# Creating Solidarity Across Diverse Communities

## International Perspectives in Education

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# Enacting Solidarity to Address Peer-to-Peer Aggression in Schools

## Case Studies from Chile

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> So, in the end, where do we take them? Where are we supposed to take them? I mean, if the paid private school definitely cannot handle him [the student], [then] it sends him to a private-subsidized school, and later he is sent to a municipal school, [and then] municipal schools keep transferring [him] from one building to another, what do we do next?
>
> —Radio journalist referring to the practice of expelling aggressive children from schools (Toro, 2010)

Peer-to-peer aggression in the schools is an increasing concern for Chilean society. Whereas public opinion and teachers often locate the roots of the problem in students' morals and family background, in this chapter we associate the problem with school policies and practices. In two studies examining how peer aggression was addressed by schools' leadership teams, we found that schools punishing children who assaulted peers reported higher levels of peer aggression compared with schools that implemented management practices grounded in solidarity. By solidarity, we mean a belief in the educability of all students, thus providing students from different social backgrounds, with diverse levels of ability and behavioral dispositions, opportunities to learn together to live together.[1] The main thesis we advance is that peer-to-peer aggression is one form of student violence that can be reduced by reducing institutional violence that is engendered by school policies that promote exclusion and social segregation. Given the high level

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of social segregation that characterizes Chile's educational system,[2] school leadership teams that are guided by an ethic of solidarity not only impact peer-to-peer aggression; they also work against furthering social exclusion that operates through educational exclusion.

## SEEKING QUALITY WITHOUT EQUITY: EXCLUSION AS EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE IN CHILE

Before presenting data describing contrasting approaches implemented by Chilean schools to address issues of school violence, we briefly discuss some key policies that account for the educational trajectory Toro (2010) described for students who exhibit aggressive behaviors in school. These policies and their negative effects on schools as social institutions that must further equity and social cohesion can provide a perspective on Chile's educational system which, in turn, highlights the importance of incorporating solidarity as a core organizing value of school leadership and policies.

In the 1980s, Chile began the implementation of a market-driven model for the provision of educational services. The General Education Law (*Ley General de Educación*, or LEGE) created two types of publicly funded schools: those owned and administered by the municipalities (municipal schools) and those owned and administered by the private sector. Each type of school receives an attendance-based, per pupil state subsidy. Today, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are concentrated in municipal schools; those from the low-middle and middle class are concentrated in private-subsidized schools, and upper-class students most often attend private-paid schools (Bellei, 2008; García-Huidobro, 2007). Belfield and Levin (2002) have argued that an educational system that is segregated may be inequitable, and that polarizing students undermines the public school system and produces schools that enter "spirals of decline"(p. 47) that are observed in a vast number of Chile's municipal schools. Over the last decade, enrollment in municipal schools has shown a steady decline, from 58% in 1990 to 42% by 2009 (Ministerio de Educación, 2011a). On the national assessment of educational quality, over the last 20 years, average scores in municipal schools are below the averages attained by private subsidized and private-paid schools (Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación, 2009). This differential performance has also been observed on international achievement tests (e.g., Program for International Student [PISA], 2006).

According to LEGE, with few exceptions, municipal schools must serve all students who seek enrollment. Private schools that receive public funding can use selective admissions processes and cancel the registration of stu-

dents who fail to meet the school's academic or behavioral standards. This stipulation introduced a perverse effect as many families opted to send their children to private-subsidized schools, believing that selection leads to a better education, ensuring that their children will socialize with children who are similar in terms of intellectual and sociocultural characteristics. Schneider, Elacqua, and Buckley (2006) studied the school selection behavior of parents in a large urban area in Chile and found that a key factor in parental decisions, particularly in the middle and upper socioeconomic groups, was the social class composition of the student body. On the other hand, Montecinos, Sisto, and Ahumada (2010) noted how low-income parents also wanted to exert their right to school choice, but were precluded by the low-quality education their pupils were receiving at their municipal neighborhood schools. Given that they were underprepared, the better-performing schools did not accept them, or if they were accepted, they could not keep up with the academic standards. This speaks of the social exclusion that geographically operates through educational seclusion, leaving whole communities without quality schooling opportunities (Torche, 2005; Valenzuela, 2008). Policy and parental behaviors have colluded to generate a systemic mechanism of segregation that is taken for granted and becomes almost invisible and naturalized (Atria, 2010).

The voucher system in Chile gives the subsidy to the school and not to the parents. Instead of parents choosing schools, in Chile school selection mostly operates the other way around (Redondo, Almonacid, Inzunza, Mena, & de la Fuente, 2007). This has resulted in schools actively—but not overtly—seeking those students who are cheapest to teach, and "suggesting" to students who are more expensive to teach—such as students with special learning needs and students with behavior problems—to "look for some other schools" (Contreras, Bustos, & Sepúlveda, 2007). The following excerpt from an interview conducted by the first author of this chapter (López, Carrasco, Ayala, Morales, López, & Karmy, 2011) in the context of an ethnographic study examining discursive practices around school violence illustrates the phenomenon as understood by a municipal school principal:

> Let's see. We have reached the conclusion that the Chilean educational system is, I don't know how to express the exact word, perhaps discriminated or divided into different groups. We are told *you* municipal schools will only have students who have problems, be it learning difficulties, or behavioral problems, emotional problems, those types of things. That is, as the system is currently constructed, that seems to be our final destiny. I have received calls from the ministry telling me, "Look, sir, you must enroll this boy from private-subsidized school X." (I will not provide names.) "He has problems

> over there, and parents are complaining. That boy cannot stay there, he has become a child who assaults his peers and he is generating problems and you have to enroll him." I answered "and why do *I* have to receive him?" If it is in order to have a boy with those characteristics, I have 20, and therefore we can exchange. You send me that child and I will send you one of mine. That seems fair. Why does a private-subsided school which is also financed by the state not have to do that [serve all students who seek enrollment]? I ask myself, why?

This excerpt clearly exemplifies how LEGE operates through practices that exclude certain students from an opportunity to learn and study according to their "parents' choice," the foundation of the market-driven model. It also exemplifies how segregation occurs by slowly excluding students from attending certain types of schools, concentrating hard-to-teach students in schools that by law must accept all who seek access.

The paradox is that concomitant with an expansion of compulsory education from ages 8 to 12 and an expansion in total coverage from 91% in 1990 to 99% in 2001 for elementary grades (grades 1–8), we can observe an intensification of various forms of segregation. The first criterion is social class, and within social class, students are sorted again based on achievement and behavior. To reverse this situation, a law was passed in 2007 to generate a subsidy formula tied to the socioeconomic status of the student—the voucher value is now significantly higher for students whose families of origin are socially vulnerable. This will, supposedly, create an incentive for private providers to enroll students from lower-income backgrounds. The logic of a consumer-oriented economy, notes Bauman (2005), places an emphasis on the "disposal of things, rather than on their appropriation" (p. 308). As aptly articulated by the principal quoted, when schools operate to serve private interests, students become commodities that can be traded. As a consequence, education as an institution that provides the social foundations of solidarity is undermined. Bauman (2005) writes:

> Individual exposure to the vagaries of commodities and labor markets inspires and promotes divisions, not unity; it puts a premium on competitive attitudes and degrades collaboration and teamwork to the rank of temporary stratagems that need to be suspended or terminated the moment their benefits have been exploited in full and used up. (p. 304)

Through the policies and practices described earlier, Chile has created a system by which municipal education receives the largest proportion of hard-to-teach students. This, in turn, has created a climate of learned helplessness in many schools, opting for the referring spiral to address problems

they believe are beyond their control and professional capacities. Hard-to-teach students are referred to specialists, who in turn refer them to further specialists, and so on. The referral process leaves these students without opportunities to participate and engage in classroom activities with peers. At the same time, schools miss opportunities to act on bullying and other forms of school violence through educative interventions.

## SCHOOL CLIMATE-RELATED PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS WITH PEER-TO-PEER AGGRESSION

Parés (2006) proposed different levels of intervention to address peer-to-peer aggression. She distinguished among interventions that can be ordered on an exclusion–inclusion continuum. Each level describes alternative roles for those involved in the situation: victims, aggressors, and spectators. At the exclusion end of this continuum, we find measures that are reactive, that reject students who act in aggressive ways and focus on controlling their behavior. For aggressors, these actions include control and threats that clearly communicate zero tolerance and the consequences of continuing with those types of behaviors. For victims, this would entail protective measures such as providing adult supervision so that the student is never alone as well as legal protective measures. For spectators, the measures involve stimulating them to denounce the acts either publicly or privately.

At the inclusive end of this continuum, interventions with the perpetrators of aggression entail actions that will break up the group that is responsible for aggression and including those students in alternative groups, such as sports, study groups, and so on. With victims, interventions aim at elevating their status within the group by enhancing these students' "public image" through leadership assignments within the classroom. For spectators, interventions aim at teaching them how to behave in ways that make all classmates feel included, particularly those who have been victimized. Students are taught how to engage in solidarity by taking care of each other. In what follows, we illustrate specific practices associated with both ends of this continuum through an analysis of data produced in two studies that examined management practices developed to address *convivencia* (getting along together), and in particular, peer-to-peer aggression in the school (Calderón & Contreras, 2011; Rodríguez, 2010).

### Differences Between Schools with Low and High Levels of Peer-to-Peer Aggression

Rodríguez's (2010) study sought to describe and compare *convivencia* management practices in five schools concentrating a high proportion

of 7th- and 8th-grade students who scored very high (over 75th percentile) and those of three schools with a high proportion of students with very low scores (below the 25th percentile) on three peer aggression measures ($n = 444$)[3]. In each school, the school principal, the inspector general, a teacher, and a student were asked to respond to a questionnaire that purported to examine how these schools managed issues related to *convivencia* ($n = 40$).[4] This was operationalized in the following three dimensions:

1. Developing, communicating, and administering policies (norms and regulations) specifically designed to promote healthy interpersonal relationships and to address issues of aggression and violence.
2. Level of autonomy to develop school policies and to implement violence prevention programs (versus passively accepting policies and programs developed by external institutions).
3. School practices and activities designed to promote social cohesion in a trusting environment where all community members are welcomed and feel safe in school (e.g., information sharing practices, socialization activities to bring community members together).

Table 1.1 summarizes the main research findings. These data showed important management practices that *differentiated* schools with low and high levels of peer aggression and victimization. Although in both types of schools expulsion from school was the last measure used to manage students' violent behaviors, these two types of schools differed in the primary and secondary interventions implemented. Schools with low levels of peer aggression tended toward actions aimed at promoting student participation in decision-making processes involving issues pertaining peer-to-peer aggression. Students were asked to be actively involved in bullying and school violence prevention. Adults took proactive measures aimed at intervening and/or preventing school violence and provided for the inclusion of aggressors and victims within the regular classroom. Opportunities were created for community-building and the development of emotional bonds among all members of the school community.

In schools with high levels of peer aggression, questionnaire respondents described the implementation of actions that did not promote social cohesion among the various school actors. School behavioral norms and regulations were handed out but not discussed in the classroom. Students did not participate in the elaboration of these norms and regulations, and parents were not seen as allies.

**Table 1.1: Management Practices of Schools with Low and High Levels of Peer-to-Peer Aggression**

| School policies and practices | Schools with low levels of peer aggression and victimization | Schools with high levels of peer aggression and victimization |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Developing, communicating, and administering policies* | Policies related to school climate are discussed with students. The school informs to the community climate-related policies through the "*Convivencia* Handbook" and other official documents relating to the discipline code, conduct and policies for dealing with disruptive students, and consequences for transgressions. In addition, a number of activities are implemented within classrooms to engage students in a discussion of the social norms that need to be followed to create a positive climate. | Documents that define policies related to school climate are handed to the school community. The school informs to the community climate-related policies through the "*Convivencia* Handbook" and other official documents relating to the discipline code, conduct and policies for dealing with disruptive students, and consequences for transgressions. |
| *Level of autonomy to manage school climate* | Autonomous and proactive management. In addition to selectively using resources and programs endorsed by the ministry to address school violence, the school develops local initiatives. For example, an internal anti-bullying campaign and inviting specialists to develop internal capacities to address social conflicts. | Passive management. There is no evidence that schools have proactively developed initiatives to solve social conflicts within the community. These issues are believed to be addressed by adopting programs or initiatives that external agencies ask the school to implement. Teachers report that climate- related issues have not been a topic for professional development. |

*(continued)*

**Table 1.1. (continued)**

| School policies and practices | Schools with low levels of peer aggression and victimization | Schools with high levels of peer aggression and victimization |
|---|---|---|
| *School practices and activities designed to promote community-building* | Student involvement is promoted. Through surveys, focus groups, and assessments, the school requests students' opinions when deciding on issues related to school climate. | Student involvement is not sought out. There are no formal or informal mechanisms to consider students' opinions when deciding on issues related to school climate. |
| | Inclusion as the main intervention. Measures that seek to help integrate the victim and the aggressor within the classroom activities are favored over measures that exclude, punish, or isolate the aggressors. Addressing behavioral problems is coupled with plans to support the academic behavior of low-performing students. The use of suspension and expulsion is infrequent; they are used as the last option. | Exclusion as the main intervention. To address instances of peer-to-peer aggression, various forms of punishment are the most common actions. These students are labeled, isolated, and referred to "specialists." By entering a "referring spiral," students are prevented from participating in regular classroom activities. Students report that low-performing students do not receive additional academic support. The use of measures such as suspension or expulsion is the last option. |
| | Promotion of social activities to bring school members together. The school exhibits a culture that values positive school climate, promoting community-building. School events go beyond socializing as they promote emotional bonding among community members. This enables trusting relationships, fluid communication, and stronger support systems. | Low levels of social activities to bring school members together. The school exhibits a culture that does not explicitly value a positive school climate. Social gathering within classes is promoted without the explicit intention of generating bonds among members. |
| | Parents are seen as close allies. Frequently, when a student assaults a peer, parents are brought into the conversations seeking to resolve the issues. According to administrators, when students are involved in an act of aggression, they first tell their parents. | Parents are not involved. When a student assaults a peer, most often, administrators call the student and hand down the punishment. According to administrators, when students are involved in an act of aggression, they first tell the principal. |

## Leadership for Promoting Social Inclusion in School Climate-Related Practices

To better understand how these inclusive and exclusionary practices were implemented, Calderón and Contreras (2011) used in-depth interviews with at least two members of the leadership teams of 12 schools (eight of which had participated in Rodríguez's study). Here, we report an analysis of interviews conducted at one of these schools with two of the three members of the leadership team: the principal and the inspector general. This school was the only municipal school that exhibited low levels of aggression and in the previous study was characterized as implementing inclusive practices. This K–12 school is classified by the ministry as enrolling students from families of medium-low socioeconomic status. The criteria for this tier are: Most parents' schooling ranges from 9 to 19 years; average monthly household income ranges from US$300 to US$460; and between 50% and 80% of students are in a condition of social vulnerability (Ministerio de Educación, 2011b). This was a comprehensive grades K–12 school that had experienced severe enrollment decline because of poor educational results and general social anomie. A new principal and leadership team were brought in 2 years prior to when data were collected and the school was exiting the "spiral of decline." Next, we analyzed how these two informants understood *convivencia* as built on practices that promoted community-building to support students' development for positive participation in life, not just in school.[5]

*Convivencia is a result of consensus and participation.* By law, each school must develop a *Convivencia* Rules and Procedures Handbook. Although the ministry guidelines stress the importance of writing the handbook through participatory and consensual processes, as shown in Table 1.1, that was not the case in schools with high levels of peer-to-peer aggression. In this municipal school, the leadership team had developed the handbook with formal participation by the different members of the school community.

> *Inspector:* Yes, yes [the inspector general gets up in search of something]. Here we have the *Convivencia* Rules and Procedures Handbook. I mean, here are a series of situations regarding *convivencia*, but all of us who act within the school are a part of *convivencia*. My responsibility is that each person is treated properly, that they perform their functions, if the teacher is expected to teach, that he is teaching, [those] who should be reading, students who come in late, call their parents.
>
> *Interviewer:* How was this handbook developed? The *Convivencia* Rules and Procedures?
>
> *Inspector:* It is being developed, it is more or less completed but it is a contribution by all stakeholders.

Not only were the rules developed in a participatory manner but their implementation did not rest in the hands of the administrators or teachers. The administration had created a "*Convivencia* Committee," involving different members of the school community. The mission of this committee was to participate in the design and implementation of school climate policies. This form of school governance, currently, is not mandatory in Chile. According to the principal:

> What happens is that we developed the *convivencia* rules and procedures; the leadership team validated the document, but then gave it to the Committee. The Committee has what you just said, the responsibility for managing those rules, engaging in actions that will install this procedures in the school, engaging in actions to see to *convivencia*. So the teachers from their point of view, youth from their point of view, and we negotiate at a democratic table how we are going to proceed with these rules and procedures.

This kind of community participation was a conscious and actively driven process. This implies that decisions were made to ensure *decision making with participation*. Decisions were thus *made*, not just received, by all who were affected by them. Nor were programs just received from external sources; the school also exercised autonomy in developing activities. As can be surmised from the previous excerpt, the leadership understood the challenges of this approach—"it's very hard to come to agreements"; confronting them generated a sense of pride and accomplishment.

A continuum of interventions for addressing behavioral problems and interpersonal conflicts that may lead to violence was defined. The first response was conflict resolution with the children involved, including other adults when violence had been observed. Bullying and other forms of aggression were defined and the roles for various actors in a case of bullying identified:

> *Interviewer:* How is the problem of school violence approached in this school community?
>
> *Inspector General:* We have it here, first we examine the child's situation on that day, we inform ourselves, we read any prior records for that child, we then see in what context he finds himself, we see if we can resolve it prior to initiating a [formal] notification of the situation . . . , we try to work out a peaceful resolution of the conflicts. If it is aggression that is different, we inform the principal, we inform the *Convivencia* Committee, we take measures, we evaluate the situation. There is a whole procedure, particularly if it is

bullying, here we have everything concerning bullying . . . the procedural protocol in case of bullying. . . . As I was saying, a series of steps defined in the *Convivencia* Handbook, call the parents, inform parents, conduct a thorough study when there is bullying, the type of victim that is produced.

*Convivencia is an opportunity to educate everyone.* Having a handbook that made explicit the norms, conduct codes, and sanctions to promote *convivencia* was coupled with other interventions that went beyond managing students' behaviors. The aim was to develop citizens by developing a sense of responsibility for the community. Additionally, the link between behavioral disruptions and pedagogical practices was made explicit, prompting changes in the pedagogical conceptions of teachers. New instructional practices were being developed in order to make schooling more appealing to students.

*Interviewer:* How do you address *convivencia* in this school?

*Principal:* That is a complex question because when I arrived, there was nothing, we found nothing and we developed the rules of procedures governing *convivencia* issues. It has 12 points, from the institutional principles, misconducts, typification of sanctions, how you call that, tribunals, in quotes, where students have the right to respond [to any charges] and more formative types of sanctions. For example, if a child throws a stone, [as a form of reparation, he then] picks up papers, engages in a pedagogical task. What is the nature of these pedagogical tasks? Help assess [other students`] homework . . . help younger students . . . we are in the diaper stage, we are just beginning. A second action is during the homeroom periods where we have taken the juvenile course which is a state plan that has been around for a while, that has modules from learning to know about themselves, through, by 12th grade, developing a life plan, their project. Through the assessment policy and rules of procedures we have addressed those dispositions that are desirable in the classroom, . . . . and we have also designed the participation of the student association, it is complete, all stakeholders and starting August, we have a leadership project and they [students] coordinate it in their classroom with the educational assistants. We have designed ten workshops. We have already implemented two. From the definition of conflict through mediation, so they develop communicative social skills, an understanding that conflict is daily, it is inherent to the human condition, that conflict is not just there, every day it is an opportunity to develop skills. And

with teachers we have a workshop . . . one, two, three workshops on life skills development that are being implemented through JUNAEB [Junta Nacional de Auxilio Escolar y Becas, which is the state-funded national program for social protection within the school]. Therefore, we have installed five or six programs or dimensions to assist with our *convivencia* in the school.

The above quote shows the whole-school approach that the school principal and his team developed. They have approached the issue by addressing several of the dimensions of school climate identified by Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral (2009). As we can see, he and his team "took charge" and, with participation from different members of the school community, came up with actions aimed at different levels—classroom, school grounds, cafeteria—and different actors: students, teachers, teacher assistants, inspector general. Altogether, from their perspective these interventions had proven to have an effect on reducing peer aggression and school violence.

*Convivencia is to promote a sense of belonging.* Separate in-depth interviews with the inspector general and school principal showed that both of them thought that one of the factors explaining the low levels of peer aggression was the principal's leadership. At the time of the study, this was the principal's second year in the school and, at least for him and the inspector, much had changed during the last 2 years:

*Interviewer:* What do you think is the main change affecting the problems the school had experienced in the past?
*Inspector:* Behavior, the behavior of kids has improved a lot. That does not mean we have, but it has improved a lot.
*Interviewer:* How did you achieve that?
*Inspector:* Through more supervision in the schoolyard, greater participation and presence of the educational assistants, myself, the work done at faculty meetings, all that, there has been work. There is no one thing one can say "I, I". No, one is just a part of. But yes, our principal, he has always been in front of all this.

The principal's leadership was administrative, as well as pedagogical. The school principal noted that one of the elements behind the changes produced was "changing consciousness" about education, about school, and about students.

*Interviewer:* You just told us that the school also developed a new perspective. What changed?
*Principal:* Work in consciousness-raising. This school was had an enrollment of 220 students, now we have 350 and the

facility is designed for 500. We had been suffering a whole bunch of events, like personal violations . . . therefore first, we have generated the conditions for trust, trust in that what we are doing will not hurt others. I really value the student association [and have] convinced the educational assistants of this new perspective, I mean not to use force to impose this new perspective and the use of transition but that these are fully formative relationships. Additionally, it is not convenient to develop *convivencia* rules that will not be compatible with their performance once they leave the 12th grade but you need to teach them, formatively, how these [rules] will operate.

Though the principal tended to stereotype children who grew up in poverty by assuming that their environment fostered violent responses, he did not see their background as an impediment. He strongly believed in the educability of all students based on the relationships that adults in the school developed with them. The principal reported that teachers had used students' backgrounds as a means of judging their behavior but now they sought to understand the children:

*Interviewer:* How do you address school violence in this school?

*Principal:* You see, a characteristic of our children is that they have an impoverished cultural level, the term is impoverished not deprived, it is impoverished.

*Interviewer:* What is the difference?

*Principal:* Very hard. Impoverished means that they have the skills, but not the tools. Deprived that they have been left without the use of those human faculties. Therefore as impoverished, they only understand solving their conflicts through aggression because they come from poor socioeconomic backgrounds. [The ones who are] weak have to struggle. At the end the stronger over the weak and their struggle is to hit someone, punch them or do whatever and they bring that to the school. These are cultural patterns that are transported into the school. And we are, we have taken some very complicated steps and we, the leadership team, were present during recess, at 1:30 we were in the schoolyard *making presence* and not punishing, trying to get students to understand that you can resolve conflicts without punching or kicking. Second, in the lunchroom there was a long line and things were broken, they punched each other, threw apples at each other, we have 300 chairs, 300 kids who eat here. We decided to have the whole lunch process in the dining room, we put a television, we started serving them well, on trays, we placed trash cans, everything was cleaned up, neatly ordered,

> *therefore there was an environment that did not provoke all that.* In addition, *we were there, watching.* Ah . . . from there we started incorporating the *convivencia* rules. This also happened in the classroom, teachers were not punishing, rather they became more welcoming, understanding they came from cultural poverty which is more conflictive and they began to be welcoming. Today we do not have so many kids out of the classrooms. In March [at the beginning of the school year] half of the students were in the hallways because teachers would send them out for throwing papers, teachers kicked them out; they did not understand those things. We changed our methods and *practices for how knowledge was delivered to constructing knowledge* because it is very boring for kids to listen to some guy talk for 45 minutes. Thus, changing modes of action with respect to instructional practices, giving them some responsibilities in the assessment rules so they could co-assess and self-assess. This is what we have done.

*A school culture of conviviencia embraces solidarity.* During the interview, the school principal reflected on the possibilities of changing a school culture that was previously infused with norms based on punishment and negligence into one where students felt listened to, contained, and welcomed. Creating a welcoming environment was deeply rooted in understanding and building from cultural differences:

> But the idea is that each child feels like his truth is listened to, that you are empathic, that you provide him with the solutions, and everything, that things are done for a reason, that when a social service is needed, needs a psychologist, has a person, a professional who can help uncover that part, the causes of the behavioral manifestation of the child, be it the aggressor, be it the victim. (Principal)

The centrality of positive interpersonal relations was at the heart of how *convivencia* was to be constructed by community members:

> *Principal:* No, *convivencia* is a sociocultural issue, it has to do with the ways they behave at home, at different places, within different communities, because *convivir* (cohabitation) is *to be by someone* it is not *to be with someone*, *convivir* is a close relationship. What happens is that the school must establish some learning activities so this living together is fruitful and develops social skills. That is the first function of education, a social function. That is where the problem lies.

*Interviewer:* Of the elements you just mentioned, which ones do you think contributed most to reducing violence, control of public spaces, more welcoming teachers?
*Principal:* I think not one by itself, there is no, no, no one variable that by itself will produce results. . . . I think you need to provide a mixture of welcoming with presence, a mixture of norms that will allow you to contact . . . allow you to improve *convivencia* but the central [piece] is the classroom, that is where the child feels welcome, and you teach in a way that generates interest in what they are learning. The teacher–student relationship, the educational assistants are central because they know the kids very well, they spend a lot of time with them. Therefore, welcoming and this new perspective held by teachers and educational assistants, not discounting the other measures, for sure.

Clearly, building a community of solidarity within the school is not an easy task and is a long-term process. One of the key elements that the school recognized and recommended had been involving students in actions of reparation of the damage provoked by peer aggression. Their social development as a member of a community was at stake:

> Therefore, within the rules, instruments or actions that allow for that [reparation] need to be in place. Evidently, if a kid damages private property, such as a sweater, he has to restitute the sweater, but in addition he must do something that benefits the community as this benefit is a pedagogical action. If he is a good student, he will go to the 4th, 1st or 2nd grade to do three or four hours of assistantship. (Principal)

## SOLIDARITY AS A CORE VALUE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Inasmuch as a school displays leadership for *convivencia* built around the idea of inclusion, the chance for a healthier school climate, which in turn serves as a protecting factor against peer aggression, is significant (Astor, Benbenishty, & Estrada, 2009). An inclusion-oriented school is one where the leadership and faculty assume responsibility for the behaviors students demonstrate in the schools. Instead of externalizing blame or blaming the students, changes are developed within the school to solve the problems encountered. The focus is placed on transforming the school culture such that improving *convivencia*—"living together"—becomes an opportunity to learn to *"be by someone."* An educative response to behavioral problems seeks to develop a sense of belonging, something that can hardly be devel-

oped if the school response to violence is merely punishment or expulsion. School leaders, as well as teachers, parents, and students, would attempt to see, and help others see, the similarities with respect to pain experienced by all those who are affected by violence.

The principal and inspector general from a municipal school that had curbed social anomie in the school through their words and actions exemplified three forms of solidarity described by Cheung and Ma (2011). Distributive solidarity refers to policies and practices that ensure all members of the community have equal access to resources and opportunities. In schools, this form of solidarity may be enacted through policies and practices that ensure that all students have equitable access to quality learning opportunities, thus alleviating social inequalities generated in the wider society. Distributive solidarity was evidenced in the commitment to the success of all students, changing instructional practices that failed to engage students' interest in learning and asking students to engage in community service to help the learning of younger children.

Inclusive solidarity refers to symbolic feelings of acceptance and friendliness that lead to social inclusion though the sharing of symbolic meanings, such as a shared identity. Cheung and Ma note that "social inclusion is conducive to a common identity . . . for resisting prejudice and discrimination" (p. 148). Inclusive solidarity was practiced by ensuring feelings of acceptance and friendliness that lead to social inclusion.

Finally, dialogic solidarity refers to developing mutual understanding through communication. It is this understanding that enables social order and fosters progress. Following Habermas's communicative action theory, Cheung and Ma (2011) posited that the assumption is that this dialogue takes place in social relations that are free from oppression and power differentials. In schools, this form of solidarity will be enacted through policies and practices that generate trust and openness among all parties to collectively solve problems that emerge from various forms of social interactions (Montecinos, Sisto, & Ahumada, 2010). Practices fostering the development of mutual understanding through communication (dialogic solidarity), were exemplified in the instauration of "tribunals" where students had opportunities to tell their side of the story, as well as in the Convivencia Committee, which included all stakeholders. Trust has been identified as a key aspect for school improvement (Bryk & Schneider (2003). As explained by Roth (2000),

> Trust itself can arise from a sense of solidarity which is only possible once we abandon traditional notions of hierarchy related to schooling and develop a sense of "we are in this together for the learning". That is, solidarity implies that we extend our sense of "we" to people whom we previously thought of as "they". (p. 243)

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Data from the two studies reported in this chapter suggest that when school leadership approaches the problem of peer-to-peer aggression through interventions that seek to include rather than punish students who assault peers, less peer aggression is reported. These are practices that promote students' participation in the school community and a sense of belonging and feeling welcomed (Orpinas, Horne, & Staniszewski, 2003; Parés, 2006). Although the methodological approach used in these studies does not allow us to establish a causal relationship, the data are sufficiently strong to suggest that there is a relationship between school-level practices of solidarity and levels of peer-to-peer aggression. The more evidence we provide that schools, through their climate and leadership practices, *do* and *can* make a difference, the more feelings of self-helplessness associated with working in stigmatized municipal schools can be addressed. These feelings were addressed in the municipal school we studied. Enrollment in this school has gone up, and is now more than 400 students.

### Implications for Educational Policy

Probably due to the high visibility of bullying incidents presented by the mass media during the last few years, two Chilean senators have recently proposed a law on school violence. The proposal includes provisions such as mandatory reporting of acts of bullying to the police and sanctions to schools with high levels of reported acts of bullying—one sanction of which is providing financial compensation to parents. This proposal was drafted by a law firm specializing in criminology, and contained not only criminal-law terms, but most important, a logic of penalty that criminalizes students who engage in acts of violence. In October 2010, the Minister of Education announced that he wanted to give this law proposal maximum urgency in the Senate, so its implementation could start at the beginning of the school year in March 2011.

During November 2001, a congressman, Deputy Mr. Rodrigo González, invited researchers from the Observatory for School Violence to discuss this proposed law. A debate session, followed by a seminar,[6] was organized by the Chamber of Deputies, in which different research groups, one of which included the first author (López, 2010), presented their views and provided empirical evidence on the issue. These researchers also provided expert testimony before the Commission of Education of the Chamber of Deputies, after the above-mentioned proposal was passed by the Chamber of Deputies and sent to the Senate to be passed. The researchers participating in the Observatory helped draft an alternative law project for school *convivencia*, which involved primary (promotion) and secondary (prevention) interven-

tions. In this alternative law, communication and school community participation were explicit and interventions for addressing acts of aggression were diverse. Following the seminar, the commission agreed to postpone its decision on the bill, but members were being pressured by the ministry. The bill was finally passed on September 8, 2011, and integrates the two projects in a rather hybrid way, proposing both actions for promoting school *convivencia*, as well as punishment for breaking rules of *convivencia* (Castro, 2010). This law is now being implemented. We provide this as an example of how research *can* be linked to educational policymaking and how researchers engage in solidarity with educators and students who may be affected by legislation.

## Implications for Professional Development

With respect to professional development, the theoretical and empirical foundations for positive school climate need to be a part of teacher training, as well as of the preparation of school principal and other leadership positions. We have started to do this at our university and will continue to pursue this line of work. Leading for social inclusion involves educational policy and practice that recognize children who engage in aggressive behaviors as members of the community and involve them in solving the problems that generate and that are generated by violence. A first step involves consciousness-raising, so principals and school leadership teams deepen their understanding of themselves within a micro-political perspective and "make visible" the nature, character, and quality of their school climate, and how they contribute toward reproducing or changing this climate. The findings of the studies we reported stressed the importance of helping school professionals recognize and assume their role in contributing toward a "toxic" or "nutritive" climate (Arón & Milicic, 2000). Externalizing the causes of, and solutions to, school violence on students, families, and local communities limits their opportunities for change and furthers a sense of learned helplessness. A second phase entails the development of skills in order to help them redirect their practices, while at the same time reflecting on them as reflexive practitioners. We, as researchers, can help school management teams become action-researchers in order to improve their school climate and build stronger communities based on values of inclusion and solidarity.

## NOTES

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1. In Chile, the concept used to address interpersonal relations and social conflict in schools is *convivencia*. A literal translation of the concept is "cohabitation" or "living together." The Ministry of Education defines policy and procedures related to convivencia as "the promotion and development among all members of the school community of the principles and elements that build a healthy cohabitation, with special emphasis in a preparation that favors the prevention of all types of violence or aggression" (Ministerio de Educacion de Chile, n.d., p. 1). In this chapter, we have used the concept of school climate as a translation for "convivencia," as both address similar issues. It is noteworthy, however, that in the U.S. literature, school climate tends to be defined more broadly than the norms related to interpersonal relationships or social conflicts (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009).

2. An external evaluation of Chile's educational policies since 1990 conducted in 2003 by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) stated:

> The important point is not whether the value-added differs that much—it does not—but rather the fact that the educational system is consciously class structured. The rules of the game are different—and unjustly so—for municipal and private schools. Private schools can both select and expel. Municipal schools—with the exception of the few prestigious ones that are in high demand—are obliged to accept all students asking for access. Under these circumstances, results can be expected to differ in favour of private subsidised schools. (OECD, 2004, p. 255)

3. Aggression and Victimization Scales (Orpinas & Frankowski, 2001, adapted by López & Orpinas, 2010) and the INSEBULL [Instrumentos para la Evaluación del Bullying], a self-report and a peer-report scale (Avilés & Elices, 2007).

4. The principal or assistant principal was included because they lead the organization. The inspector is the staff person who has direct responsibility for students' out-of-classroom needs and behaviors, enforcing discipline codes and sanctions. Teachers were included because, through their daily interactions with students, they witness classroom incidents of aggression and also are enforcing discipline codes and sanctions. Students were included, as they tend to be the protagonists in the incidents of aggression and sanctions that were investigated in the study. By including all of these stakeholders, a 360-degree perspective on how the school managed situations of convivencia could be attained.

5. The interviews were conducted in Spanish. Transcript excerpts have been translated into English, with some editing when deemed necessary to increase clarity.

6. Seminario Violencia Escolar: Una Mirada desde la Investigación y los Actores Educativos [School Violence Seminar: Perspectives from Research and Educational Actors]. November 17, 2010, Library of Congress, Valparaíso, Chile.

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