, it is clear that violence in and toward the school, in addition to allowing students to avoid classes they find boring, allows them to be attended to by school staff. This occurred because the institution focused psychosocial intervention exclusively on students who behaved in a disruptive or violent manner.

In the following excerpt we see a mechanism of the school culture, which begins with an episode of disruptive or violent behavior by a student, which triggers—when seen by a school official—the intervention of at least one professional. It leads to the student leaving the room, to be controlled and interviewed—described with the colloquial expression *pescar*, which is equivalent to being noticed and paid attention to—despite this happening

1. Translator's note: Here the term used in Chilean slang is *choro*, which is roughly equivalent to acting tough or acting aggressively.

for negative reasons. The excerpt implies that in order to be heard and attended to, students not only have to raise their voices, but also be the one who makes the most noise or carries out acts of violence, to the point of interrupting or attracting the attention of an adult.

Here, if someone hits someone else, they pay attention to you, they send you to the inspector's office, everyone arrives and then you leave the classroom ... it's more boring to be in the classroom. The one who yells the loudest gets the attention, just being *choro* (interview with 8th-grade student).

The expression being *choro* refers to being cunning and aggressive in order to obtain material or social advantages. This kind of attitude is usually socially legitimized among the most vulnerable communities (Pavez, 2012; Sepúlveda & Murillo, 2012), while school professionals—more representative of the middle class (Burke & Whitty, 2018)—consider that being *choro* is a negative stereotype, usually contrary to the student profile and the values of effort, respect, and academic knowledge (Laloeza, 2012). This conflict of values is replicated at this school, insofar as the aggressive students are listened to, leave the classroom, and are attended to by adults. This confirms the negative stereotype that adults in the school may have regarding the culture of the students' families and communities of origin.

The circuit taken by students who managed to be attended by the school professionals often included the inspector's office. In this area, the students were registered, recording the events that caused them to abscond or be expelled, along with their names. In most cases, the teacher of the class was consulted and the headteacher was notified, deciding whether punishments would be applied in accordance with the school coexistence regulations. They were often given lectures by the inspector or the person responsible for coexistence and they remained in the area for a while before joining the next classes. There, they could use an armchair intended to be a quiet space for them to calm down. They also had a table, pencils, and paper to draw or color.

Despite the punitive measures applied by the inspector, the participants appreciated the safety and comfort the space provided. As they stated: "I like being in the inspector's office to draw and play" (student, 3rd grade); "They don't bother me there [in the inspector's office], I'm safer" (student, 6th grade).

### Category 3. Be aware: those of us who are not troublemakers also need attention

The participants stated that students who did not engage in disruptive or violent behavior were at a disadvantage. Although they did not carry the negative label of being a problem student, they were generally compliant in the context of boring classes: "Sometimes they go out on their own because they say they get bored in class. Sometimes I get bored too" (student, 3rd grade).

On the other hand, when observing acts of indiscipline in the classroom and fights between other students, they felt annoyed by the repetitive nature of the situations. They also felt sadness and fear about the damage that could be caused to other people or to the building: "I feel bad when they fight and that kind of stuff, I don't like it" (student, 2nd grade); "It makes me a bit sad because they get angry and start hitting each other ... I feel sorry that they react badly because they might accidentally hit the misses<sup>2</sup>" (student, 4th grade); "So, I'm getting bored, I'm getting fed up, it happens over and over and over again" (student, 7th grade).

Some of them validated the voluntary abscondences and the measures to expel classmates who were undisciplined and violent in the classroom, because it was a relief to them and made them feel safer. "I feel relief when they leave because they won't be bothering [anyone] anymore" (student, 5th grade).

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2. Translator's note: The term used in Chile is *tia*, which is equivalent to "miss", referring to female teachers in English-speaking nations.

The discomfort related to being a victim of aggression from other classmates was also demonstrated: “I get along well with my friends, but badly with others. The other day a classmate pulled down my pants. I got upset and felt ashamed” (student, 6th grade). In addition to annoyance and embarrassment, some reported feeling sadness, “I feel sad because nobody likes to be bothered” (student, 3rd grade).

In this experience, they claimed that situations of verbal abuse were not made visible by the adults, as was the case in situations of physical abuse that occurred in places where no adults were present.

I don't like to spend much time [with the other children] because they tell you ‘this isn't how it's done, this is how it's done’, and they bother you. They bother me from all grades, I don't know why ... I keep quiet or I leave ... If I say something [to the school staff] they'll keep bothering me because they don't listen to you or pay attention to you (student, 4th grade).

Shame, helplessness, and guilt are feelings expressed by students who have been physically and verbally abused by other classmates. At the same time that they perceived helplessness in the face of school violence, they assumed responsibility for the persistence of the situation, for not knowing how to express their own discomfort and their need for change. They considered that the alternative of *shouting louder* could be useful to get the attention they needed, but they would have preferred to have the routine attention of the adults, rather than being linked to aggression or shouting.

I'm guilty, because I don't say that they bother me every time... I'd like the school to see what's happening, that some of us aren't going to shout. I want them to hear what's happening, what's happening to me (student, 4th grade).

The latter quotes show that students have learned that those who receive or witness aggression from their peers do not obtain attention from the school staff. They have learned that the few alternatives for action they have in this situation include self-silencing and distancing themselves from the context in which aggressions occur among students. This learning has been established in the framework of school management that is overly focused on students who fit the aggressive stereotype. However, some students did not want to occupy this category and could not find a space in the culture of the school institution. This situation can be understood as violence *from* the school towards the students and their culture.

Lastly, with respect to the habits of these students at the school, they stated that during recesses they resorted to spending time in the Learning Resource Center (CRA) and the inspector's office. They explained that they felt safer and more at ease in these spaces, considering them refuges in the face of the helplessness they mentioned regarding the mistreatment they observed or received. They were pleasant spaces in which they liked to participate. “At recess I leave the classroom because they bother me there and I'm safer here” (student, 2nd grade. The interview was conducted in the inspector's office). “Being in the inspector's office to paint and play” (student, 2nd grade). “I like going to the CRA because there are lots of things, books, and I do activities. I forget about problems or mistakes I made without wanting to ... and I feel safe” (student, 5th grade).

#### **Category 4. Despite everything, there is hope in play, affection, and recognition**

Although the students perceived that indiscipline and violence were commonplace in their school and they felt helpless, powerless, fearful, guilty, and annoyed by it, they expressed parallel desire and hope that the situation could improve or change.

According to the participants, the first possibility for feeling good at school was the availability of materials in the institution: “I like that we have so many things: computers, books, projectors” (student, 5th grade). They also highlighted the building in general: “I like the school because it’s colorful. It shines in the sun” (student, 2nd grade).

They also referred to episodes in which they had received awards, helped others, or represented the school. “If I feel valued at school, I don’t know really ... in awards, in events, when I help someone or break up a fight” (student, 5th grade). These were social situations in which they had felt important to the institution and where they had been given opportunities for achievement.

I like it when we go to the championships, because the teacher supports you there, they tell you ‘you can do it’, and nothing happens [no fights or indiscipline]. I think it’s because they make you feel good, they think you’re going to do well, I don’t know ... because in the end you don’t always behave badly (interview with student, 8th grade).

One element that they saw as more remote was learning through play. They stated that it would be very helpful if subjects were studied through playful activities. They also appreciated free spaces to exchange ideas or create, with less damage or destruction being caused: “I’d like to change the way classes are taught, make them more fun and with more games” (student, 7th grade); “I like the arts, that you can do art, anything that comes to mind, and physical education because the teacher gives us free time” (student, 3rd grade); “Sometimes we can do whatever we want, but less destruction ... breaking” (student, 5th grade).

Finally, they mentioned that one significant change would be to have a closer and more affectionate relationship with their teachers. Considering the question of what you would say to this school, one participant stated, “That the teachers are affectionate to you” (student, 2nd grade).

## Conclusion

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Conducting this study allowed the research team to contrast their own beliefs and management practices with those of their students. The management implemented up until the time of the study was focused on intervening with students who were considered disruptive or violent because of their personality. The participatory sampling exercise showed that the number of students who usually had interventions by the team was small (five students from fourth to eighth grade). However, they accounted for a large part of the staff’s activity.

The results led the team to take a broader view, connecting episodes of aggression or *explosions*—in the words of the students—with classroom experiences. That is, while the personality and culture of origin could be related to the frequent occurrence of such episodes, it was necessary to consider that the school’s pedagogical approach was not welcoming or interesting to the children. Seemingly, the teachers did not feel good in the classes either, as the participants observed in their apathetic faces. In this context, some students could not stand the routine and disrupted it with acts considered violent and disruptive by the staff who worked on coexistence and by their own peers.

These acts may symbolize the dispute of the power vertical exercised by teachers towards students in the classroom, in which children became partially aware of the position constructed over them (Grinberg et al., 2014; Kaplán et al., 2012) and attempted an (im)possible and ephemeral way out. These acts would *not* be isolated students causing problems, but situations of violence *in* the school, insofar as acts of disruption and aggression took shape and meaning within it. They would also imply violence *towards* the school, as they attempt to disrupt the designs and regimes supported by the management of coexistence.

Meanwhile, the results enabled us to note that children who observed and received aggression also needed attention, to be listened to, and recognized regarding their experience and identity (Fierro, 2017; Garcés-Delgado et al., 2020; Yáñez et al., 2018). This aspect leads us to think that the focused management of coexistence establishes inequitable distribution of psychosocial resources in the school (Kaplán, 2006, 2009; Tomasini et al., 2014), organized around the management of childhood psychosocial risk (Grinberg, et al., 2014; Infante et al., 2011) and the compensatory subsidy (Bonal & Bellei, 2018; Llóbet, 2006). This inequity in the distribution of psychosocial resources can be seen as a situation of educational injustice (Rojas et al., 2019), in that the experiences of annoyance, sadness, fear, shame, hopelessness, and guilt manifested by students who observed and received aggression were not addressed.

On the other hand, both the negative visibilization of the *choro* or aggressive student and the invisibilization of alternative subjectivities among students can be interpreted as symbolic violence (Grinberg, 2015; Kaplán, 1992), since the stigma of the aggressive student is reproduced (García & Madriaza, 2006), as the coexistence team repeatedly makes efforts to contain their behavior, without seeking to modify it or transform the social conditions that sustain it (Giroux, 1986). In turn, the school does not provide spaces to recognize or develop other subjectivities (Kaplán, 2006) related to their potentials (Grinberg et al., 2014), their cultural diversity (Laluzza, 2012), and their possibilities of learning (Julio, 2016) to relate to and coexist with each other in an inclusive and peaceful environment (Fierro & Carbajal, 2019). These acts of symbolic violence are directed *from* the school towards the students and their culture.

The participating children indicated that situations of violence in, towards, and from the school taught them to shout or to remain silent. Between these alternatives for action, they remained hopeful about their school and its staff. They appreciated the didactic resources, and the few spaces for play and free learning. They hoped that the school staff would realize what they were experiencing, that they would listen to them, that the fights and disruptions would stop, and that the quality and warmth of the classes would improve. This leads us to consider that the school, while reproducing the social exclusion of marginalized children and young people, retains a high symbolic value as a space for inclusion and development (Gómez & Zurita, 2013; Rojas et al., 2019).

Management that listens to what is happening would first imply looking more broadly at school violence, acknowledging the defenselessness and helplessness of those who receive and witness it, and second, raising awareness of and socially validating other positions and identities that are silenced in the school culture. Based on this, it is possible to design and sustain a more equitable distribution of psychosocial care, with a transformative perspective.

In order to achieve this, the resources and spaces for reflective work on the practices to manage violence and coexistence in the school become relevant (Fierro & Carbajal, 2019). This, in turn, calls for reconsideration of the situation of structural violence in the educational system, which obliges the schools that attend to the most marginalized students and families in society—such as the one that participated in this research—to continue operating with limited and targeted resources (Bonal & Bellei, 2018).

One of the elements that could be interesting for further exploration in future research is the spaces of refuge from school violence reported by the students, in this case the CRA and the inspector's office. Studying this situation in other schools could shed light on the environment, resources, and structures that are attractive and safe for students. Another element that could be examined in future research is the teachers' lack of enjoyment, as noted by the students. It is essential to find out more about the experience and perspective of classroom teachers in order to expand the problematization and the search for pertinent and viable solutions.

Conducting this study as part of an action research process enabled us to unite the hope for change among the team responsible with that of the children who face school violence. It was an opportunity to rethink with and for children, moving towards inclusive and fair school management considering the students, their perspectives, and their culture (Díaz et al., 2019; Yáñez, et al., 2018).

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