SAFETY AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE POLICIES IN LATIN AMERICAN SCHOOLS
Human rights perspective

Ana María Rodino
Costa Rica Distance University, San José, Costa Rica
Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, San José, Costa Rica

Background

This paper discusses the theoretical framework, methodology and results of the *X Inter-American Report on Human Rights Education* (IIHR, 2011). This report is part of a broader research program on the development of Human Rights Education (hereafter HRE) being conducted since 2002 in the countries signatory of the *Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* or *Protocol of San Salvador* (OAS, 1988).[1]

The Inter-American Report on HRE is the result of a set of studies conducted every year simultaneously in 19 countries of the region, following a single design.[2] The report collects findings obtained in each country and compares them with the use of a data collection matrix that feeds into a system of indicators. The indicators gauge the performance of variables that reflect changes in the exercise of some critical aspect of the right to HRE over a given period, usually the decade prior to measurement. The report reveals regional and national trends — whether progress, setbacks or stagnation — in legal protection and in political, institutional and operational conditions on the exercise of the right to HRE.

The regulatory foundation of the system of reports is the right to HRE. International standards derived from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, and in the Americas, the *Protocol of San Salvador* clearly establish the right to HRE as part of the right to education. Therefore, the signatory countries of the Protocol of San Salvador are committed to design a legal and logistic platform for promoting and protecting economic, socil and cultural rights in all their dimensions. This includes the duty to progressively incorporate international human rights provisions into their domestic legislation, design public policies and implement activities to comply with these

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[1]   The Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, IIHR/IIDH, located in San Jose, Costa Rica produces the annual *Inter-American Report on Human Rights Education*. This author has been a member of the research team since the design stage in 2000, and currently coordinates it. She was the writer of the *X Report* here discussed.

[2]   The 19 countries signatory of the Protocol of San Salvador are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela. In the case of the X Report, unfortunately, no researchers could take part from either Haiti or Suriname, so no information is available on these two countries. The research universe was then limited to 17 countries.

precepts. The purpose of the *Inter-American Report* on HRE has been to examine the degree to which policies, initiatives and decisions are consistent with content on the right to HRE, and how much progress has been made in achieving it. Previous reports monitored the inclusion of HRE in education legislation and planning, curriculum, schoolbooks and teacher training. The *X Report* explores a new domain from a HRE perspective.

Context and justification

The term "school environment" covers a vast, complex system that contains diverse components, all of them necessary and relevant for the process of education. The apparently simple expression "school" includes such diverse dimensions and factors as the rules, regulations and public policies that govern education; the different manifestations of the curriculum; pedagogical tools used by the people involved in education; teaching itself; extra-curricular activities for student participation, and other stakeholders in the world of education, especially parents and the community. The progress and outcome of the educational process cannot be understood without considering how these factors fit together, their synergies and tensions. This ecosystem as a whole and its individual components all need to be imbued with the vision, content and practices of HRE.

Earlier versions of the *Inter-American Report* on HRE focused on certain of these components based on recommendations by the IIHR in-house research team and following discussion with Institute authorities. The theme for the *X Report*, however, originated differently. A request was received from some of the region's ministries of education to conduct a research targeting a phenomenon that is arousing ever-greater concern among national education authorities: violence in schools.

The request reflected a valid and current concern that is germane to the effective exercise of human rights in schools. School-based acts of violence, regardless of their source or severity, constitute violations by certain members of the school community of the human rights of others. From the rights perspective, they must always be identified and reported. Above all, they must be prevented so they do not even occur. Given this request, the Institute decided that the *X Report* would examine the phenomenon of violence in Latin American schools, particularly violence played out among the main stakeholders in education (between students and teachers, and between students), often known as *school violence* or *intra-school violence*.

It has become a problem of great concern to the region's top education authorities, faced with the perception that acts of violence have been on the upswing over the past decade and reaching alarming proportions. The subject is widely discussed in the media and in the marketplace, usually in the absence of any reliable information. There is little basis beyond journalistic reports about certain headline-grabbing cases and generic information of questionable credibility taken from the rumor mill. Beyond certain experts, few are familiar with academic studies

conducted in the region, which are rarely in the hands of the very people in the education sector who most need them: school administrators, teachers, students and parents.

It is important to reframe this issue as a problem of dignity and rights, shedding light on its many different angles with a clear human rights lens and avoiding prejudices and stereotypes, arbitrary apocalyptic hypotheses, groundless opinions and threatening talk of "iron-fisted" crackdowns. The latter is particularly dangerous, not only because research has shown such responses to be ineffective, but also because they tend to condone the violation of certain other human rights in the name of a form of "order" or "peace" defined unilaterally by those who hold power (Krauskopf, 2006; Abad and Gómez, 2008; Rodríguez, 2010).

Thus the challenge was taken of examining this problem using the theoretical and methodological framework of the *Inter-American Report*. The overall purpose was to provide tools that will help people in the education community become more sensitive to the problem, analyze it objectively, take action to prevent it and, if necessary, face up to it without ever losing their human rights perspective and using HRE as a strategy for intervention.

This means the theoretical-pedagogical construct needs to be reversed. The educational system should not take on the objective of "fighting violence" *per se* (a task proper to police and the courts), but instead should plan ways to create and sustain conditions that will guarantee safety and peaceful coexistence in school facilities and education communities, as these goals are clearly in the purview of educators. "Learning to live together" is, in fact, one of the great and undeniable purposes of education.[3]

Living together means more than mere peaceful coexistence among people sharing the same physical space. The United Nations Development Programme, for example, explains it as a social dynamic based on relations of trust and cooperation, in which all people feel like part of a society, enjoy their human rights and experience socially constructed opportunities expressed in part by the State, its rules and its democratic institutions (UNDP, 2007).

When educational institutions teach students to live together, manifestations of violence may and in fact do erupt, and the school needs to respond. The school should recognize these manifestations and call them by their name — acts of violence — without ambiguity, because whatever goes unnamed tends to become invisible and cannot be handled clearly or effectively. However, manifestations of violence are serious disruptions of the educational process. Even beyond their particular causes, often external to the school, if they are not contained, they reveal the school's own limitations and inadequacies for managing, negotiating or constructively transforming conflicts that arise within its walls and among its members.

Again, while the school's institutional mission is not to combat violence, it still needs to recognize the manifestations of violence and work conscientiously

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3   Together with "learning to be, " "learning to do" and "learning to learn, " these are the four pillars of education defined by *Delors Report* and now universally accepted. See UNESCO (1996).

to prevent them. It must be able to identify factors that favor violence and heighten the potential for violent acts to occur (*risk factors)* so as to neutralize them, and find other factors that can reduce the likelihood of violent acts (*protection factors*), to strengthen them (MEN, MEPC, and OEI, 2005). When necessary, if the school finds itself faced directly with episodes of violence, it must handle them using tools consistent with its educational nature and function, always from a rights perspective.

Theoretical framework: school and types of violence

The first step for addressing the problems of violence in the school setting (as in overall society) is to banish an initial conceptual error: alluding to violence as if it were a single, uniform phenomenon. Instead we will use the plural expression "types of violence" to cover the highly diverse spectrum of situations and behaviors commonly encapsulated in this term.

Expressions of violence in school settings can vary in many ways, such as their relationship to the school, origin, type and degree of severity; such factors are also interwoven with other phenomena from each different socio-historical and geographic context. In Latin America, the problems may range from fairly constrained manifestations of violence such as harassment or bullying among peers, to clear aggression among students, acts of vandalism against school property, mistreatment between teachers and students, taking weapons into schools, open or subtle influences from the drug world, including drug retailing and the presence of gangs, excesses committed by police guards inside or outside the schools, among others (Rodríguez, 2010: 4).

Specialized studies use different approaches to classify types of violence in schools, although two particular classification systems are most common: one rates the relationship between violent acts and the school itself, as an institution; the other rates the type and degree of violence. Studies based on the relationship with the school distinguish between (i) violence by or from the school (institutional violence exercised by the school itself or by the education system against its members), (ii) violence toward or against the school (acts that directly target the school, that is, intended to destroy or damage the institution's infrastructure and legitimacy), and (iii) violence in the school (events inside the school that mirror criminal acts generally occurring on the outside, in society) (Gómes, 2008: 4).

Studies based on types and degrees of violence often distinguish between physical violence and symbolic violence, sometimes adding an additional class of less severe behavior they call "incivility" (Gómes, 2008). Other authors use more operational classification systems, identifying five manifestations of violence: (i) vandalism (against school property); (ii) disruptiveness (against school activities); (iii) indiscipline (against the rules); (iv) inter-personal violence (among students, teachers, etc.); and (v) crime (illegal actions subject to criminal consequences) (Rodríguez, 2010).

These two classification systems can be combined into a table showing the major expressions of violence in the schools (table 1).

Table 1   Preliminary classification of types of school violence

Types of violence	By the school	Against the school	In the school
Physical	Physical punishment.	Vandalism (including graffiti), trespassing, burglary and theft, fights between students and teachers.	Fights between students, burglary, theft and damage of student property, sexual violence,* competition among groups for control over areas of the school grounds (often in collusion with adults).
Symbolic	Humiliating forms of punishment, meaningless curriculum requirements, demanding prior cultural and social knowledge as a prerequisite for student success.	Challenging the rules of coexistence in the school and society, including threats and physical or online harassment or stalking against adults.	Threats, aggressive words and gestures among students, physical and online harassment or stalking, moral violence (libel, slander),** forced social isolation,*** etc.
Incivility	Ill-mannered words and gestures by adults, imbued with class-based or ethnic-based judgments, generally used to enforce obedience when challenged.	Aggressive words and gestures by students against adults, willfully ignoring school rules and standards of "good manners", repeated instances of punishable behavior.	Aggressive words and gestures among students, contrary to school rules and standards of "good manners", often revealing gender, age, ethnic or social class prejudices.

Note: Shaded areas indicate behaviors that tend to occur more often in schools with socially vulnerable populations.

* Known as the Maria da Penha Law (No. 11.340, August 7, 2006, art. 7), a landmark in Brazil's fight against violence against women; the law defines sexual violence as any behavior that forces a women to witness, sustain or participate in an undesired sexual relationship by means of intimidation, threat, coercion or use of force; that induces her to negotiate her sexuality or use it in any sense; that prevents her from using contraceptives or that forces her into marriage, pregnancy, abortion or prostitution by means of coercion, intimidation, bribery or manipulation; or that limits or prevents her from exercising her sexual and reproductive rights. Education research suggests that this definition should be expanded to include fondling and physical contact brushed off as joking or teasing.

** Also forbidden under the Maria da Penha Law.

*** Symbolic violence includes psychological violence, defined by the law as any behavior that may cause damage to psychological health and self-determination.

Source: Gomes (2008: 4).

Forms of school violence are closely associated with phenomena of social transformation and the types of violence experienced by overall society. Today, basic school education has become nearly universal in most of the world, and Latin America is no exception. Public education, once little more than a program proposal and an optional plank in the government platform for whichever authorities happened to be in office, came to be understood as a human right binding on the States. This change triggered a massive process to educate populations characterized by vast socio-cultural diversity. Inequality, inequity and social violence have

"invaded" the school, formerly considered a sort of "sanctuary", an exclusive stronghold for the minorities that owned property and political power in each society (Gomes, 2008: 2).

Similarly, the causes and conditions under which different manifestations of violence develop in Latin America vary from region to region, according to Rodríguez (2010). The Southern Cone is experiencing the "consequences of deindustrialization and social breakdown trends" that sidelined broad swaths of the population who had been fully integrated before the recent wave of crisis. Central America is contending with "the legacy of 1980s armed conflicts, limitations of the 1990s peace processes, the impact on economic dynamics of unskilled labor in foreign-owned assembly plants ('maquilas'), and heavy migration especially into the United States". Meanwhile, in large countries such as Brazil, Mexico and Colombia, the explanations seem to be associated more with "the proliferation of powers parallel to the legal structures (drug cartels, armed groups, etc.) in the framework of weakened States and extremely critical structural situations" (Rodríguez, 2010: 3).

Nevertheless, above and beyond these differences and peculiarities, the author recognizes a common problem in all the countries of the region: "the widespread establishment of a culture of violence that 'settles' nearly all conflicts (even the most minor and irrelevant) by violent means" (Rodríguez, 2010: 3). Education needs to address this very phenomenon and this perspective and attitude toward social life and interpersonal relationships. It must begin by understanding the many complexities involved, and it must avoid lapsing into false over-simplifications or stigmatizing stereotypes — both ineffective.

Specialized studies have evaluated the many strategies implemented by different countries to fight school- or youth-related violence, attempting to discern which ones have produced results, and which have not. It is generally found that punishment-based strategies ("iron-fist", "crackdown", "zero tolerance", military models) tend to be the least effective and indeed are generally counterproductive, as are strategies to target "vulnerable youth" or to "rehabilitate" offenders and gang members (Krauskopf, 2006; Abad and Gómez, 2008; Rodríguez, 2010). By contrast, strategies that have achieved more and better results are based on prevention, target the overall youth population (they are non-specific), and lay the groundwork for a culture of peace and human rights in the school and society. The study identified certain success factors, such as promoting teamwork, recognizing students as young people and rights-holders, linking education to the world of work, citizenship training and conflict resolution, and presence in the school of other specialists to back up the teachers (guidance counselors, student advisors, etc.) (Acosta, 2008; Abramovay, 2009).

Research domain and hypothesis

Literature on the subject reveals the importance of developing educational policies to prevent potential violence. These policies should target the entire student body and be designed to improve the climate in the schools and facilitate daily

coexistence. They should be based on human rights values and principles, a culture of peace and democratic citizenship, and rest on the development of self-esteem, communication skills and interpersonal relationships.

This research was rooted in the conceptual and political conviction that there is a *two-way relationship between safety and peaceful coexistence in the schools and human rights education.* On one hand, if members of the education community feel comfortable and safe inside the schools and enjoy interactions based on respect and solidarity, human rights are learned in a practical way. These practices are part of the "hidden curriculum" of every education system, which has at least as much educational value as the overt, explicit curriculum. Daily living teaches the most fundamental human rights values and attitudes: that everyone deserves a sense of dignity; that everyone is a rights-holder and deserves self-esteem; that others have a right to receive consideration and care, and that all are equals in dignity and rights.

On the other hand, there is a reciprocal influence. Human rights training for members of the education community encourages more peaceful, democratic and safe interactions for everyone, because HRE builds up the values, attitudes and behaviors that should govern respectful relations among individuals/ rights-holders (freedom, equality, solidarity, peace, justice, tolerance, etc.).

In short, a school that works on HRE is contributing to peaceful coexistence and safety, and vice-versa. The two will either grow together or deteriorate together. This is why, if one dimension of school life falls short (such as recurring incidents or situations of some sort of violence), one pedagogical strategy is to tackle the other dimension: rights education. The evidence from studies cited above confirms such an assertion.

This research built on the hypothesis that HRE progress depends on whether the education sector has public policies and strategies for intervention designed to promote safety and peaceful coexistence inside the schools, and whether these policies and strategies are designed and implemented with a focus on rights. The goal was to inquire whether Latin American countries have such policies along with strategies for preventing and managing violence, what they are, how they are grounded and how they are implemented. It should be noted that the theme focuses on the effective exercise of a variety of rights, not only the right to education and to HRE. These rights are directly at play in the school environment: in this case, the right to life, to humane treatment both physically and psychologically, prohibition of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, freedom from discrimination, and right to health, participation and due process.

Sources of information, procedures and matrix of variables and indicators

Two types of information were collected in the countries. One was information provided by interviews and focus groups with school actors. Its purpose was to offer a contextual, preliminary view of how teachers, principals and parents perceive

the current situation of safety and "living together" in the schools — or, to approach it from the opposite angle, how they perceive the situation of violence in the school setting. The other was hard data on policies on the subject compiled at the national ministries of education from documentary institutional information as the preferred source (laws, orders, regulations, empirical data, assessments, evaluations, etc.) For this purpose, a matrix of four variables and 15 indicators was developed together with the suitable means of verification (table 2).

The variable *Statistical information and assessments* was included to verify whether lead entities in the national education sector had access to information on incidents or situations of conflict in the public schools. This empirical foundation provides the essential basis for assessing the real situation of safety and peaceful coexistence in the schools. The indicators point to the existence (or absence) of factual data, procedures for documenting and processing data, and analytical studies of the data.

The variable *Policies, plans and programs* was intended to determine whether education authorities had general policies and strategies for handling the kinds of problems targeted for study. Policies and actions were classified into three levels of generality: guidelines or instructions, plans, and programs or projects. One indicator applied to each level. A crucial fourth indicator asked whether these different types of policies had been designed with a human rights perspective.

The variable *Policy implementation* delved more deeply into the rationale and the expected timetable of public policies; that is, it looked into the activation and implementation of policies. The indicators asked whether basic conditions were in place for implementing such policies: responsible institutional entities, budget, participation by different education stakeholders, informational materials, and training programs.

The variable *Monitoring and evaluation of policies* looked into the completion of the policy cycle, asking how much oversight was exercised over policy implementation, effects and outcomes. The indicators explored whether compliance with policy provisions was subject to any official monitoring, whether evaluations took place and whether results or conclusions were available.

Information was collected and analyzed following the standard procedure for the *Inter-American Report*. Local researchers collected raw material for the study in their countries, following detailed specifications provided by the IIHR in-house team. The local researchers were former Institute students and employees of the ministries of education who had participated in previous reports. The raw material was sent to the Institute to be processed and analyzed, together with supporting documentation. For this report, a total of 136 documentary sources were identified and studied.

Table 2   Research matrix of variables and indicators

Field: Public policies for education. Domain: Policies on safety and peaceful coexistence in the schools		
Variables	Indicators	Means of verification
1. Statistical information and situation assessments	1.1 Availability of statistical information and databases in the ministry of education on incidents or situations of violent conflict in the nation's schools.	Interview with the head of statistics for the ministry of education (or other government agency, if relevant).
	1.2 Practice of some procedure for systematic processing and analysis of available statistical data.	Review of the existing database on conflicts in the schools (in the ministry of education or other government agency).
	1.3. Availability of descriptive or narrative studies by the ministry of education based on available statistical data.	Listing of available studies.
2. Policies, plans and programs	2.1 Existence of *guidelines or instructions from the ministry* to promote safety and peaceful coexistence in the schools and prevent and manage conflict in the nation's schools.	Interview with the head of the ministry office responsible for this subject.
	2.2 Existence of one or more *plans* on this subject.	Document(s) from the ministry giving specific instructions on peaceful coexistence, safety and violence in the schools (communiques, rulings, regulations, etc.).
	2.3 Implementation of one or more *programs or projects* specific to this subject.	
	2.4 Explicit presence of human rights education values and principles in existing guidelines, plans and programs or projects on this subject.	Text of the plan(s) and specific existing programs or projects.
3. Policy implementation	3.1 Existence of a department or departments responsible for peaceful coexistence, safety and preventing and managing conflict in the schools.	Organizational chart of the ministry. Interview with the head of the office responsible for this subject.
	3.2 Availability of budgetary resources for carrying out existing plans, programs or projects.	Review of the education budget. Interview with the head of the office responsible for this subject.
	3.3 Participation by education stakeholders in carrying out plans and programs or projects: 3.3.1 School principals 3.3.2 Teachers 3.3.3 Service staff 3.3.4 Parents 3.3.5 Community	Interview with the head of the office responsible for this subject. Text of the plan(s) and existing programs or projects.
	3.4 Existence of dissemination and training materials on this subject, with a rights approach, produced and distributed by the ministry of education.	Copies of the dissemination and training materials produced and distributed.
	3.5 Existence of training activities on this subject for the people involved in education. 3.5.1 School principals 3.5.2 Teachers 3.5.3 Service staff 3.5.4 Parents 3.5.5 Community	Interview with the head of the office responsible for this subject. Registry of training activities by the office responsible for this subject.
4. Policy monitoring and evaluation	4.1 Monitoring of compliance with policies, plans and programs or projects on peaceful coexistence, safety and prevention and management of conflict in the schools.	Interview with the head of the office responsible for this subject.
	4.2 Conducting evaluations on the progress of existing plans and programs or projects.	Review of evaluations and official studies on the operation of existing plans and programs. Interview with the head of the office responsible for this subject.
	4.3 Availability of findings or conclusions on the progress of existing plans and programs or projects.	

Results and discussion

Documentary sources consulted

Educational policies on matters of peaceful coexistence, safety and violence prevention in schools are still rare in Latin American countries. Moreover, they tend to be overly general, vague and scattered among a plethora of documents of different kinds, difficult to synthesize. To determine how relevant and specific they are, a look at the chronology is enlightening: the most specific, explicit, relevant policies are of recent vintage, most of them having appeared between 2005 and 2010. By contrast, policies developed from the late 1980s through the mid-2000s are general, indirect and reflect the then-common notion of "school discipline"; however, they do include an embryonic perspective of children's rights inspired by the international adoption of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989).

The chronology of the sources also reveals the region's general tendency to develop policies on this subject that are increasingly direct and explicit. They have been appearing rapidly since around 2004, and the pace has picked up since 2009. As the research report was being written (October 2011), several countries were fully engaged in the process, whether writing policies, discussing them with the education community or testing them on a pilot basis.

The results show that national education authorities are paying attention and getting involved, largely as a reaction to specific incidents of school violence, and mobilized by demands and proposals from the public. This complex set of problems is no longer being left entirely in the hands of school principals or teachers, nor is it seen lightly as a simple dichotomy, easy to solve by applying either traditional school disciplinary rules or criminal laws. There is a new understanding that the hopes of building peaceful coexistence in the school environment, guaranteeing that schools are safe and preventing outbreaks of violence that threaten the entire educational community are objectives that deserve special, more profound handling suited to the circumstances of each national and local setting. There is a newly emerging awareness that these matters merit serious consideration and action proposals that arise from within the educational system itself, guided by education authorities but involving all affected groups.

Contexts and perceptions

In all the countries studied, teachers and the general public alike are deeply concerned about problems with peaceful coexistence, safety and violence in the schools and feel that these problems are growing steadily. This sense of concern tends to be based on anecdotal evidence, an accumulation of particular extreme cases, sporadic and highly publicized, most of which they learned about through the news rather than from direct experience.

Perceptions of the causes of these problems vary according to the geography of the region and the socioeconomic setting of the different institutions. Opinions in South America center around poverty, social exclusion and child labor, added to

the low quality of education and expulsion from the system (masked as "dropping out of school") as factors that trigger frequent incidents of vandalism, theft and different kinds of physical aggression against the school, among students and toward teachers. Interviewees in Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean, while recognizing these same factors, tended to stress the destabilizing influence of youth gangs and the drug trade that expose students and teachers to extortion and death threats, often borne out.

As for the chief manifestations of violence, teachers focus mostly on the school environment and comment that the most dangerous places and situations are en route from home to school, upon entering or leaving the facility, and the risks of keeping the school open to entry by outside persons. They also worry about students who carry weapons, thus giving greater clout to their intimidations and threats. Many educational systems, lacking specific policies for situations of this kind, simply call the police.

Despite directives handed down by the ministries of education in the countries, researchers found widespread unease among teachers, who describe their anxiety as they see the problem growing steadily. Even so, there is no lack of critics who object to certain police-type solutions (such as the use of security cameras in schools), pointing to powerful commercial interests in the security industry.

Teachers have no lack of critical self-awareness. They have also heard the outcry against teacher discrimination and violence toward students, and therefore advocate HRE training for all teachers. Shortcomings in infrastructure and hygiene, inadequate control by school authorities over certain areas of the facility (particularly bathrooms) also contribute to a deteriorating school environment where conditions are unappealing and dangerous and are an affront to the dignity of people who use them.

These perceptions among teachers reflect the broad range of factors involved and the different perspectives for seeing the problems of coexistence, safety and violence in the schools. Nor can the influence of the press be ignored. In countries where the media energetically exploit extreme cases, they often lapse into sensationalism and melodrama, contributing to simplistic, often biased perceptions among the population and pushing authorities to take fast, harsh action.

The report notes that at present the media appear to be "setting the agenda" in this field, with all the risks that implies. First, educational authorities feel pressured into knee-jerk reactions to the most highly publicized cases, launching policies and actions that are not well thought out or have not been consulted. Second, they fail to assert their own well-founded position on problems and make it heard with the same force as the media or other private interests speaking through the media, including the economic concerns of companies that sell security services.

Development of policies: statistical information and situation assessments

Only a little over half of the 17 countries studied (53%) report that the ministries of education have statistical information and data bases on incidents or situations of violent conflict in the nation's schools, to varying degrees. Five countries (29%)

have this information to an acceptable degree, while the other four (23.5%) have it partially (information is incomplete, disperse or indirect). Having reliable empirical data of national coverage is critical if the countries are to take a serious approach to these problems without succumbing to name-calling or sensationalist perceptions, so often fueled by news stories on the most extreme events.

Statistical data can be gathered by the ministry of education itself or by other entities, including the police or the ministry of justice. However, if they are to serve educational needs, such data need to meet certain minimum requirements. The ministry of education should express its view and approve decisions on the design of data collection to incorporate the perspective that educational institutions need; and the data must be easily available for analysis by the ministry as a basis for making decisions. In the absence of these minimum conditions, the mere existence of data offers little or no benefit to the education system.

In several countries, the ministry of education compiles data from individual complaints or reports filed on violence in schools; the complaints may be received in writing or over a special telephone hot line. This type of information, while useful, tends to be biased and inadequate. It reflects particular situations, mostly extreme cases, which comprise a very small share of all the events that actually occur, and there are no procedures for verification and collecting evidence.

Research found that in eight of 17 countries (47%), the lead institution for education practiced some *procedure for processing and analysis of available statistical data.* The same five countries that had acceptable amounts of data were also achieving acceptable levels of processing and analysis (29%), while another three (18%) did so only partially. Altogether, this indicator points to results similar to the last one, although with lower levels of achievement. Education authorities possessing information and databases tend to process and analyze their data in some fashion, even if their methods are less than optimal. A few of the countries that conduct nationwide surveys on this subject also compile and process data on victimization and perceptions of violence that are more sophisticated and nuanced.

Systematic processing of data entails classifying and disaggregating the information; each country tends to use its own criteria for this purpose, even though specialized organizations recommend that national indicators be based on internationally accepted standards. A move toward using common criteria and categories in processing data would make it possible to draw comparisons across different situations.

Positive findings on the *availability of descriptive or narrative studies by the ministry of education based on existing data* are less widespread than for the previous indicators. There is a steady decline in the degree to which the three indicators on this variable yield a positive result, and the third drops off more abruptly than the first two. This is not surprising because producing analytical studies entails more rigorous and in-depth work than merely collecting and processing statistical data. Only five of the 17 countries (29%) have such studies: three in acceptable quantities (18%) and two partially, as they have fewer studies or studies of lesser scope. Although this indicator produced poor results, it is encouraging that four more countries (23.5%) are currently working on studies of this kind.

Some of the processes for analyzing or sorting data and developing studies are the result of multi-sectorial initiatives rather than an exclusive activity of the ministries of education. These are good examples of synergy among national institutions or with international organizations, combining efforts, expertise and resources.

Policies, plans and programs

The technical concepts *guidelines, plans, programs and projects* are not used consistently among countries, and the distinction between one category and the next is often blurred. The concepts should be used cautiously and understood as approximations, not absolutes, as the terminology can vary from one place to another.

Thirteen of 17 countries (76.5%) already have some type of *ministry guidelines or instructions* on peaceful coexistence and violence prevention in schools. Of these, eight countries (47%) have developed them to an acceptable degree, and five countries (29%), to a partial degree. The indicator found a high degree of compliance because this very broad category of public policies includes provisions contained in separate and distinct regulatory instruments (general law of education, children's code, disciplinary rules, orders by different ministries or circulars by education authorities). The category could also apply for rules of a general nature, perhaps not specifically targeting the problems covered by this study, but including them under a particular article or paragraph, albeit briefly or schematically.

The indicator on the existence of *specific plans in this field* points to significantly lower levels of compliance, indeed the lowest of the entire variable. Of the 17 countries, only seven (41%) have some kind of plan on this subject, one (6%) to an acceptable degree and six (35%), only partially.

By contrast, *specific programs and projects on peaceful coexistence, safety and violence prevention in schools* are present to some degree in the great majority of countries from which information was obtained (94%). Of the 17 countries, 10 (59%) received acceptable scores, while six (35%) are partially acceptable.

If the public policies are placed on a continuum between the extremes of "generality/specificity", the overall tendency is for the majority of the countries fall into two clear categories: the most common are operational, specific policies with limited coverage (*programs and projects in the schools*), followed by the exact opposite, with policies as general as possible (*guidelines or instructions from the ministry*). The types of policy found most infrequently were intermediate: comprehensive but also specific, referring directly and explicitly to issues of peaceful coexistence, safety and violence prevention in schools (*specific plans*). The macro level and micro levels are equally important and useful, but there is still a need for more in-depth, comprehensive educational proposals that cover vast geographic areas, that are organic, developed via participatory processes and based on inter-sectorial commitments. This is easier when public policy instruments are in place, such as national plans.

In conclusion, the region is moving ahead quickly, but remains visibly ambivalent. A very positive sign is that since the second half of the last decade, the

States have been adopting initiatives for intervention in primary and secondary schools to build peaceful coexistence deliberately and systematically and tackle possible situations of violence; but it is not encouraging to find so few examples of the fullest, most comprehensive level of planning: national plans that are attuned to the needs and specificities of each State. The presence of so few plans to address these matters suggests that many difficulties still stand in the way of developing authentic policies of national scope that are systematic, comprehensive and all-encompassing.

Many of the existing plans, programs and projects were inspired by or developed in cooperation with civil society organizations or international organizations. In some cases, it was even reported that the initiative had originated when these entities approached the State to exert pressure and work with it on this problem.

Researchers identified education policies on peaceful coexistence, safety and prevention of violence in the schools that explicitly and clearly incorporate the *values and principles of human rights education.* Of the 17 countries, 13 (76.5%) reflect these values and principles extensively, while three (18%) do so partially. Together they make up 94.5% of the universe of study. This means they were conceived with a rights perspective instilled by international agreements the States have signed, especially the *Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

The presence of a rights perspective in these policies goes beyond merely citing international instruments as a standard; it means that human rights are present in other ways as well. For example, they could underpin activities for organizing program and project work with other members of the education community, or serve as course content in program and project training opportunities for members of the education community.

Policy implementation

In answer to the question of *whether the ministry of education has a department(s) formally responsible for addressing this problem,* the indicator was met to some degree in 14 of the 17 countries studied (82%): it was acceptable in five (29%) and partial in the other nine (53%). Partial compliance means that researchers failed to identify a specific entity within the ministry of education that was clearly responsible for the issue, but instead, several different departments (sometimes pertaining to different ministries) had some share of responsibility, although not clearly delimited, and all were acting separately. This reflects an institutional response in principle, although the dispersion of objectives and the assignment to a variety of State agencies, with no joint coordinated action, does not guarantee an effective response to these serious problems.

The indicator that produced the fewest results was the existence of a budget for implementing plans, programs and projects on peaceful coexistence, safety and prevention of violence in the schools. Only six of the 17 countries (35%) were found to have some type of official budget resources. Three (18%) satisfied the indicator partially. Two countries (12%) reported no budget, while researchers in nine

countries, the majority of the universe of study (53%), found no information in some cases, or insufficient information to judge the current budget situation.

The fact that the budget is partial or non-existent does not mean that current policies are not being implemented at all. There is evidence that they are taking place to some degree, but it is not clear how much or how their daily operations are funded (resources may come from other budget items or programs, or from projects with international organizations or private businesses). In any case, this indicator points out a weakness found in many good proposals. Without a stable official budget, it is practically impossible to carry out on-going specialized actions with good coverage that require professional support to enhance the work of regular teachers (social workers, counselors, psychologists and in certain cases for prevention of serious violence or crimes, police officers).

The picture for the region is more promising in terms of the *participation of different stakeholders in education,* as three-fourths of the countries in the study have policies on the subject whose text explicitly calls for a variety of stakeholders to take part in implementation, in addition to the country's lead agency for education. Ten countries (59%) do so consistently, repeatedly and on a sound footing; in another three countries (18%), the point is raised timidly, occasionally or irregularly. If the main educational actors are given active participation and decision-making authority, they not only exercise their right to participate in matters that affect them, but also will ownership of the policies and commit to them, which helps bring about better results.

Official documents are not always enough for a good evaluation of policy implementation. Often the texts do not differentiate among the many participants in education (they speak of the "education community" without specifying who it is), or they fail to define everyone's duties and competencies, that is, whether they are empowered to deliberate and propose policies, and above all, to make decisions about them. If such details are not specified clearly, the participation asserted in such policy documents may end up being more token than real.

The *ministry of education produces and distributes rights-based materials for training and public education* on the problems under study. Three-fourths of the countries give positive results, six of which were acceptable in quantitative terms (35%) and another seven, partially acceptable or limited (41%). Most common are print versions of the policy documents themselves, as well as study materials for teachers, students and families (brochures, guides and handbooks), festivals and public-awareness drives. Unfortunately, there is little information on how these materials are distributed among members of the educational community and to what extent, so it is impossible to say whether they reach the entire country on an equal footing.

The ministries of education emphasize that regulatory documents and public-education materials are posted on their websites, but in reality, the Internet is not a medium that the main stakeholders in education use habitually to find out about public policies. If it is not enhanced with other sources of information, its impact is not only low, but also difficult to estimate.

Of all the indicators for this variable, the most successful is *whether training activities on this subject are offered to the different participants in education.* Fifteen of the

17 countries (88%) reported different types of training activities for principals, teachers, students and families, 10 to an acceptable degree (59%) and five, only partially (29%).

The activities generally consist of lectures and workshops for different audiences and on different topics, in two main categories. The first category is training for school principals and teachers on the content and implementation of public policies. It covers such topics as human rights education, how to perform situation assessments on peaceful coexistence and violence in the school, legal and psychological guidance, strategies for conflict resolution, support for the participatory development of school codes or regulations on peaceful coexistence (in countries that have them) evaluation of policies in that respect, and the like. The other category, training for the broader educational community, raises awareness about problems with coexistence, developing social relationships and preventing violence. The training covers such topics as self-esteem and communication, life skills, ethics and values, citizenship and human rights, crime prevention, alerts on new types of crime, especially using the Internet, addiction prevention, gender equality, sexuality and HIV-AIDS prevention, culture, recreation and sports, etc.

The countries very often create forms of cooperation between the country's lead entity of education and other entities to multiply the impact of training and awareness rising. Examples may include other government departments (local governments, the ombudsman, child welfare, other ministries such as social development, health, security, internal affairs or justice, the board of elections, the local police, etc.), local or international nongovernmental organizations (such as Plan International) and inter-governmental organizations (UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO, UNFPA, IIHR, OEI, and the like).

Inter-institutional activities can be very effective and productive if they are planned jointly and carried out in close coordination; this is not always the case in the countries examined, despite the best of intentions. Effective inter-sectorial cooperation is recognized as a valuable but challenging goal. Because efforts were found to be disjointed in so many cases, with similar but unconnected interventions being made repeatedly, the need is more pressing than ever to develop national plans for preventing violence in schools and in overall society.

Policy monitoring and evaluation

As a whole, this variable yielded the fewest positive results by comparison with the others. Such a finding can be explained in part because the concern with developing specific policies on these issues is relatively recent.

The best results are on *policy monitoring* to determine whether policies are reviewed and are progressing as expected. A total of 11 countries (65%) apply some strategy for monitoring or follow-up on these policies; two do so regularly and thoroughly (12%) and the other nine do so irregularly, inconsistently or partially (53%). Other countries are in the process of developing or implementing monitoring mechanisms (12%).

The findings drop off abruptly on *evaluation of the results of current plans, programs and projects.* Only five of the 17 countries studied (30%) have some type of evaluation mechanism. Two countries have set up acceptable, regular evaluations (12%), and three evaluate partially or sporadically (18%). Another three countries (18%) are currently developing or about to develop some evaluation mechanism, while in eight countries, nearly half the universe of study (47%), none was identified.

The figures obtained on *availability of evaluation findings and conclusions* are even more meager. Five countries (30%) have either quantitative or qualitative findings and conclusions, two to an acceptable degree (12%) and three, partially (18%). No country was in the process of developing them. The majority, eleven of the 17 countries (65%), has none. The two countries that performed best on the latter two indicators (Mexico and Argentina) have developed information systems that collect quantitative and qualitative data to support every stage of the policy process, from context assessments to final evaluation of results and impact.

The fact that a plan or project is relatively recent is not an excuse for not evaluating and is insufficient reason for official results on its operations to be unavailable, even if they are only partial or provisional. Specialists and academic institutions will always make valuable contributions to research and evaluation, but they cannot and should not relieve the public system of discharging its responsibility. Without strategies for monitoring and evaluation, any public education policy walks blind, especially in a complex, multi-faceted, constantly changing problem area such as the one discussed.

Recommendations

It is not the task of a regional research report to advocate actual content for policies to create healthy coexistence in schools, guarantee safe school environments and prevent outbreaks of violence that threaten the educational community. Such policies call for tailor-made approaches attuned to the circumstances, needs and concerns of each particular national — or even local — setting. Authorities in charge of education in each country should lead the process of building them.

The only overall recommendation that can be drawn from the report is that, if the country has no policies in this regard or if existing policies are incomplete or fragmented, the State should undertake to introduce them based on a well-founded assessment and proposals produced from within the educational system itself, guided by authorities but involving all relevant sectors.

In fact this process has already begun and is moving ahead quickly in the region. However, since the goal of this research was to conduct systematic observation of HRE progress, drawing on its findings some general suggestions can be offered to the States Parties of the *Protocol of San Salvador* for developing, implementing and evaluating such policies. Among them, national education authorities are advised:

— To investigate systematically the situations that might affect peaceful coexistence and safety in the country's schools, as well as the perceptions held by members of the education community on the subject and the role played by mass media in creating them.
— To use clear rules for classifying information, and indicators based on internationally accepted standards in order to move toward common rules and categories for processing data.
— To foster studies based on sound data.
— To promote the design of specific national plans that are comprehensive, have the broadest geographic coverage, are developed in participatory fashion and are grounded in an inter-sectorial commitments to work together.
— To adopt a genuine human rights approach in all policies on the subject, not merely making reference to international instruments, but incorporating them as a blueprint to organize work with the education community as part of intervention programs and projects in schools.
— To guarantee that each school and the many different players in its educational community enjoy real, active participation and have decision-making power in developing, implementing and evaluating policies on the subject.
— To ensure that there is at least one unit within the ministry of education responsible for handling this problem and for applying current policies, and to endow it with sufficient resources to carry out regular actions of nationwide coverage.
— To regularly evaluate existing policies and the actions for school intervention derived therefrom, and see that their findings are discussed with the education community, and made available to the public.
— To identify and study best practices performed in this field in other countries of the region and the world, and to learn from them.

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Ana María Rodino. Senior researcher at the Costa Rica Distance University and Main Educational Consultant for the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights. E-mail: anamariarodino@gmail.com

Resumo/abstract/résumé/resumen

Politicas de segurança e coexistência pacífica em escolas latino-americanas: os direitos humanos em perspetiva

O trabalho apresenta o quadro teórico, a metodologia e os resultados do *X Informe Interamericano da Educação em Direitos Humanos*, produzido em 2011 pelo Instituto Interamericano de Direitos Humanos (Costa Rica) sob a coordenação da autora. A investigação examina o crescente problema de assegurar a convivência pacífica e a segurança e prevenir a violência escolar em 17 países latino-americanos da América do Sul, Central e do Norte, e as políticas educativas que se têm elaborado ou estão a elaborar atualmente para enfrentá-la, analisadas numa perspetiva de direitos humanos.

Palavras-chave   segurança escolar, convivência escolar, prevenção de violência escolar, direitos humanos em educação.

Safety and peaceful coexistence policies in Latin American schools: human rights perspective

The paper presents the theoretical framework, methodology and results of the *X Inter-American Report on Human Rights Education,* produced in 2011 by the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights (Costa Rica) under the coordination of the author. The research examines the increasing problem of securing peaceful coexistence, safety and prevention of school violence in 17 Latin American countries from South, Central and North America, and the educational policies they have developed or are currently developing to face it, analyzed from a human rights perspective.

Keywords   school safety, school peaceful coexistence, prevention of school violence, Human Rights in education.

Politiques de sécurité et de coexistence pacifique dans les écoles latino-américaines: les droits de l'homme en perspective

Le travail présente le cadre théorique, la méthodologie et les résultats du *Xᵉ Rapport Interaméricain de l'Éducation aux Droits de l'Homme,* produit en 2011 par l'Institut Interaméricain des Droits de l'Homme (Costa Rica) sous la coordination de l'auteure. La recherche aborde la difficulté croissante à assurer la coexistence pacifique et la sécurité et à prévenir la violence à l'école dans 17 pays d'Amérique du Sud, Centrale et du Nord, en mettant l'accent sur les politiques éducatives qui ont été mises en œuvre ou qui sont en cours d'élaboration afin de la combattre, analysées du point de vue des droits de l'homme.

Mots-clés   sécurité à l'école, coexistence scolaire, prévention de la violence à l'école, droits de l'homme en matière d'éducation.

Políticas de seguridad y convivencia en la escuela latinoamericana: la perspectiva de derechos humanos

El trabajo presenta el marco teórico, la metodología y los resultados del *X Informe Interamericano de la Educación en Derechos Humanos,* producido en 2011 por el Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos (Costa Rica) bajo la coordinación de la autora. La investigación examina el creciente problema de asegurar la convivencia pacífica, la seguridad y prevenir la violencia escolar en 17 países latinoamericanos de América del Sur, Central y del Norte, y las políticas educativas que se han elaborado o se están elaborando actualmente para enfrentarlo, analizadas desde una perspectiva de derechos humanos.

Palabras-clave   seguridad escolar, convivencia escolar, prevención de violencia escolar, derechos humanos en educación.