## THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A COEXISTENCE PROGRAM FOR SCHOOLS: BASES AND CHALLENGES FROM TOP TO BOTTOM

## A IMPLEMENTAÇÃO DE UM PROGRAMA DE CONVIVÊNCIA PARA ESCOLAS: BASES E DESAFIOS DE PONTA A PONTA

## LA IMPLEMENTACIÓN DE UN PROGRAMA DE CONVIVENCIA PARA ESCUELAS: BASES Y DESAFÍOS DE PUNTA A PUNTA

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**ABSTRACT:** Dealing with the issue of coexistence problems at school, already present before the pandemic and boosted by it, seems to be one of the most outstanding discussions to achieve educational goals as desired as the formation of autonomous and ethical people. In this sense, this theoretical article aims to briefly present the description of the implementation of a Coexistence Program in the public education network of São Paulo, its difficulties and learning for those who still hope to implement, in Brazil, the construction of public policies that guarantee the theme of coexistence as a condition for Brazilian education.

**KEYWORDS**: Ethics. School. Youth. Public policy.

**RESUMO:** Tratar da temática dos problemas de convivência na escola, já presentes antes da pandemia e potencializados por ela, parece ser uma das mais destacadas discussões para se concretizar objetivos educacionais tão pretendidos como a formação de pessoas autônomas e éticas. Neste sentido, este artigo teórico tem como objetivo apresentar brevemente a descrição da implementação de um Programa de Convivência junto à rede pública de educação de São Paulo, suas dificuldades e aprendizagens para aqueles que ainda esperam concretizar, no Brasil, a construção de políticas públicas que garantam o tema da convivência como condição à educação brasileira.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ética. Escola. Juventude. Políticas públicas.

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**RESUMEN:** Abordar el tema de los problemas de convivencia en la escuela, ya presente antes de la pandemia y potenciado por ella, parece ser una de las discusiones más destacadas para alcanzar objetivos educativos tan concebidos como la formación de personas autónomas y éticas. En este sentido, este artículo teórico tiene como objetivo presentar brevemente la descripción de la implementación de un Programa de Convivencia con la red de educación pública de São Paulo, sus dificultades y aprendizaje para aquellos que aún esperan realizar, en Brasil, la construcción de políticas públicas que garanticen el tema de la convivencia como condición para la educación brasileña.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Ética. Escuela. Juventud. Políticas públicas.

## Introduction

One of the most obvious needs brought to light in current times is the transformation of the institutions that teach children and adolescents around the world. In times of "schools without walls", even before the pandemic of COVID-19, the impact that education has in promoting a country's economic and social performance no longer allows it to exempt itself from changes in a new order of international competition, because academic performance is no longer the only need.

There is no doubt that issues of school coexistence put the quality of educational processes in check. This certainty is shared by researchers and governments that have already validated and included in their agendas the creation and fostering of educational policies for the promotion of peaceful and respectful coexistence, where well-being, democratic participation experiences, and learning assertive forms of problem solving in interpersonal relationships are present (CASASSUS, 2001; TOGNETTA, 2022).

## Where do we start from?

Certainly, before the pandemic of COVID-19 there was already a common complaint among educators that in post-modern times school coexistence has become a big problem. Physical and verbal attacks on teachers and among students, thefts, disobedience to rules, teasing, indiscipline, and incivilities seem to be part of everyday life at school that calls for urgent change.

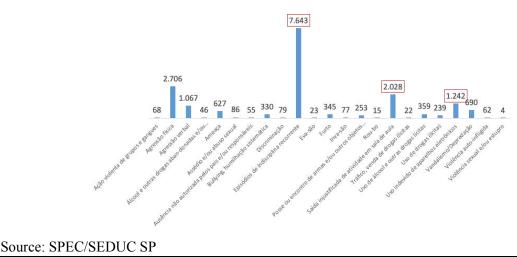
Research around the world reveals that coexistence problems at school have intensified (DEBARBIEUX, 2001; DUBET, 1997; JARES, 2008; TOGNETTA; VINHA, 2012; URUÑELA, 2013; VINHA; DIAZ-AGUADO, 2015) to the same extent that they present

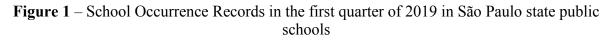
different characteristics for each type of problem manifested at school (JARES, 2001; LA RUSSO; SELMAN, 2011; TOGNETTA; VINHA, 2010; VINHA; NUNES, 2018).

Certainly, the evolution of scientific research in the field of education not only reiterates how the issue of school coexistence is the "Achilles heel" of most educational institutions, but also points to a problem that is so difficult: the complexity of the solutions that need to be sought and implemented in schools.

In Brazil, the situation is configured, in recent years, a little worse than in other countries, if we take into account the Tales Report, 2019, and the results of PISA 2019, published in 2021: 19% of Brazilian teachers say they spend a lot of time managing coexistence problems in classrooms, while the OECD average (which encompasses data from teachers, managers and students from 37 countries and Brazil is a guest) is 13%; 44% of Brazilian students talk about the delay to start classroom work because of such problems, while the OECD average is 24%; 43% of managers point out the lack of respect of students for teachers, while the OECD average is 22%.

In São Paulo, in 2019, the data made available by the Secretariat of Public Education reveal the diversity of these problems, as well as enable us to reiterate how much it is not true that São Paulo schools have many "violence problems" as different reports boasted before the pandemic. Note, with the help of Figure 1 below, that the numbers of School Occurrence Records (SORs) from the first quarter of 2019 filled out by principals and sent to the former SPEC (School and Community Protection System) clearly show the difference between "situations of indiscipline, incivilities, transgressions of rules," whose frequency is much higher than what can be classified as violence.





In Figure 1, we find, for example, 7,643 episodes of recurrent indiscipline, 2,028 episodes described as "unjustified withdrawals from classroom activities" and 1,242 episodes of "improper use of cell phones. We have insisted that the issue of coexistence in school requires a very careful look to understand what is frequent in these institutions: as we see, these are disturbing behaviors (TOGNETTA, 2020; VINHA; NUNES, 2020), also called "microviolence" (DEBARBIEUX, 2007), which are far from violence in the deep sense of intentionally hurting, submitting, humiliating, mistreating someone.

However, the results of international evaluations have also pointed out what moral psychology research has identified, when dealing with the characteristics of less frequent forms of coexistence problems, but whose intensity and cruelty demand an alert condition to the institutions that educate - we are talking about violent manifestations peculiar to peer relationships - bullying and cyberbullying. We have been frightened by these phenomena that already existed, but which, with the pandemic, have been strengthened and will certainly be present in the daily life of Brazilian schools. This has been the great challenge for Brazilian schools, because we are dealing with an issue that does not bother authority directly, especially in school, since bullying is a problem between peers, hidden from our eyes. A challenge that alerts us to a suffering condition of girls and boys who do not know how to defend themselves and, at the same time, how to respect each other, recognizing the limits to their own identity and that of the other (AVILÉS MARTÍNEZ, 2003; OLWEUS, 1993; TOGNETTA, 2003). This is a problem for the construction of the identity of children and adolescents and how they will legitimize values (so forgotten today in post-modern times) such as tolerance, respect, and generosity.

If we observe the same graph again, we can see how the investigations carried out today show us that the quantity of episodes of what we call "manifestations of a violent nature" is much smaller when compared to the previous figures. There are quite important issues to be considered here: the first of them is the emphasis on episodes of physical and verbal aggression (2,706 and 1,067 episodes, respectively) and other registers such as the so-called "discriminations", "threats", and even what is considered "bullying, systematic humiliation". The doubt that hovers around is, in the same measure, the certainty that the manifestations of such problems show how complex they are and how urgent the understanding of these issues is for teaching professionals: can those who take note of the records sent to the Secretary of Education tell the difference between what they called discrimination or threats and verbal aggression or bullying? The second question we listed, based on this data, concerns what, in fact, is understood as hard violence at school. These are episodes in which the violence is

intentional and victimizes, indefensibly (or almost so), the people involved. Note how small these numbers are in the face of the disturbing manifestations that we call attention to with the same figure indicated above: 68 cases of violent action by groups or gangs; 239 cases of illicit drug use; 22 cases of trafficking; 86 cases of sexual harassment; and four cases of sexual violence or rape. Less violence and more indiscipline, we could say for sure. However, the impact of the frequency, even if reduced, of these violent manifestations is very large, harmful, and worrisome.

Finally, the third point to draw attention to is what these data reveal: there are other forms of violence felt by those who suffer and little evident to those who record them, whose latency is great, such as bullying, or have deep causal relationships with the phenomenon (LAHR; TOGNETTA, 2021; TOGNETTA, 2008; TOGNETTA; FODRA; BONI, 2020). These are the problems we have called "emotional distress". Before the pandemic, there were already cases of this type of problem - 62 cases were recorded in the first quarter of 2019 alone. That is sixty-two boys and girls suffering from a cruel evil that has certainly grown worse during the period of social withdrawal.

Well, all this to show that the data we had as a diagnostic sample of the problems of coexistence in the public school system in São Paulo pointed us to an urgent need for teacher training and understanding of more effective ways that have already been developed and implemented in other countries (and, by hand, in other education networks or schools in Brazil), to transform the school environment into a place of well-being and belonging to all who live together there. One of these experiences is what we will now briefly describe.

# Where do we go from here? Revisiting the formative experience: a game of intentions, actions and challenges

It is not an easy task at all to describe what was conceived, felt, sensed, analyzed, understood and reflected in the spaces and times experienced in the construction of a Coexistence Program, which, in fact, could meet the training needs of teachers of the final years of elementary education and transform the school context into supportive environments of coexistence and welcoming.

Considering these aspects, among others, it was important, for us, to give life to the Project "Conviviality as a Value in Public Schools: implementation of a Support System among

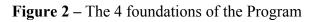
Equals (SAI)", approved in 2019, by the Research Edital/FIS/FCC<sup>3</sup>. This project was initially intended to be developed in three schools, selected by the Secretary of Education of the State of São Paulo (SEE/SP). These schools would be located in regions of vulnerability and with records of school violence. Our main goal was to implement an ethical coexistence program in São Paulo schools, highlighting the experience of juvenile protagonism as a latent strategy to the necessary care that coexistence issues require. The fact is that the proportion taken from the experience of the massacre in Suzano, in which two teenagers entered the school and killed ten people (TOGNETTA; FODRA; BONI, 2020), made the project, whose potential was to be replicated and multiplied to other schools after its proof, become present, beyond the three school-poles, in a scenario of scales that involved the entire education network of São Paulo with its more than 5000 schools.

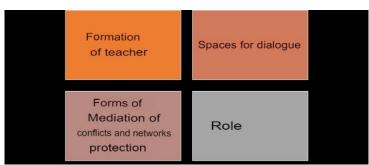
In this scenario of intentions, the first major challenge was to make this action feasible at least in the schools of the three centers involved and, in this sense, planning meetings were held and the researchers followed up in each of the three schools. These actions were developed by GEPEM (Study and Research Group on Moral Education, in the Portuguese acronym) and shared and experienced by a group of managers and their teachers. However, as the idea was to reach the other schools in the districts involved in the project, "Formative Seminars" were planned (and this was another challenge), in order to attend, directly, the Pedagogical Center Coordinating Teachers (PCCTs), Teaching Supervisors (TSs), Vice Principals and School and Community Mediator Teachers (PSCMs), who are currently called Conviviality Orienting Teachers (COTs).

To give continuity to this process under construction, the vice-principals would replicate the training with the teaching staff of their respective schools in the Collective Pedagogical Work Classes (CPWCs), and in each study cycle, the teachers would develop activities with the students based on actions also present in the program.

The following Figure 2 shows the four foundations of the program that had been designed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> This is a Research Grant entitled "Final Years of Primary School: Adolescences, Quality and Equity in Public School", financed by the Itaú Social Foundation/FIS and Carlos Chagas Foundation/FCC, to select 14 projects with the objective of fostering, supporting and disseminating research committed to building solutions to the challenges and obstacles to improving the quality of educational policies and the daily functioning of schools, focusing on the final years of Primary School. Available at: https://www.fcc.org.br/fcc/educacaopesquisa/politicas-e-praticas-da-educacao-basica-e-formacao-de-professores/editalef2.





Source: GEPEM Archive

The first base that begins the process of implementing the proposal is teacher training. In fact, this concept permeates all other bases in the sense that it is through reflection and study, with those who are in charge of the school work and involved in it, that the beliefs (or theories) that are held, in this case, to teach boys and girls to live together, are modified (RETUERT ROE; CASTRO, 2017).

However, it is on this basis that three major themes are advocated that underpin the entire training movement for the theme of coexistence: how an "ethical personality" is formed. Themes such as the construction of self-knowledge and the value of oneself and of the other, as the way to be ethical, the choices of moral values as a meaning for life, and the ways in which, symbolically, man is able to solve his conflicts, are present in this moment of formation, in an assertive way, using a non-violent communication.

In a second moment, in addition to teachers and managers, the training would also involve the school community and the services of the protection network: the second base for the implementation of our coexistence program, which deals with the interlocution between the school and the services of the school protection network to address the different problems of coexistence experienced at school. The use of intervention tools to deal with the daily conflicts at school, the creation of spaces to strengthen bonds, the most effective intervention methods for different types of coexistence problems, and the flow of referrals and directions thought together with the protection network services, especially at such a difficult time, when the problems of emotional suffering, domestic aggression, and other conflicts have been enhanced by the pandemic, are themes of this base.

In the third base, also relying on the training of teachers who act as coexistence tutors, the work corresponds to the training of students for the participation and implementation of the Help Teams: a Support System among Equals, whose experience from previous projects proves the effectiveness of the actions of young people who are trained to welcome and help their colleagues and support the principle that youth protagonism is a condition for all and any school institution that excels in well-being, safety, and peaceful resolution of the interpersonal conflicts that are so present.

Finally, the fourth base is the promotion of spaces for dialogue and democratic participation of students at school, through class assemblies.

However, the link between the intentions and the actions already initiated as planned was abruptly interrupted, especially due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which lasted for more than two years, and all the developments that affected the state education system (SEDUC) and the schools selected to continue participating in the research. In this context, it was necessary, once again, to attend to the urgency of the moment. In view of this, we prepared a new diagnosis that would certainly have other challenges to face: the problems of emotional suffering, cyber-aggressions and violence suffered by children and adolescents, on one hand, and, on the other, the training needs for teachers and managers in view of this new reality. It was necessary, then, to rethink the direction of the project, that is, to recalculate the route from the pandemic context and, in this way, to think, collectively, about the needs as perspectives of change and forms of resistance, to overcome the obstacles faced by the daily school life.

## Recalculating the course from the pandemic context

With the pandemic and based on the needs of the schools and their managers and teachers, other priorities for the project were developed. The fact is that we knew the highly complex dynamics that education has, as well as the need to conceive it as a "space of the possible", as Bourdieu (1997, p. 62) indicated to us. We also knew that it was "certain that the orientation of change depends on the state of the system of possibilities" (BOURDIEU, 1997, p. 63) and that we should even go "toward possibilities that must be created out of nothing" (p. 63).

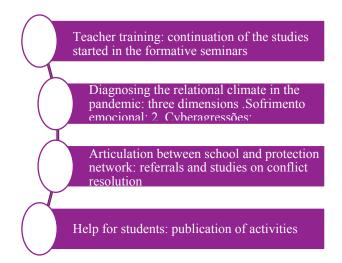
We then started from new research questions: What are the main problems that affect the quality of coexistence of students in the pandemic context? Given the complexity of the long period of absence from the school context, what should be the priorities of the work proposed by teachers in their classrooms and other school spaces, even if virtual, regarding the promotion of ethical coexistence?

From this perspective, a new model was proposed in order to cover actions in teacher training, which involved expanding the diagnosis of the relational climate, including the protection network to train and guide the studies on conflict mediation, and contribute to

overcoming coexistence problems of students in the network. It would no longer be possible, as long as the social isolation lasted, to train the students to participate and engage in Help Teams<sup>4</sup>. How, then, to reach those who would most need help with the problems experienced in these new times (and considered, therefore, particular dimensions of the relational climate of this moment)? In response to this question, the proposal made was to encourage already formed members of the Help Teams from other schools to put together a material that would serve as a welcome, support and inspiration for the students assisted by the project<sup>5</sup>.

This model can be translated by the following Figure 3:

Figura 3 – Grupos de ações do projeto de pesquisa em 2021



Source: GEPEM Archive

Certainly, "[...] think about structuring structures that highlight the collaborative decision-making among its members, in order to meet the needs of the school and the subjects that work there" (ABDALLA, 2006, p. 91, emphasis added) was a new need that was imposed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Help Teams are a type of peer support system that have been identified in the world literature as a more effective way to combat and prevent bullying and other peer problems. To learn more, access www.somoscontraobullying.com.br.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The material proposed by the students of the schools that participate in the Brazil Network of Helping Teams -"What fits in a hug? From young people to young people" - was published by Editora Adonis and distributed to the 27,500 students of the final years of elementary school in the schools of three directorates that were the participants of the Project.

To meet these numerous challenges, it was necessary to discuss them and start from a "negotiation of needs" (ABDALLA, 2021; ALTET, 2000; CANÁRIO, 1994; RODRIGUES; ESTEVES, 1993). In this sense, we were open to the rules of the game, under tensions and challenges posed by the different situations of everyday life, in which the purposes of the research and the resulting actions were constantly redefined.

Logically, these new actions were not thought of in a linear way as a choice between options; but, on the contrary, they were reflected upon by the researchers and managers in a complex and dialogical way. First, seeking a sensitive listening to the venting, frustrations, and anguish of the network managers/teachers, and then, also to the researchers themselves, in the multiple planning meetings. However, with the intention of making the Program continue to exist, there were always possible spaces open to carry out our ideas and actions, especially to give new meaning to coexistence as a value in public schools in São Paulo.

#### What we have learned...

We are certain that the tensions and multiple challenges in the construction of this Program, and in its different times and spaces of coexistence, have contributed to concretize this process of training and research, imbued by relationships of cooperation and solidarity: bonds that have generated a field of meanings and a social space of belonging for all those involved.

In the same way, we have been convinced up to this point of the difficulties faced by the professionals of an educational network when there is no public policy in place that reiterates and equates networking for a certain theme. It is true that the step taken by the Secretary of Education of São Paulo in transforming SPEC into CONVIVA has already denoted the effort of public administrators (although few) to transform into a resolution the construction of a program with the theme of coexistence that integrates, beyond the actions of protection and overcoming the criminalizing ways of dealing with coexistence problems in schools, the promotion of positive coexistence among those who belong there.

It is certainly not an easy task to accomplish when one does not change old beliefs that, as it is promoted by a public institution, education should be guided by neoliberal ideologies and actions of partisan self-promotion of those who are in charge of the work. Perhaps this justifies the fact of the unbridled juxtaposition of projects contracted by the teaching secretariats and inserted into the daily lives of teachers and managers who fulfill tasks and that adds to the fragile conditions of public networks that reinforce social inequality (ARROYO, 2019; DOURADO; SIQUEIRA, 2020; FREIRE, 1997; ABDALLA, 2021; SANTOS, 2006).

We have, finally, understood that the construction of a policy to promote school coexistence should guarantee five quality indicators through which the actions of this project were guided and may guide other future ones. Let's go to them:

## 1- 1- First quality indicator: promoting positive coexistence

The quality of the new forms of relationships at school must be based on the encouragement of a culture of peace and promotion of positive coexistence. The emphasis is not on fighting violence, but rather on opening spaces where those who live together at school can work in groups, participate in dialogues and strategies; where moral values are raised; where democratic participation is exercised in order to think about problems and solutions to conflicts and learn to regulate their emotions. A positive regulation will be able to "disarm cultural and structural violence and thus direct violence will actually be reduced" (VILLALBA, 2016, p. 93). It is therefore a matter of seeking more creative nonviolent alternatives where so much resorts to punitive and criminalizing ways.

## 2- Second quality indicator: human formation - learning to live together

It is about conceiving school interaction as an end in itself, as important as academic performance. It is a fundamental pillar for the integral formation process of children, adolescents and young people, since it encompasses the cognitive, affective, moral and social aspects that involve them. Its quality indicator, as formation, is based on the four pillars described by Delors (2003): learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. It implies, therefore, that all activities in a plan for coexistence allow the daily construction of moral values, by which the experience of living together is based, as well as the learning of these new forms of relationships and human behavior. To this end, including learning how to teach how to live together, which will be the responsibility of educators. Therefore, this quality indicator also refers to teacher training.

# 3- Third quality indicator: starting from one's own reality and ensuring local culture

It is about the need to incorporate the identity elements of local communities, where the schools are located, and turn to these communities with the possibility of expanding learning to live together in these collective spaces. The focus is on the sense of social responsibility and citizen commitment to those with whom we live, so as to go beyond the school walls to a respectful coexistence with the guarantee of preserved human rights (URUÑELA, 2017)..

## 4- Fourth quality indicator: participation and inclusion

It is about the participation of all members of the educational community, especially students who have, as proven in the literature, a primary function for the establishment of processes to promote coexistence, when they welcome, value diversity and reiterate belonging to a community, whose meaning is the search for the good of themselves and of others. Included in this indicator is the condition of inclusion of human diversity in all its forms of presentation - diversity of gender, race, handicapped, migrants, adolescent offenders...

# 5 - Fifth quality indicator: ethical

Although it may seem "logical", not all peaceful coexistence is enough, from the point of view of this last indicator: it needs to be ethical. Such accent is the quality that conditions to educators and students values such as trust, care, and dignity of any human being who has the right to the full development of his or her potentialities. A coexistence whose quality is ethical, because it is about guaranteeing the civilizing milestones conquered by humanity, which a public policy that advocates coexistence cannot give up.

In one last word: our research, in line with the world literature (COLOMBIA, 2014; CHILE, 2019; SANTOS, 2021; TWEMLOW *et al*, 2009; URUÑELA, 2017; VIVALDI, 2020) show the importance of formulating educational policies that make teaching programs sustainable, thus ensuring that there are institutionalized spaces for the continuous training of school agents, that they too can autonomously seek the instrumentalization they need in the face of so much data from science that reveal the progress of the ways in which teaching effectiveness can be had. These same investigations indicate how urgent and important is the transformation of the theme of coexistence into public policies to overcome the heteronomy present in the Brazilian ideology that, all the time, breaks with ethical commitments in defense of life, of human rights, and of citizenship. These commitments are also formed by the school, but definitely by a school that knows what to do and, knowing what to do, is able to RESIST.

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