Educational policies, territories and actors strategies

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Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to analyse how educational policies about school violence are reinterpreted and implemented at school level and if this process contributes to a more pluralistic and democratic school. A research carried out in 3 clusters of schools showed that the diversity of understandings and strategies to face school violence, higher within the territories than between them, was associated to the school board's agendas and the legitimacy of the different actors to interpret and act within the national policies framework. There was a high consistency between violence management strategies and the ways schools faced social and cultural diversity. Those who favour more inclusive strategies to deal with violence tend to provide higher educational opportunities in schools, inversely, those who favour repressive strategies are more likely to support educational and social selective strategies, with less educational offer; less participation of teachers, students and parents in violence regulation.

Keywords: school violence, educational policies, equity, democratic education.

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School violence, discipline and educational policies

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how collective actors reinterpret and enforce national policies about school safety, within and between educational contexts, and to understand how this process challenges a more pluralistic and democratic school. The basic theoretical assumption we've adopted in this research is the idea that educational actors are situated actors, and its action is uncertain because of structural constraints, organisational frameworks and particular relational arrangements. This assumption implies that to understand how behaviour policies are implemented at local level we must consider different levels of analysis, seeking to apprehend the production of school-specific policies and forms of participation of the various actors in this educational process.

The persistence of school violence in the media agenda and the increasing social concerns questioned the political agents and resulted in policy measures in different countries and recommendations by several international organizations. The emergence of the social debate on school violence also originated a remarkable interest in the science field on the last two decades, and consequently the problematic stepped into the scientific agenda with significant vitality, translated into an increasing number of investigations and by the constitution of a field of experts (Brown and Munn, 2008; Smith, 2013). This development, made with the large preponderance of theoretical proposals inspired in the concept of bullying, turned into a growing controversy about the pathological characteristics that are often attributed to violent behaviour (Bansel et al, 2009) and slowly led to the development of alternative approaches. Some of the critics point out that, at present moment, the use of an almost single definition of violence undermines the effective study of the multiple combinations of factors that comprise it. It is therefore essential to unveil the social processes associated with school violence, paying attention to the analytical biases produced by the decontextualization of individual behaviours (Casella, 2002; Korbin, 2003; Visser, 2006; Fuchs, 2008). As we argued before (Sebastião, 2009a, 2013; Sebastião *et al.*, 2010), to understand school violence it is relevant to consider the cultural frameworks in which they are produced (particularly socialization backgrounds) as well as the normative, organizational and relational contexts of schools. We can't consider actors agency if we don't consider schools as organizations with a

history, culture and specific relationships frameworks (Torres, 2008; Torres and Palhares, 2010).

To understand the social and political relevance of issues as school violence and discipline we must consider the structural changes in European societies, associated to the new political arrangements that are shifting the social consensus established in Europe after World War 2. The widespread diffusion and prevalence of neoliberal values emphasize the central idea of a limited social management of the population and, consequently, the ascription to the individual of the responsibility to confront globalized insecurities and challenges (Ong, 2006), namely through their own decisions about school careers. One major educational consequence of these conceptions is to bring the behaviour policies to the foreground, placing individual behaviours at the centre of the schooling processes, and ignoring structural constraints and cultural bias on educational processes. Casella argues in this regard that: "At the beginning of the 21st century, policy reinforces the simple idea that kids need to be changed and that adults have the means to change them, and that the way of changing them is by adjusting their cognitive facilities and threatening them with punishment" (2002, p. 369). A systematic causal relationship is generally established between "behaviour correction" and "educational achievement improvement" (Maguire *et al.*, 2010), ignoring thereby all the other relevant variables associated to effective learning, such as students' social and cultural diversity, pedagogical methods, organisational strategies or school and families.

In a convergent perspective, school violence expresses some of the societal dilemmas about the crescent unpredictability of everyday life, particularly when some of its central institutions, such as school, seem to lose the capacity to contribute to some sense of ontological security in a context of radical change. As Giddens argued, the economic and social changes which characterise late modernity societies has weakened the idea of security and shifted perceptions towards an environment of manufactured uncertainty: "Many aspects of our lives become, suddenly, opened, organized only in terms of 'thinking of scenarios' construction 'if ... then', of possible future results" (Giddens, 2000, p. 174). As this scenario deepens more and more, the transition from schooling to labour market is increasingly uncertain, leading educational policies to lose support and legitimacy. The interaction between uncertainty and the consequences of massification gives a new and enlarged meaning to what Bourdieu called

two decades ago the "outcasts on the inside" (Bourdieu, 1993) stressing the tensions around educational equity and integration.

School is a space of conflict, where social reproduction strategies are associated to the attempt to control educational outputs by different groups of teachers and parents, and the potentially dangerous behaviours (or labelled as such) are considered as anomic threats' to the success of these strategies. Violence is then considered as an indicator of the educational quality which leads many school boards to the need of constant reaffirmation and demonstration of school safety as a synonym of educational excellence, given the families' perceptions about these behaviours as potentially endangering children's schooling

To evaluate the impact of behaviour policies in schools (in other words, their real power to outline and regulate social practices) one must consider that, as Barroso advises: "the actions that ensure the functioning of the education system are determined by a beam of regulatory devices that often annul each other, or at least relativize the causal relationship between principles, goals, processes and outcomes" (2003, p. 40). Policy enforcement doesn't depend strictly of the policies themselves, since we can find acting simultaneously in schools different generations of educational policies (or at least its consequences), and a wide range of other measures with their own temporalities, characteristics and constraints, related to employment, social issues or territory management. During the process of policies' enactment and implementation the complexity of the problems in which they are supposed to intervene is often not taken into account: "in part because the social conditions to be attended are tangled webs of problems with symptoms, sources, and 'solutions' that are neither readily apparent nor reliably addressed by policy provisions" (Malen and Knapp, 1997, p. 419). Policies are often developed using as model the best schools, or schools with ideal teachers, students and buildings, without considering the need to adapt to local differences (Mainardes and Marcondes, 2009; Braun *et al.*, 2011). The process through which education policies are evaluated cannot be reduced to the hermeneutics of their political and ideological assumptions or by the attempt of assessing some local isolated impacts. Several authors have drawn attention to the fact that there is, within schools, a significant range of sources and forms of political and organizational legitimacy, as a result of organizational autonomy and actor's agency (Barroso, 2003; Watkins *et al.*, 2007). Policies represent the normative framework in which teachers, other educators, students and families interact, for the reason it effectively

defines the possibilities and boundaries to action, as well as the resources that each can use to do it, but cannot predetermine how to use it or its' consequences.

In this perspective, schools are not homogenous realities and the discourse of school actors is only partially common and reflects their different organizational positions, with differential access to information, interpretations and possibilities of action. The performance of those who must implement policies, street level bureaucrats, to use Lipsky's expression (1971, p. 393), is then affected by the tension between the demands of the state; the objective needs of its customers, and the organisational position of the public servants. Teachers are in a particularly ambiguous situation, since they are simultaneously objects of and policy actors (Braun *et al.*, 2011, p. 622) and this particular configuration emerges clearly when schools have to implement national behaviour policies.

Cultural diversity also brings greater complexity to the process of obtaining inside the same relational space a minimal level of behavioural consistency, because it amplifies the unpredictability of factors associated with the presence in schools of a larger set of values and behaviours culturally oriented. The significant level of populational mobility induced by economic and social globalization, translated into a permanent movement of students' coming in and going out of the educational system, contributes for a fragmentation of the learning process and the relation with the school system of rules, placing the discipline as a permanent problem. Students from particular ethnic minorities or nationalities (Gipsies, Africans or South- Americans) are systematically seen as resistant to the adoption of the school rules and the cultural values it embodies, and for this reason potentially inducing conflicts in schools. Several schools put in place informal discrimination measures, as the selection of their students at the moment of their enrolment; tracking classes with specific schedules and less qualified teachers; re-orientation of low class students for vocational training at the first sign that their grades or behaviour are not in accordance with the board expectations'. The effects of these selective strategies are harder on ethnic minorities because they accumulate economic and cultural factors of disadvantage, and in some schools this is considered as predictor of learning or behavioural problems (in general at first the language, but rapidly other individual or social characteristics).

This paper is based on a research about the implementation of behaviour policies and the strategies to control and regulate school violence in Portuguese lower secondary schools. Analytically we seek to situate

ourselves at the place where policy "meets the pavement" Casella (2002), considering the distance between policy enactment and its concrete fulfilment.

School behaviour policies in Portugal

The strategies implemented in the Portuguese educational system to deal with the development of situations of violence and severe indiscipline has been based in two main strategies during the last decades (Sebastião *et al.*, 2010). The first structure itself around the Programa Escola Segura[5], a cooperation agreement between the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education, with intervention on the outside of schools undertaken by the national police and on the inside by guards of the Ministry of Education. The second relevant dimension has been the reformulation and revision of the Student's Code of Conduct, with the objective of defining the values and principles of students' behaviour, constituting the legal framework where the public schools must structure their internal disciplinary regulations. In a very participated public discussion, the main changes to this instrument led to an adjustment and strengthening of disciplinary action, which can be corrective or punitive, as well as a broadening of disciplinary procedures and decision-making to be applied by the schools, that may now be extended to include families (including the possibility of imposing fines for the misbehaviour of children). The Student's Code mandatory guidelines incorporation on schools disciplinary standards reflects the attempt to universalize the political values and objectives arising out of the political reorientation from the last elections. Policy concerns focus on the penalizing violence and indiscipline, attributed mainly to the existence of students poorly socialized and irresponsible families. Although there was in 5th grade a curricular area on citizenship where students should attend a training module on Safety Behaviour and School Violence; the recent curricular reorganization has eliminated the citizenship area and, consequently, any kind of preventive or educational approach of the school violence issue. Despite their compulsory elements, the interpretation process and local implementation of the Student's Code of Conduct produced small variations in the documents from school to school that proved to be much more divergent in practice. This debate has

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[5] Safe School Program

become not just a battle between different political views on behaviour regulation, but also about how school is organized. The successive changes of this framework demonstrates the conflicting nature of negotiated and policy-making processes (Malen and Knapp, 1997), but also the desire of the central government to interfere and impose its vision in schools' everyday life.

It is important to note that the debate on this particular policy didn't occur isolated from others, particularly the local structuration of larger networks of schools and its management model, the new curricular options or the option by pedagogical models associated to final examinations, changes that have to be analyzed in their relationships as attempts to a structural reorientation of the purposes and procedures of the educational system. The enactment and implementation of a new model of school management (*Juridical System of Autonomy and Administration of Schools*) had particularly extensive impact in the way policies are locally implemented, because it changed school's autonomy and its organizational structure, promoting new internal hierarchies, leadership status and community participation on the strategic guidelines of schools. The strengthening of school leaders, previously assumed by a collegial body, expressed itself in new powers in administrative, financial and pedagogic management. The election process of school leaders requires that the candidates to school directors develop a strategic and intervention plan, which is distributed and voted for all the educational community at the General Council. School principals became in this process key players in the translation of national education policies into a locally practical expression, having some autonomy for their application, which enables a local interpretation, often associated to their own concerns and needs of re-election. This amendment may ultimately lead to an increase of ambiguity (Braun *et al.*, 2011) regarding the action of the headmasters (Sebastião, 2003) and their relation with the government and local stakeholders.

Behaviour policies are no different since violence and disciplinary problems are repeatedly the trigger to a silent, but quite effective, form of family contestation of these micro policies: the desertion of middle class students. The use and administration of disciplinary rules are often associated to the management of the social composition of the students, used as an instrument to legitimate the expulsion of those seen as threatening the school image, convergence which brings a significant relevance to violence and discipline in school life. Schools are quite different from each other because their distinctiveness doesn't result only

from the particular group of teachers working there or from the social context, but also from the intersection in the territory of different policies, strategies and social perceptions towards education (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006; Watkins *et al.*, 2007). This particular arrangement constitutes the empirical base to the analytical decision of focusing the research in particular territories, where the convergence between policies, organizational arrangements and actor's action creates a rich and complex environment. Behaviour policies are used, in this sense, as a research object that can help to start unveiling that complexity.

Three clusters and seven schools – development of a research

The decision of selecting three clusters of schools resulted from the work developed in the Observatory of School Safety [6] between 2006 and 2011, which, for the first time produced comprehensive data on school violence in Portugal, during a sequence of years[7], including all levels of non-higher education. The theoretical clarification of what is a violent action (distinguishing it from indiscipline) and the use of indicators such as *Acts against: freedom and physical integrity of persons; sexual self-determination; property and personal equipment; school property and equipment*, etc. The data produced allowed a new understanding about the extent of school violence, with the possibility of identifying the most frequent acts and to collect information about the context of violent situations. In political terms the information produced contributed directly to inform policies and to a better management of staff and other resources of the ministry in terms of security, however had little impact in the enactment of prevention actions, which took a long time to be decided. The available data made possible to take a first major conclusion. It was found a relatively weak dissemination of violent situations at national level, with only 1.6% of the schools in the 2010/2011 academic year reporting more than 6 cases, with a strong decrease in the number of schools affected whenever the number of cases rose. However, despite the low number of incidents at national level, when we look at their regional distribution a different reality emerges, with a strong concentration of incidents in the

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[6] CIES-IUL Research Team which had a contract with the Ministry of Education to produce a data system and perform analysis to support political decision between 2005 and 2011.
[7] With national reports between 2006 and 2011 presented publicly.

metropolitan areas of Lisbon an Oporto, especially prevalent at Lisbon with 50% of the total[8].

One particular municipality in Lisbon region stands out in this 5 year period, having participated about 20% of the incidents in the entire area. This county is the second largest populated in the country, and is characterised by a high population density in the urban areas, factors with a particularly impact in the school environments of the selected territories. In the 2009/2010 academic year, the average rate of occupancy of the county's schools was 126%, especially in schools with levels 1B and 2, where some educational establishments were overcrowded (up to 200%), namely in areas of highest population density, and every school of this study has experienced annually an increase in the students' number per academic year.

Given the distribution of violence occurrences in this county, we've selected three clusters (A, B and C), integrating seven public schools with ISCED levels 1B and 2[9]. Territorial, social and economic criteria were considered to select territories with similar social, economical and demographic conditions, but with a wide range of school violence levels between their schools. The distribution of the selected schools comprised three schools in Clusters A and C while cluster B corresponds only to one school. The option to include a territory with one school is only explained by its geographical isolation and the absence of other schools at these levels. In Cluster B there is no school choice for families or possibility of informal processes of students' selection: one territory, one school, without even a private school.

From the methodological point of view the research adopted an intensive strategy with the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. It was used statistical information from the national database of school violence and other statistical data provide by several sources (Ministry of Education, City Hall, Schools) and data from inquiries to teachers and students. The qualitative data came from the analysis of official documentation; from interviews with school boards and other

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[8] Source: National Report on School Violence and Security in Portuguese Schools, Ministry of Education/ Observatory of School Safety, 2010/2011.

[9] In Portugal, the basic compulsory education is composed of three grades that children must attend between the ages of 6 and 15. The level 1B (the last two years of "Primary Education") corresponds to the Portuguese second grade and level 2 ("Lower Secondary Level") to the third grade of the basic compulsory education.

responsible staff for school safety, as well as from *focus groups* with stakeholders in each cluster.

The data collected (Table 1) showed school environments characterized by a great cultural and social diversity, with a relevant number of students depending on social and economic public support[10] and a significant concentration of low income students. This is an interesting illustration of what Fuchs pointed (2008) concerning the school violence problem and the causality between school and context. This proximity between schools leads several families to develop attempts to choose better educational opportunities for their children, especially in the beginning of each level, which are facilitated or hindered according to the choices of the school boards in the maintenance of the national standards of enrolment, as we could find during the field work. As some authors have underlined: *nuances of local context [can] cumulatively make considerable difference to school processes and students achievement* (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006, p. 309) and these differences can be, from the viewpoint of educational equity, magnified positively or negatively (Braun, et al, 2011, p. 587).

The data showed that cluster A has strong inner contrasts between schools. Students of schools A2 and A3 are characterized by low social and economic status: over 80% have the need of social and economical support, a situation that contrasts with school A1, where only 25,8% have this kind of support (although are located approximately 400 meters from each other). The global attainment levels are low in schools A2 and A3, with a significant proportion of students attending a school year lower than expected for their age and just one of those schools provides alternative courses to regular education (A2). Inversely, the school without reports of violent incidents (A1) has also the highest level of successful students with relatively high socioeconomic status (compared to the other in the same cluster), and doesn't provide any alternative courses to students with academic failure. The number of foreigner students per school has the less significant differences in cluster A, varying from 19.6% in A 3 to 11.1% in school A1.

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10 Students coming from families with very low income classified in two levels: Level A, families with global annual income until 2.934,54€, has support for school material, meals and part of the school manuals cost; Level B, families with annual income from 2.934,55€ till 5.869,08€, are supported in 50% of Level A. Above this value there is no direct support for children education. Although this is not a social class indicator it shows the social differences between and inside schools, and indirectly the local economic structure.

Table 1. Violent incidents per 100 students and students characterization variables, 2010/2011

Clusters	Schools	Ratio of incidents per 100 students	Foreigner Students' (%)	Students with social and economic support (%)	Students attending a school year lower than expected (%)	Educational provision
A	1	0,00	11,1	25,8	14,6	Regular
	2	1,95	16,6*	86,0*	35	Regular, Alternative[11]**
	3	4,21	19,6	83,9	40,1	Regular
B	4	2,80	22,4	61,8	47,6	Regular, Alternative***
C	5	0,76	12,6	49,3	28	Regular
	6	3,81	11,1*	41,7	29,7	Regular, Alternative**
	7	1,19	14,9	54,8	45,7	Regular, Alternative**
(Average)		2,11	15,5	57,6	34,4	----

Source: Schools data (2010/2011) and City Council data* (2010/2011)
** Educational - Vocational Courses and Alternative Curriculum Courses
*** Educational - Vocational Courses, Alternative Curriculum Courses and Educational - Vocational Integrated Program

The internal socioeconomic disparities are lower in Cluster C than in cluster A, although significant: social and economic support percentages vary between 41.7% in school C6 and 54.8% in C7. This cluster is also quite interesting because it shows a weak relation between relevant variables, since the school with more violence (C6) is the one that has less foreign students, with socio-economic support or with school failure.

Cluster B (school B4) is characterised by a strong diversity with the largest number of foreign students in the sample, the lowest educational attainment, one of the highest percentage of pupils supported with socioeconomic measures and a level of violent incidents above average. This school is characterized by offering several educational alternatives to regular education in an attempt to integrate the diverse types of pupils and individual trajectories.

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11 See table in annex for the alternative educational provision in the Portuguese educational system

Table 2. Ratio between violent incidents and school intervenient, 2010/2011

Clusters	Schools	Incidents per 100 students	Teachers ratio per 100 students	Other Staff (non-teachers) ratio per 100 pupils
A	1	0,00	10,2	2,3
	2	1,95	12,5	3,0*
	3	4,21	11,5	2,6
B	4	2,80	13,1	3,2
C	5	0,76	8,9	3,6
	6	3,81	10,9	2,5*
	7	1,19	12,5	2,4*

Source: School data (2010/2011) and City Council data* (2010/2011)

Other relevant differences between schools could be identified, namely the ratio between teachers or other school staff per 100 students, and the same ratio for the number of violent incidents. There is a common sense idea that a better-prepared school to prevent and solve internal problems such as violence is a better equipped school, for instance, with a higher number of staff members. Curiously, at Cluster A the best equipped school, considering staff and teachers number (A2), isn't the most peaceful one. We cannot state that there is a clear relation between the incidents rate and the amount of staff resources, but that these numbers recommend looking for other connections inside the school organization (Casella, 2002; Thrupp and Lupton, 2006; Torres, 2008; Sebastião, 2013).

School and territory: reconfiguration effects

The constitutional principles of the Portuguese educational system were built upon the idea of public school as pillar of the democratic system, to promote equal educational opportunities regardless the social origins or country region of the student (Sebastião, 2009b). Considering that public schools can't refuse enrolment to students and that admission is organised on the basis of the students' place of residence, with few possibilities of schools' selection or parents' choice, it would be expectable to find similar social distributions within the clusters, due to the significant proximity of the schools. However the data gathered showed that when comparing social composition between clusters and inside clusters we could find a stronger differentiation in the second case, situation characterised by clear social

and economical disparities of students' origins in its distribution by schools. Such distribution led us to inquire school boards about their enrolment strategies and to understand competition among neighbour schools to attract and keep in the schools middle classes students and with good educational performance.

Considering cooperation to face similar problems of school failure, indiscipline and violence, in clusters A and C geographical proximity couldn't be considered an advantage. The competition between schools is more intense among those geographically close, contributing to the high differentiation of schools found intra clusters situation that confirms the conclusions drawn from other researches (Abrantes and Sebastião, 2010). Neighbour schools were the strongest contestants to attract the "best" students, and school leaders with more or less support of teachers and partially by some of the community members (schools A1/C5), defined their own strategies to achieve a more favourable position in the informal market of school choice. The definition and operationalization of such strategies by the school boards takes particular evidence in the reinterpretation mechanisms of the law: the selection of school students, allows, as in A1, to choose students by their social and academic conditions. It was possible to identify that the school reputation and its public image represent a transversal problem for all schools, but it is understood in different perspectives. Some of the schools were worried with being attractive to middle-class parents, to be chosen between other schools, either private ones. In the case of School A1, the principal was explicit about the importance of school image. The focus on dissemination of information about the school, including the publication of school results and its position in the national ranking on the school website, was very evident, and clearly stated by the principal:

> The other schools, although located in the same area have different contexts, and for one reason or another the population distribution is done in a particular way; and we are not naive about it, what we want with the school image is to attract a certain type of audience that is more volatile, of course we play with it; a student entering this school already knows that has to have a certain type of attitude and a certain way of behaving, implicitly both parents and students knows it. (A1 Principal)

The reputation of the schools is generally associated with competition for the best students or related to social exclusion and school failure (Braun *et al.*, 2011; Sebastião, 2009b). However, for some schools, it is essentially a problem of developing educational processes that reduce indiscipline and violence and increase educational opportunities for students coming from families with few economic and cultural resources. Concern with more inclusive school opportunities is clear in a situation where, in the beginning, selective practices had few alternatives and equity turned out to be a distinctive brand of the school:

> (...) Perhaps because of our way of being, because we try somehow, because we arranged the technicians the school needed, because we think we have to sort out the issues, because we (…) have several training offers. And this also gives us room, because for example in Regular Education, situations also turn out to be less frequent, because students who were at risk and are at the root of these conflicting situations eventually go to alternative offers - where the work methodology and resources are also larger... Probably that's why our school is not one of the worst schools in [the] Municipality. (B4 School Board Advisor).

As Braun *et al*. (2011, p. 590) pointed out, there is the construction of a collective consciousness of schools about themselves, and this is a complex process that includes the policy framework, the leadership orientation, internal debates and the context characteristics. Many stories about the schools are created and disseminated for several years, contributing to structure the collective identity, as one interviewee explained:

> When I arrived the school had bad reputation and very little benefit, unsafe place, unpleasant, what is not fair because nowadays the kids feel good here and the atmosphere is more calm (C3 School Board Advisor).

However, selective practices were also present as a way of dealing with "problematic" students (including in this definition all the "deviant" situations in learning and behaviour). As one school leader emphatically stated:

> "All students, all those we can dispatch, we dispatch, those with more age whom don't have nor school performance nor interest in

school activities, about 20 per year, with about 50% success rate [in
the success of this process]" (C1 Vice-director).

These strategies are the complement to a more basic selection of
students made by schools A1 and C5 of their students. This is
accomplished in two steps, firstly, at the beginning of 1B level (5th grade)
the students are kept together in the transition from their 1st grade school,
even from some private schools; secondly, in the transition to 7th grade
with a significant reduction in the number of classes per grade, due to the
necessity of redistribution of students by the schools of their territories.
This is an opportunity for both schools to push students with lower school
performance to other schools, or those not having the wanted profile as
mentioned, simply pushing them out, generally without any guidance
relatively to their educational future. Considering the effects of schooling,
we could assert that these particular schools contribute to reconfigure
socially and economically the territories, by redesigning their social
networks and they distort the distribution of social and cultural capital
through the territory, by grouping families and children on the basis of their
social background or school performance.

When schools don't have any clear strategy to face the problems with
violence or indiscipline, as it was the case of schools A2 (facing a
prolonged leadership crisis) and A3, they tend to use external variables to
justify their problems:

> From our school cluster comes here about forty students (...) The big
> problem doesn't come from our schools, but from the (…) relocation
> neighbourhood, and really the bulk of the problem comes from this
> neighbourhood (A3 School Board Advisor).

In this sense the school context is seen as constraint which limits school
board and the teachers' capacity to act over violent situations and
indiscipline. In school A2 in general, the majority of violent situations
happened in the afternoon shift, where the low achievement students, recent
migrants and unruly students were grouped.

Educational equity and social cohesion in these clusters are in this sense
questioned by these micro policies, characterized by the attempt of some
schools to claim its own identity within the local context, through the
assertion of distinctive elements. In these schools context effect tend to
have a negative outcome, heightening the internal processes of selection.

We can speak of a process of symbolic ranking within local territories, in which school boards use different strategies to achieve the better position, but it doesn't means necessarily that it has *a priori* a positive or negative purpose. In some schools variables as students' socio economic background, ethnicity, behaviour, being refugee, or having special educational needs are understood as context variables that should be taken into account by the school organization to adapt its educational and training offer; in others are seen as a burden. C*ontext counts*, contradicting speeches about the education *neutrality* (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006, p. 308), but we must look at its impact in both directions, the way it constraints schools activity (Malen and Knapp, 1997; Visser, 2006) and, simultaneously, how schools organize themselves to face those constraints, and in the end, end up contributing to the transformation of the context in which they operate.

Regulatory framework and intervention strategies

The implementation of regulatory frameworks of the students' behaviour is in Portugal structured by the national norms of the Student Code of Conduct, which stands as the base for each school's disciplinary statute. Although with a common normative base, the research found that the way the transcription of the national normative into local sets of rules was characterized by the diversity of understandings and guidelines for intervention.

Even if the diversity of guidelines for intervention was relevant, it was possible to identify the existence of contrasts and similarities within and between clusters. In cluster C the core strategies for the regulation of students' behaviours were considered the debate over the rules (both its preparation and communication to the school community). In cluster A, the schools tend to give more importance to the hierarchical control of the students, with a more normative definition of disciplinary roles and responsibilities associated to the concrete processes of intervention in conflict situations. Cluster B, although close to cluster C, showed some concern that all actors possess similar interpretations and patterns of action.

Part of this differentiation between schools can be found on its leaders' decision of considering violence regulation as a priority for action. We found a first group of schools that gave priority to violence regulation, based on the conception that safety and conflicts are central elements in the planning and implementation of their activities (Schools A2, A3, B4, C6

and C7) [12]. A second group of schools leaders also believes that violence is a problem which deserves attention; however do not have an action plan with specific activities concretely defined or integrated into other areas of intervention, usually opting to devalue the problem and emphasizing the effectiveness of the immediate intervention (Schools A1 and C5) [13].

Table 3. Intervention strategies in situations of violence and indiscipline

Clusters	Schools	Intervention strategy
A	1	Intervention and decision are highly centralized in school board
	2	Increased coordination among different school intervenient (teachers, staff)
	3	Decision-making processes and actions centred on the teachers' of the class council. Only very serious cases of violence or indiscipline reach the pedagogical council
B	4	Strong interventionist sense in the classroom, based in the discussion of the importance given to the internal rules to get a convergent action of all school intervenient (teachers, staff)
C	5	Intervention centred in *formatting* students in rules, combined with a *tight* control of school contexts
	6	Zero Tolerance Plan based on the conception of merging preventive and interventional actions, with emphasis on the dissemination of clear and objective rules for all.
	7	Rules application takes a strong centrality implicating the different school levels

Source: Interviews to School Board members

The principles and strategies of leadership are materialized in the hierarchy of powers and responsibilities in the processes of prevention and intervention, so that the goals defined (explicitly or implicitly) can be achieved. From the perspective of organizational coordination there are significant differences in internal hierarchies of schools and in the decision-making processes, what translates in intervention processes centred on the school boards or by the participation of the middle level responsible, namely class coordinators, whom in the first case are almost removed from the process. When teachers are called upon to perform an active role (schools A2, A3, B4, C6 and C7) it can be often found the allusion to a

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[12] In general the plans were focused on five key areas, specifically related to the actions planned for the regulation of school violence: 1) Awareness and discussion, 2) Articulation and internal coordination, 3) Monitoring and supervision of spaces; 4) Community mobilization 5) Creation and promotion of structures, projects or initiatives.
[13] As discussed above such strategy in these cases combines with a more limited educational provision and student selection processes.

teacher profile and the ability to perform this role. But although there is a discourse about the teacher role considered as a reference model, the competences to regulate situations of violence and indiscipline are essentially perceived as being mainly dependent on the personal characteristics of each teacher, and not so much resulting from defining a role or function.

In the first group all regulation activities are centralized in the school board (School A1), or together with other internal structures of the school (School C5), generally the mediation offices (which can integrate psychologists or social workers, when available, or just assigned teachers). Nevertheless, in circumstances of greater gravity, all school boards have a determining role in the intervention, especially when procedures and criteria of decision are under public scrutiny.

Intervention strategies and its organizational support were also linked to the importance attributed to the production and use of information about the spread of violence in schools (Sebastião et al, 2010), was this produced by the school or provided by the Observatory of School Violence. Three situations could be identified between both registrations: schools that have detailed internal information but not typify it; schools which report to the Observatory but not typify internally and one school that typifies internally and reports to the Observatory. These differences and their causes were particularly revealing of the school's position on violence and its relevance to the educational community.

A first type of factors refers to the implementation of mechanisms of concealment, since some principals considered that public knowledge of the existence of situations of violence in their schools would lead to their stigmatization. A second explanation lies in an attitude of indifference or neglect to report the incidents to the Ministry, and, finally, was also identified a dual guidance that distinguishes appropriate procedures according to the instance who will participate (for example, the Ministry of Education or the police). The use of violent situations was also identified as a "resource", since some schools could use its public (even in national newspapers) divulgation and systematic communication of all kind of relational situations to the Observatory of School Safety as a strategy to support demands about resources to the Ministry of Education or as an argument in internal conflicts between groups of opponent teachers, fighting for the supremacy in the internal system of power.

Final considerations

In conclusion, the school boards develop their own strategies and practices to match national standards, but the results discussed above allow us to conclude that even with very different starting points and internal conditions, schools develop their own ways of solving the problem of violence. This statement is in the wake of the conclusion of Braun et al (2011) that "(...) schools have different capacities for "coping" with policy and assembling school-based policy responses. Schools produce, to some extent, their own "take" on policy, drawing on aspects of their culture and ethos, as well as on situated necessities within the limitations and possibilities of context(s)" (2011, p. 586). In general, if we could find a discursive pattern about disciplinary intervention generally consistent in each school, the presence in the field during two school years allowed us to understand that in general it was more likely to find a wide range of decision criteria in the evaluation of the incidents and application of disciplinary measures. In most schools the process of regulating conflicts was poorly structured and marked by the absence of uniformity in decisions (in the sense of a coherent and fair action), suggesting that decisions are more often at the mercy of the subjectivity of the person responsible for the regulation of the conflict, than according to the norms established in the school, even if he/she tries to use it as a frame of reference. Although the school leaders had expressed a general preference for preventive measures, they claimed that often these were not viable or effective in useful time, choosing the application of the disciplinary sanction of suspension. This gap between discursive orientations and regulatory practices was clear in the analysis of the data recorded by the mediation offices – existent in six of the seven schools analyzed – which showed a significant inconsistency in the measures applied, with ambiguous accounting practices and assigning of penalties.

It is important to underline that when we consider the analysis of the students' behaviour regulation we need to consider other relevant dimensions to which it's intimately connected. In particular the management of the social composition of the students' population, as done by some school boards, needs further deepening since there seems to have almost a symbiotic relationship in some schools between the process of regulating violence and the implementation of socially selective processes, resulting in the reduction of social diversity of the students corps.

Schools make their interpretation of national policies and define locally strategies and practices models that they consider most appropriate to their needs (Casella, 2002; Braun *et al.*, 2011). This interpretative autonomy results in different strategies of conflict resolution within the same territory, with mixed results and different orientations (Lipsky, 1971; Barroso, 2003), which are often associated with the particularities, guidelines and strategic interests of the leaders, internal balance of power, and the characteristics of the social context or the requirements of educational policies (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006). The mechanisms of selectivity (in the school and guidance of students) are an example of this ambiguity and intersection of guidelines, policies and private interests, translated into processes of social reconstruction of the schools territories (Abrantes and Sebastião, 2010; Braun *et al.*, 2011). This means that relevant school actors' (and particularly principals) can mobilize resources to achieve general policy goals at the same time than their personal strategic interests, and that, in this scenario, the reduction of violent situations is not frequently synonymous of a more democratic school.

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Annex

Measure	Purpose	Legislation
Regular Education	System of compulsory schooling for school age children and youth (aged between 6 and 18 years), ceasing when they finish their (upper) secondary education or turn 18. The regular education system is divided into Basic and Secondary Education. Basic education comprises three cycles, the 1st with four years, the 2nd with two years and the 3rd with three years, and is organized as follows: - 1st cycle: education is broad/ globalizing and is the responsibility of a single teacher, who can be assisted in specialized areas; - 2nd cycle: education is organized into interdisciplinary areas of basic training and develops predominantly under a system of teacher for area; - 3rd cycle: education is organized around a unified curriculum, integrating diverse areas, and develops into a system of teacher for discipline or group of disciplines. Secondary education is organized around different forms, contemplating the existence of courses mainly oriented to working life or further study, all of which contains training components (technical, technological and vocational as well as Portuguese language and culture) appropriated to the nature of the various courses. High school courses have three years duration and each teacher is responsible, normally, by a single discipline.	1986/ 10/ 14 – Basic Law of Education System nº. 46/86 *recently* amended by 2009/ 08/ 27 – Law nº. 85/2009
Alternative Curriculum Project (**PCA**)	With diversified content, which take into account the needs of students, aims to ensure the fulfillment of compulsory schooling and fighting exclusion. This route is intended for students under 15 years of age (inclusive), which are in any of the following situations: a) Occurrence of repeated school failure b) Existence of integration problems in the school community; c) Threat risk of marginalization, social exclusion or dropout; d) Registration of trouble conditions (such as: strong demotivation, high rate of failure, low self-esteem and lack of expectations for learning and the future, as well as the mismatch between school culture and their culture of origin).	2006/ 01/ 06 – Normative order no. 1/2006

Education and Training Integrated Program (**PIEF**)	Encourage completion of compulsory schooling to under-age and the academic and professional certification of children from the age of 15, in situations of exploitation of child labor and / or encourage the completion of compulsory schooling associated with a professional qualification concerning minors with 16 or more years that have an employment contract	15/10/ 1999 – Joint order no. 882/1999 amended by 2003/ 09/ 26 – Joint order no. 948/2003 amended by 2006/ 02/ 10 – Joint order no. 171/2006
Young Education and Training Courses (**CEF**)	They are an opportunity to conclude the compulsory education, by a course flexible and adjusted to students' interests, or to proceed with their studies or education, allowing a qualified entrance in the working world. In this sense, each course corresponds to an education/training stage (from Type 1 to Type 7), which access is related with the education and professional qualification level that they have already achieved. Students will get a school and a professional qualification at the end of each stage. Young people who access these courses must be 15 years or more; lower school qualifications [14]; lack of professional qualification or interest in obtaining a higher professional qualification level. The major goal is stimulate young people to proceed with their studies/training, allowing them to get professional skills by flexible solutions, according with their interests and the need of the local job market.	2004/ 06/ 27 – Joint order no. 15024/2004 *recently* amended by 2008/ 06/ 05 – Normative order no. 29/2008 (Beginning: 2002/ 04/ 12 – Joint order no. 279/2002)

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[14] With 6, 9 or 12 years of schooling completed or not, which according to ISCED corresponds to lower or upper secondary education (levels 2 or 3).