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School violence and school coexistence management: unresolved challenges

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Abstract

The study analyzes the key management actions for the prevention and reduction of school violence in educational centers belonging to the three types of administrative offices found in the Chilean school system. The methodology is quantitative with a descriptive cross-sectional design. The Questionnaire for School Environments of Non-violence (CENVI) was applied to a sample of 1410 students, 10-14 years of age. The results show a descriptive analysis that reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the management for the prevention of violence. Recommendations are given in the areas of training, peaceful co-existence and participation to promote a healthy learning environment in schools.

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1. Introduction

School violence is a phenomenon of global concern and the increasing prevalence of school violence presents the educational system and its members with the challenge of finding solutions. This in turn activates a growing concern for improving relationships within the school setting, in order to prevent violence and positively influence the psychosocial development of students and the learning outcomes of the school (Diaz-Aguado, 2006; Murillo, 2011; Ortega, Chaparro, & Coll, 2010).

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1.1. School violence

School violence is a phenomenon that negatively affects students' academic and social development and whose consequences can affect a person their entire life. The negative effects that victims experience can affect their immediate social environment, becoming a problem that transcends their school lives. Europe and the US have paid attention to this phenomenon since the 1980s, with a specific focus on its definition and prevalence (Perez, Astudillo, Valera, & Lecannelier, 2013)

Violence is a historical construct associated with dominance, which would explain why it manifests in various ways. It is a learned negative behavior based on aggression, which occurs mainly due to a lack of the social and emotional skills needed to resolve conflicts peacefully (Carabajal, 2010; Ortega, Chaparro, & Coll, 2010). In educational establishments, the definition of violence differs from one context to another (Castillo, 2011). However, the theoretical approaches to the concept agree that the common goal of using violence is to cause pain within the context of a victim-offender relationship (Berger, 2011; Blair, 2009). This relationship is interchangeable and can mutate to a point where "the one who assaults or frightens may become respected, feared, admired or victimized" (Potocnjak, Berger, & Tomicic, 2011:45). Violence then, should not be understood based on the individual characteristics of its participants, but should instead be recognized as a group phenomenon. Reducing school violence requires recognizing that this is a multi-causal, complex, and dynamic phenomenon (Berger, 2011; Potocnjak et al., 2011; Tijmes, 2012).

1.2. Effects of school violence

The effects of school violence can increase and be prolonged when this violence becomes an abuse of power, when it is constant over time (Diaz-Aguado, Martinez, & Babarro, 2013), when it implies inequality of power and when it signifies an experience of victimization (Olweus, 1993). Research has found that the psychosocial effects of the experiences of violence or bullying can cause many immediate socio-affective, cognitive, behavioral and identity issues in victims (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003; Fekkes, Pijpers, Fredriks, Vogels, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2006; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Later on, as adults, evidence shows that the stigma suffered is often remembered with anguish (Nashiki, 2013) and both aggressors and victims can maintain the dysfunctional symptoms they experienced as children (Sourander et al., 2007).

1.3. School coexistence management

Healthy relationships with others and non-violence at school are managed through a healthy school environment. This healthy school environment promotes the building of interpersonal relationships based on mutual respect, expressed in the harmonious interplay and non-violence between different actors and participants within the school. The focus on a peaceful co-existence within the school environment is essentially formative, and is based on the recognition that a wide range of information, abilities and values should be taught and learnt in order to enable the student body to practice living in peace and harmony with others, since this is a foundational aspect of citizenship (MINEDUC, 2011, 2013). A healthy school environment has a significant impact on the socio-affective, ethical, and intellectual development of students. It also influences learning outcomes since disruptive or violent behaviors promote environments that impede the normal development of classes and affect students' socio-affective and cognitive learning (CONACE, 2006; Murillo, 2011; OREALC/UNESCO, 2001, 2013).

A healthy school environment is based on the school providing a learning space in which social skills can be developed (Eceiza, Arrieta, & Goni, 2008). Schools should plan and implement training programs that facilitate the development of socio-affective and ethical skills such as empathy, respect, mutual appreciation and healthy relationships. The management of the school environment should carefully promote positive classroom settings that enhance the social and emotional development of each of its members (Sanchez & Cerezo, 2011). The assumption is that the central aspect of education consists of socio-affective and ethical learning, as an essential contribution to civic education (Banz, 2008).

The problem arises however when one realizes that schools and educational systems in general, have failed to respond to the high incidence of school violence, and management has been unable to implement programs to

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