

Real Challenges in Brazilian Schools

22 DILEMMAS FACED BY PRINCIPALS, VICE-PRINCIPALS,
AND TEACHERS AT SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT BRAZIL

COORDINATION

KATHERINE K. MERSETH

ORGANIZATION

INSTITUTO PENÍNSULA

Fundação **Santillana**



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Presentation

ANA MARIA DINIZ

Ana is an entrepreneur with a degree in Business Administration and a graduate of the Harvard Business School Owner/President Management program. She has worked in the fields of education, energy, and well-being. She is also an advisor to Península Participações and presides over the board of Instituto Península, the social arm of her family's business. Since 2010 Instituto Península has sponsored the Singularidades Institute, an institution that provides initial and continuous education to teachers, focusing primarily on didactics. She is also one of the founders of the movement called Todos Pela Educação (Everyone for Education), a public-private partnership that strives to improve the quality of public education in Brazil, and an advisor to Partners in Education, an NGO that facilitates partnerships between public schools and companies or entrepreneurs.

Many are talking about the urgent need to reinvent schools and the educational system to meet the education needs of children and adolescents better. However, nothing done to achieve this will be effective without due attention and importance being given to teachers. Of the few certainties that exist in education, two are related to teachers and are unquestionable: no isolated factor impacts the success of a student at school more than a good teacher; and good teachers are not born, they're made.

A good teacher is prepared to deal with a wide variety of different challenges in the classroom and to teach the students in a way that they can learn. There is no single type of person that becomes a good teacher. After all, teachers run into situations as singular and unique as every human being. Therefore, the more real situations they have to refer to, the greater their repertoire of teaching materials; and the more emotionally prepared they are in terms of self-awareness and interpersonal relationships, the greater their performance will be.

Written by school teachers and administrators throughout Brazil, this book presents real situations that the authors dealt with in a productive and inspiring way. I hope that this method-

ology of recording and presenting cases will not only serve as an example and give comfort to the countless professionals that find themselves in similar situations, but also as inspiration for others to share their stories. That way it will be possible to create a virtuous cycle of quality education and lead to the exchange of enriching experiences, allowing teachers to help students realize their full potential.

Introduction

KATHERINE K. MERSETH

Katherine is a senior professor at the University of Harvard School of Education, and her work focuses on teacher training, mathematics education, and instruction in the case-method of instruction. An award-winning author, she is involved in the Harvard Children's Initiative, Harvard's school leadership programs, and Harvard Teaching Fellow's teacher training. She has extensive experience in middle and high school education studies, and her graduate course is among the most sought-after and best-evaluated courses at the Harvard School of Education.

Throughout the world, legislators, education leaders, local, regional and national politicians, families, and communities seem to agree on one thing: that what happens in the classroom during a child's school years has a significant impact on them and influences to a great extent what they learn, and that the school they attend will have a decisive impact not only on their future, but also on the society in which they live. As a teacher plays a fundamental role in the learning process, he or she must receive exceptional training and support, both from specialized institutions and the school where they teach. The objective of this publication is exactly that: to provide support and preparation to teachers in the face of the challenges and opportunities they encounter in their classrooms. In it, you will find a series of cases written by school teachers and administrators from many different parts of Brazil, based on real experiences and grounded in different perspectives on issues surrounding primary, secondary and higher education, with the objective of helping the teachers exam and discuss possible initiatives to ensure the success of their work.

Before exploring the cases, it's essential to understand something about education in Brazil. Over the last several decades, there have been important advances in the area. One of them is guaranteed access to basic education and today almost 100% of children between the ages of 5 and 14 years old are in school.

Another was the approval in 2017, after a long effort to mobilize millions of people throughout the country, of the National Common Curricular Base (Base Nacional Comum Curricular or BNCC), which establishes all of the essential and indispensable skills and knowledge to which all students have a right to develop.

However, there is still much to be done, above all when it comes to the quality of the education Brazilian students receive. In the last edition of PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), in 2015, Brazil ranked among the bottom of the 72 participating countries with respect to the three criteria evaluated: mathematics, reading, and science. The national data reflect the same reality: in 2017 the National Literacy Assessment (Avaliação Nacional de Alfabetização or ANA) revealed that 55% of 8-year-old students in the public education system are behind in mathematics and reading skills.

The challenges to be overcome by professional teachers are also great. The beginning salary of a teacher who meets the minimum requirements for the profession in Brazil is 3,500 BRL for elementary, middle and high school—well below the beginning salaries of teachers in member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which is equivalent to 8,750 BRL. Despite the fact that real salaries vary significantly depending on the level of education of the teacher, the school system in which they operate, and even the geographic area in which their school is located, this information can explain to a great extent the low attraction of the teaching profession in Brazil, which is low even compared to other Latin American nations, such as Chile, Colombia and Mexico.

Nonetheless, the teaching profession has a high number of young people in Brazil. The average age for high school teachers and above in Brazil is 40 years, and more than 80% of child and elementary education teachers are under 50, while in OECD countries the percentage is 65%. However, keeping highly-qualified individuals in the field and providing them with opportunities for continuous professional development are still important objectives. Providing support to professors is essential to improving the conditions that influence student learning. Real gains will be

won in classrooms and schools where teachers and administrators have access to exemplary professional development programs that offer them a deep and comprehensive understanding of leadership, the structure of educational networks, evaluation systems, and planning strategies that will open new doors for the further development of their work as educators.

TEACHING CASES

The result of a powerful collaboration between the Instituto Península, Instituto Singularidades, and the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (DRCLAS) at Harvard University, this book presents didactic materials called teaching cases according to a teaching method called the case-method of instruction, with the intention of contributing to teachers' professional development and inspiring them.

In the United States, cases are popular teaching materials in the fields of business, law, medicine, and education and it has been exciting to see this concept adopted for teacher training (Merseth, 1991, 1996; Shulman, 1992; Sykes, 1989). According to researchers, case-based learning helps professionals develop the skills needed to diagnose problems, consider multiple influences and perspectives, and engage in the exercise of suggesting and analyzing possible solutions.

Discussions of cases offer the participants a safe research environment in which they can “test” new ideas and approaches without worrying if their ideas will really work or not, as well as the opportunity to come to a better understanding of the issue being examined, through listening to the interpretations and suggestions of others.

The situations described in the cases in this book represent real experiences had by teachers working in both urban and rural areas throughout Brazil, from Roraima on the border with Venezuela to Santa Catarina in the South, and constitute rich portraits of Brazilian education. Each case is both specific and general at the same time, often outlining a dilemma or tension that demands further exploration and resolution.

Those that deal explicitly with topics such as the structure and dynamics of education systems, schools, and philosophical beliefs allow teachers to recognize the great influence that such issues have on their everyday lives, as well as permit school faculties and administrations to examine them in a more profound and careful manner than they are accustomed too. Such considerations and the exercises involved are indispensable to the professional development of educators.

WHAT ARE TEACHING CASES AND THE CASE-METHOD OF INSTRUCTION?

Although there are various possible definitions, teaching cases in this book are narratives that attempt to describe real educational practices in the most comprehensive manner possible. They seek to present multiple perspectives from different players at the school and may include specific comments and observations from the point of view of teachers, students, administrators and members of the community. Good cases provide one with a “piece of reality” that can be examined, explored, and used as practice by discussion participants and facilitators. The cases explored in this book do not present a critique or analysis of the situations portrayed in them—this falls to the reader.

The case-method of instruction often refers to the manner in which the cases are utilized. They can be approached individually for reflection and deepening one’s knowledge of different strategies or in a group setting with active and lively discussions about the situations related in them, whether lead by a facilitator or not. However they are approached, it’s important to emphasize that “cases” and the “case-method of instruction” are intimately related.

The type of cases and objectives can differ significantly at times. In the training of professionals, three categories of cases stand out: examples for portraying, studying and applying best practices; dilemmas or scenarios for practicing analytical and decision-making skills; and pieces for deeper thought and personal reflection (Merseth, 1996).

The cases in this book belong to the second category. They attempt to portray the situations from a balanced perspective, offering different perspectives and the experiences of the various people involved, in addition to seeking to stimulate active discussion about difficult, complex, and problematic situations. Specific, pre-defined answers and solutions do not constitute part of this methodology.

GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPANTS IN CASE DISCUSSIONS

There are various differences between the format of case discussions and those of more traditional approaches, such as lectures and seminars. For example, it's essential that the participants be prepared. Before the discussion, they must read the case and reflect on the initial questions to become familiar with the story, players, problems, and dilemmas presented in the case. They should, therefore, engage with the material and be ready to share ideas, paradigms, and reflections.

Another important factor in case discussions is a well-established learning community. The characteristics of such a community include respect for different points of view, ideas and interpretations, as well as the ability to listen, which is just as important as talking. Furthermore, a productive learning community is one in which everyone builds on each other's contributions in order to come to a more profound and robust understanding of the cases.

After a case discussion in a large group, the participants should individually reflect on what they heard and learned. Sometimes this is essential to beginning to understand why a perspective was neglected, and certain factors that didn't seem important before will be taken into consideration. Throughout the process, participants should try to be reflective, in addition to being sensitive to their environment and those around them. Learning through the case-method of instruction can be an extremely powerful and enjoyable way to acquire knowledge and grow as a professional.

GUIDELINES FOR CASE DISCUSSION FACILITATORS

When choosing a case, the facilitator should be clear on the objective of the discussion, anticipate the directions it can take, and consider the profiles, interests, and knowledge of the participants to prepare for the themes and topics that are likely to emerge.

Preparing and presiding over a case discussion requires a significant amount of work. The facilitator must be well-acquainted with the case, understanding the characters and their beliefs and positions, in addition to reflecting on the influence of the context and the possible points of conflict and tension. He or she must also identify the political and power relationships between the discussion participants and think of plausible solutions to the dilemma presented in the case. The facilitator should take care in this respect with the possible consequences and solutions that may arise. The objective is to determine the most appropriate course of action, which is not always obvious, as well as why it's the most appropriate.

Good facilitators ask open-ended questions that keep the discussion going, ensuring greater participation by the people involved. Case discussion facilitators are neither lecturers nor content providers, nor do they determine action strategies — this falls to the discussion group. It's the facilitator's job to monitor time, engage the participants, encourage them to think about the issues through careful inquiry, make sure that everyone contributes, and help them practice a method of analysis and evaluation so that, when confronted with new problems, they will be ready with an approach to finding their solutions.

Becoming a good facilitator, therefore, requires much practice in leading case discussions.

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Synopses of the Cases

PART I: INTERNAL ASPECTS

A DILEMMA REGARDING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Brazilian law, seeking to promote equal opportunity when it comes to education, provides for the inclusion of individuals with special needs in formal basic education. But little has been researched or discussed regarding higher education. At a teacher training college located in a large urban center in Brazil, a prospective student self-described as having special needs due to emotional and cognitive development issues is rejected when applying for an opening in the pedagogy program. Thus, an awkward situation arises for Mario, the program coordinator.

A DILEMMA REGARDING INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION

A university professor faces a big challenge: ensuring that her only blind student learns all the theoretical and practical contents required to become a Portuguese teacher. It so happens that the canonical syntactic theories are explained in visual diagrams, and the teacher feels compelled to find possible adaptations so her student can learn them.

HELPING STUDENTS ADAPT TO A FULL-TIME SCHOOL

Paloma is an excellent principal and does everything she can to help her team achieve maximum success. Pedro Henrique is a child that needs special attention and, by order of Child Protective Services, comes to study at the full-time school for which Paloma is responsible. The arrival of the new student triggers several con-

flicts between teachers, students, and parents. Even Paloma feels divided: should she support the student's permanent enrollment at her full-time school or follow the suggestions of most teachers and require him to transfer to another school?

BULLYING IN THE CLASSROOM AND THE TEACHER'S RESPONSE

A principal assumes the interim leadership at a large middle and high school undergoing an intervention. However, she finds herself faced with an interpersonal problem to resolve when the mother of one of the students files a complaint against a teacher who is bullying her son in class. The principal calls a meeting of the school board to resolve the issue collectively. To her surprise, before the group finishes deliberating on the matter, the teacher in question slips away from the meeting.

INNOVATION AT A PUBLIC SCHOOL

Priscila, the principal at a public school in the countryside of the state of Minas Gerais, is experiencing one of the biggest dilemmas of her professional life: on one side she has a teacher in her evaluation stage who is carrying out her professional development in an ethical manner through an innovation project developed at the school; while on the other, an oppressive and politically manipulative public administration. Priscila is forced to make a decision that can impact the personal life and professional development of one of her teachers: should she turn in the assessment form for the teacher's evaluation period to the Secretary of Education or not? The situation takes place in the middle of a delicate political moment for the city: the teachers are about to go on strike, which will affect the structure of the municipality. She knows that the municipal government is persecuting what they see as political dissent and that the request for the report could have ulterior motives unrelated to education.

THE ROLE OF AFFECTION IN EDUCATION

Paulo, a teacher of a school in an underprivileged neighborhood, experiences various conflicts with his 8th-grade students, and a crisis arises when his student Carla, accompanied by her mother, goes to the principal, Vilma. Upset by several situations experienced in the classroom, Carla files a complaint against the teacher. He becomes indignant, as he always has believed that the role of a teacher was to teach, with no need to form affective bonds with the students. Now he is faced with a demand that he should like his students. Vilma reflects on who's right and how to solve the dilemma.

THE EFFECTS OF A TEACHER'S PERSONAL PROBLEMS ON CLASS

A teacher named Ana discovers that her colleague Helena, overloaded and caring for a sick child, has been neglecting her responsibilities toward her students, hindering their development. As Helena refuses to talk about the matter, Ana is faced with a dilemma: should she report her colleague, who is normally a responsible professional, but is going through a difficult period; or should she stay quiet and close her eyes to the fact that the students are being affected by their teacher's poor conduct?

A TEACHER UNDER THREAT:

HOW SHOULD A SCHOOL DEAL WITH VIOLENCE?

A young and dedicated teacher named André faces a difficult situation when he comes to receive threats, including death threats, from one of his students. André considers several options for dealing with the situation: ignore the threats, file a police report, talk to the student's guardians, and quit his job. However, he realizes that none of them solves the problem. Violence at the school makes the teacher's work difficult and stressful.

EXCLUSION FROM INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

At a public school in the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre, a student catches the attention of a recently-arrived teacher named Marta because of his aggressive and inappropriate behavior. When asking the management about a possible psychological diagnosis for the boy and ways to better include him at school, her colleagues begin to show a certain discomfort or irritation. The problem takes a new dimension when the boy has an aggressive episode in the school environment and puts his fellow students and teachers at risk. The transfer of the student to a school capable of attending to his special educational needs frustrates the teacher and reveals deficiencies in the training of the faculty.

CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE EDUCATION AT A PRESCHOOL

Marta is the principal at Escola da Mata, a preschool sponsored by a large industrial company. The school, known for its innovative practices, seeks to foster a close relationship with nature, promote the development of the child as a whole person, and encourage play as part of its guiding principles. However, their innovative program is being threatened by the demands of the sponsors, influenced by several families calling for drastic changes to the school's approach to education. At the same time, teachers and staff members pressure the principal to hold fast to the principles that make that school an institution ahead of its time.

PART II: EXTERNAL ASPECTS

DRUGS AT SCHOOL: WHOSE PROBLEM IS IT?

Carolina is the vice-principal of one of the largest high schools in her city. One day, she found herself in the middle a rather unusual situation: a police search in one of the classrooms. Was the

measure necessary or an overstep? The teachers at the school were not included in the decision to allow the search, adding to their discontent regarding the occurrence. What's more, suspicion was raised that an employee of the school could be involved in illegal activity. The vice-principal needs to decide what side to take.

IS SCHOOL A PLACE FOR AGGRESSION?

This case deals with the distance and inconsistency that often exists between what adults say and what they do. At a public elementary and middle school, great effort was made to instruct the students not to engage in aggressive behavior. Nonetheless, in one certain situation, the vice-principal, despite what she always tells the children, loses control.

DAILY LIFE IN AREAS OF CONFLICT: WHAT IS THE SCHOOL'S ROLE?

The principal of a school located in one of the most violent communities on the west side of Rio de Janeiro is faced with a dilemma: on a day when there is an armed conflict between drug traffickers and police officers, should he or shouldn't he open the school? Would the students be safer inside the institution or at home? This case shows the anguish of an administrator who, even making the decision in conjunction with the "Community School Board," has the feeling that he made the wrong one.

REPERCUSSIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

A boy is assaulted by his father and breaks his hand. Upon learning of the aggression, the boy's teachers and school must make a decision on whether to report the incident to Child Protective Services. Many issues regarding the family must be taken into consideration. The decision is not a simple one, as reporting the

incident could lead to the boy and his younger sister being sent to live at an orphanage or made to transfer to another school where they won't receive the same care and attention.

LOW STUDENT COUNT, HIGH BASIC EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT SCORES: THE SCHOOL THAT COULD NOT CLOSE

Terezinha began her second year as principal in a climate of instability: The Secretary of Education announced that it would close the Robson Garcia school, arguing that the number of students enrolled there was too low. But this was successfully averted thanks to the mobilization of the community, which saw the school as the best part of their neighborhood, heavily neglected by the city government. However, the principal was warned by her superiors that she couldn't lose any of her students or she would risk having the school closed for real the following year. In the meantime, the tumultuous relationship between one of the teachers and her students becomes a concern to the parents, some of whom begin to consider transferring their children to another school, threatening the fragile victory won by Terezinha and the community.

PART III: IDENTITY ISSUES

WHEN TEACHER AND STUDENT HAVE CONFLICTING WORLD VIEWS

At a high school in an under-served community outside Brasilia, a Portuguese language teacher with several years of experience, but new to public education, finds herself at an impasse. When she assigns a research project on historical and literary narratives of the 19th century to the seven classes she teaches, one of the students refuses to redo the assignment according to the teacher's instructions. The central issue is the defense of fascism by the student and the refusal by the teacher to allow her to continue to express such positions in a graded assignment.

INTEGRATING FOREIGN STUDENTS: HOW SHOULD IT BE DONE?

The principal of a school in Northern São Paulo is concerned with the behavior issues and poor performance exhibited by her students. Her worries increase with the arrival of immigrants to the school; the presence of the new students sets off a wave of cultural conflicts, bullying, and difficulties on the part of the faculty in adapting their teaching practices to the needs of the new public.

BETWEEN BORDERS: XENOPHOBIA AT A SCHOOL IN RORAIMA

Paulo is a geography teacher at a public school in a city on the border with Venezuela. Due to the worsening of the socioeconomic crisis in that country, many families moved across the border to his town. Consequently, the town's population increased in an abrupt and disorganized manner, leading to an increase in social problems, unemployment and, above all, negative attitudes toward immigrants. The number of foreign students at Paulo's school grew and making sure that the coexistence between Brazilian and Venezuelan students was harmonious and respectful became a challenge.

GENDER AND PREJUDICE AT PRESCHOOL

A small town in the state of São Paulo had both urban schools and a rural one. The rural full-time school, despite being located 30 minutes outside the town, had many students that came from the city. The principal, Elizabete, had assumed the role two months before the episode narrated in the case. Until her arrival, the school, which was normally quiet and free of any serious problems, had never seen conflicts that required deep discussion. However, with the arrival of a new student to the preschool, many conflicts began to arise. The mother accuses the school of influencing her son's sexuality, because, after beginning to attend the school, he began to show "different and strange" behavior. She demands that the student no longer participate in classes that involve rhythmic

activities and playtime, during which the boy only wants to play with dolls. At first, the vice-principal does not agree, but as time goes by and the mother continues to make threats, she decides to follow the mother's "orders." The problem is aggravated, however, when the student begins to suffer from being excluded from some of the curricular activities. The teachers insist on no longer excluding him, while the mother insists on not wanting her son to be "encouraged" to "do things that are for girls," and Elizabete finds herself at an impasse: what is the best path to take?

A YOUNG WOMEN'S CLUB AND ITS DEVELOPMENT AT SCHOOL

The routine at a school is shaken up by the emergence of a romantic relationship between two girls. The case reveals different perspectives on the issue, as well as suggests a multiplicity of ways to address it and, to this end, presents various reflections. It also serves as background for a variety of debates on gender ideology, transsexuality, bullying, and violence, among other issues. The presentation of the narrative, the community members involved and how they positioned themselves in relation to the issue, without, however, offering a conclusion or close to the case, seeks to prompt deep reflection and dialogue to promote discussion of these important issues.

PART IV: EQUITY

THE MEANING OF ZERO ON A REPORT CARD: WHO FAILED?

A young vice-principal reflects on the evaluation process at her school when she has to justify to a student's family a zero he received on his report card from the Body in Movement teacher. The teacher claims to have given the grade because the student didn't participate in his classes.

ACCESS IS NOT SYNONYMOUS WITH LEARNING

This case explores the thoughts of a vice-principal who needs to open a dialogue with her colleagues to discuss the assessment results at their school. How can she provide support to her team and at the same time demand high performance from them? Is it possible to provide quality education with equity? Can a school help a student who has fallen behind in an effective manner? The situation is an opportunity to discuss a “management circuit” with a focus on learning outcomes.

PART I

Internal Aspects

A Dilemma Regarding Access to Higher Education

CASE

The college had accepted various students with self-declared special needs before, some with a slower than average learning pace, who completed the program, fulfilling its minimum requirements. They had had a blind student and now they had a deaf student and several deaf teachers. That is to say the institution presented itself as one that strives to promote inclusion.

One day Solange, a student in her final year of the Education Studies program, asked to speak with Mario, the program coordinator. He was expecting her to report some kind of problem at the college, so it was a surprise to him when she related that she wanted to talk about Lia, her daughter. Mario hadn't known that Solange had a daughter and at first didn't know what he could do for her. Solange explained that Lia was "special," and that Iara, her college professor, had suggested that mother and daughter attend the same Education Studies program; after all, as everyone knew, the college was an inclusive institution. Solange agreed, considering her experience studying there. Mario then asked, "Solange, tell me a little about Lia."

Solange looked calm and confident as she told Mario about her daughter.

"Well, Lia is a very sweet, shy girl. She's 21 years old. She's been working at her father's office for a year now, where he gives her several jobs to type up on the computer. She has always had difficulty keeping up at school, but she graduated from high school, despite being a girl with special needs."

“Could you give me an example of her special needs?” asked Mario.

“She has difficulty with reading comprehension and composition, and is slow at learning certain things. But in general, she gets along well with everyone, despite being shy.”

“I see! Based on what you’ve told me, I think we need to conduct a special admissions process for Lia,” stated the coordinator, excited at the possibility of carrying out a special admissions process.

Mario told Solange that he’d like to speak with Lia before started the admissions process, as was his usual procedure when a prospective student communicated that they had some kind of “special” needs without specifying them. He wanted to get to know her better in order to understand why her mom considered her “special.” He then asked Solange to have her daughter write him an email scheduling a time that he could meet her. The idea was to put the young woman in a situation in which she could demonstrate independence, as the conversation would be between Mario and the candidate and no longer involve her mother. Mario also instructed Solange to tell Lia to visit the college’s website, look at the syllabus and learn a little about the program. He wanted to see if she would show interest in the program on her own and if she had the autonomy to do so. During the conversation, Mario intended to see if Lia could express her thoughts on the program based on the information available to all prospective students. This, for him, would already be part of the admission process.

A week later, Lia sent Mario an email communicating that she would like to schedule a time to meet with him. He responded promptly and set the day and time. On the day they had agreed upon, Mario asked Karen, his assistant, who also held a degree in Education, to participate in the conversation and relate to him any concerns she may have: “What special needs does Lia really have? Solange says that she doesn’t have a medical report with a diagnosis of Lia’s condition and that she is not undergoing therapy because the family is having financial problems. How can we help her?”

THE CONVERSATION

Lia arrived at the scheduled time. Her appearance was a little unusual and seemed like it could be indicative of a condition. During their conversation, she didn't take the initiative to ask any questions, so Mario began to pose several to her. He found out that she had not visited the institution's website to get to know the program better.

"Do you want to be a teacher?" he asked.

"Yes!" Lia, despite not speaking much, seemed happy and excited about the prospect of going to college.

"Is there anything in particular that you would like to ask about the program?"

"No."

Mario was unable to learn anything about the candidate from these monosyllabic answers and the difficult interaction seemed to him to also be an indication of a condition. He asked her what she did for work and where she lived, wanting to get to know her a little better and understand why the conversation wasn't flowing. But Lia continued with the one-word answers. When talking about her daily routine, several inconsistencies appeared between what she said and reality. She stated, for example, that she worked close to the college, but the neighborhood where her father's business was located was very far away. It was also difficult for her to define what she did at the company, though she could describe certain activities.

Mario then explained to Lia how the admissions process would proceed from there. He related that the admission exam did not require any specific knowledge from high school and only assessed reading comprehension and writing skills, in addition to knowledge about current events. He told her that she would take the exam in one afternoon and that Karen, his assistant, would be there to assist her. He added that she would have additional time to respond to the test questions and that she could ask any questions she might have during the exam to better understand it. His intention with this procedure was to identify any comprehension difficulties the young woman may have during the exam, rather than only consider the results. He would also take Lia's posture

during the process into account, that is, whether she would be able to ask necessary questions and stay focused if anything were unclear to her.

THE EXAM AND THE RESULT

Karen monitored the exam and then went to Mario as soon as Lia finished. She related that Lia had not asked any questions and had been quiet the whole time, appearing very focused, which indicated to the coordinator that she hadn't had any questions.

Two days later the results came in: Lia had failed the exam. Mario immediately began to worry about Solange, who had held such high hopes that her daughter would study in the same program as she.

He then sought out Solange on the college campus and, in a classroom he had reserved, with Karen present, informed her that Lia had failed. He detailed the entire process, from his first conversation with Lia to her behavior during the test. Solange began to cry.

She said that she had listened to people tell her about Lia's unsatisfactory school performance her entire life. She then declared that the college was not as inclusive as it claimed to its students and was therefore being hypocritical. She also found it strange that Lia had not asked any questions during the exam.

Mario suggested that she may not have been able to formulate her questions into words. He then reminded her that Lia had undergone a special admission process, with additional time to finish the exam, along with the opportunity to ask about anything she didn't understand, and that the content, as Solange herself knew, was meant to test basic skill and not specific high school-level knowledge. Lia had shown that writing and reading comprehension were still big challenges for her. This being the case, it might have been more frustrating for her to have been accepted only to find that she was unable to keep up with the program later.

Solange insisted that the institution was wrong to fail her and said, "This is a School of Education, so you should do what you say and accept everyone with special needs."

Mario asked her what she thought was the best way to communicate the results to Lia. He related that, normally, the college would call the prospective student.

Solange said that she would prefer to break the news to Lia herself, as she knew that her daughter would be really frustrated, thanks to the institution. If she had known that Lia would fail the exam, she would never have encouraged her to take it. Because of the results, she would start to regress emotionally, and the family did not have the money to pay for a professional to help her.

Mario waited for Solange to recompose herself and once she had done so, she returned to class.

THE NEXT DAY

A day later Mario had a meeting with the Education Studies program faculty members and presented the case to them, as Solange was a student at the institution and he felt they needed to know about what had happened.

Various perspectives on the situation arose during the discussion with the group.

Mirna, a professor of Inclusive Education, expressed that she felt the student had been wrong to say, “This is a pedagogy school, so you should do what you say and accept everyone who has special needs.” She added that “Inclusive Education” as a discipline was related to Basic Education and that Higher Education needed to be contextualized in a different way.

Fabia, who, in addition to being a professor at the college, was the principal of a school for adults and adolescents who had fallen behind their grade level, expressed the opinion that Solange was right, as Lia could be given more time to finish the program and, even if she did not meet all the requirements to graduate, it was the job market’s place to say if she would be a good professional or not. The young woman could be a teaching assistant, for example.

Mario, in turn, asked Fabia, “But what if it were a medicine program, would she have been accepted?”

“No,” the teacher responded.

“What about law?”

“No.”

“So, why should Education be any different?” Fabia became thoughtful.

Iara, the professor who had suggested to Solange that Lia should take the pedagogy program, was present at the meeting but didn’t speak.

Nilma expressed her position, “This is a vocational program. She wouldn’t be able to keep up with the pace of the program and would fall behind the rest of her class.”

ANOTHER IDEA

Nilma then revealed some information provided her by Solange, her student:

“Lia can’t read or write basic texts, but she likes art. She could take a course in that area.”

Betina added, “It’s her mom who wants her to study Education, not Lia. What’s more, anyone can fail the admission process. Why shouldn’t a prospective student with special needs be able to fail as well?”

Mario was very bothered by the situation, especially after what Fabia had said. Should the admission process be tailored to the limitations of the prospective student? Should he have adapted it more than he had? If approved, would the prospective student have been able to keep up with the program and effectively enter the teaching profession?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How should a special admission process for a higher education program be conducted? Would this compromise the intended outcomes of the program in anyway?
2. What should be the criteria for rejecting a student with special needs during the admission process of a higher education institution?
3. How can one adequate the professional training sought in higher education to the demands of the job market and the special needs of some students? In what ways is the school responsible for this?
4. Is it possible to establish generalized standard conduct for situations such as the one described in this case or should they be dealt with on a case by case basis?
5. Could the legislation regarding inclusive education cover higher education in a more consistent manner with how it covers basic education? If yes, in what ways?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What did the program coordinator do wrong and what did he do right when dealing with the situation?
2. Would relying on the current legislation regarding inclusive education be enough to resolve the situation?
3. Was the admission process specially adapted? Why?
4. What should be considered about the position taken by Solange, a student in the course, regarding Lia failing the admission process?
5. Could the professors from the team have contributed more to resolving the issue?

A Dilemma Regarding Inclusive Higher Education

CASE

Renata had always wanted to be a teacher. When she was a child, she loved to play “school,” and she would give lessons to the neighbor kids or even imaginary students. When she graduated from high school, she had no doubt what was next and sought out a teacher certification in Portuguese Language and Literature. As soon as she graduated, she began to teach at public schools in her city and, having fallen completely in love with the profession, went on to continue her studies and research on teacher education. After ten years of working in basic education, she moved on to higher education, preparing people to work in the profession she considered to be the most beautiful, poetic, and delightful of them all: teaching.

THE CHALLENGE

Renata had faced many challenges over the course of her career, but none quite like this one. Whether she was sitting at her desk at work or at home, she felt intense frustration as she planned lessons for her “Portuguese Syntax” class in the language and literature program. She worked at a small teacher training college in the city of São Paulo that prided itself for promoting diversity and equality in education. Its motto was “No student left behind,” which meant that everyone had the right to learn. Renata used to feel very happy teaching there, helping to mold new teachers. However, ever since she started teaching the syntax class that André was in, the satisfaction she derived from her work began to suffer some serious blows.

The school's first blind student, André, dreamed of becoming a Portuguese professor and was in his third semester of the program. Having already studied Library Science, this would be his second degree. He and Renata met for the first time that semester in the "Portuguese Syntax" class.

The professor loved to teach syntax. It was very exciting for her to lead students in visualizing the internal structures of phrases and help them understand the hierarchical relationships between the different little linguistic pieces. One of the things that every language and literature student learns, for example, is the sentence diagram, a visual representation of how the elements of a phrase relate to one another. It was like a Matryoshka doll, those wooden figures from Russia within which exist various similar, smaller dolls. The illustration of the syntactic structure of Portuguese looked like something out of organic chemistry, a schematic with lines and arrows simulating branches.

It was exactly this visual aspect, which had been so exciting to Renata before, that now led her to feel so frustrated both in her office and at home: how could she make André, her only blind student, understand the beauty of the diagram? After all, she could only really think about syntax in visual terms.

Because she believed in the school's motto ("No student left behind"), the professor had always believed that it was possible to guarantee every student the conditions they needed to reach their full potential. Now, she felt ashamed for asking herself if André would be able to learn everything his classmates learned.

ATTEMPTED SOLUTION

Renata sought a resolution to her dilemma in every way she imagined possible. First, she contacted the publishers of the basic textbooks used in her class to find out if they had Braille or raised print editions of their materials. The response was always the same: they didn't have any books of that kind; the best they could do would be to provide the electronic versions of the materials so that the text could be converted into audio by a computer program. However, such software would be useless for the type of

content she was teaching, as none of them could, in a sequential verbal language, translate what a diagram represented. The professor was indignant: why hadn't anyone, up to that point, concerned themselves with the accessibility of materials on syntax for the visually impaired? At the same time, she was frustrated that this had been the first time she had worried about it and began to imagine all the challenges that André had had to face during his 40 years of life to conclude his studies and even just to live in society in a dignified manner.

Renata was determined and continued to consider possible alternatives. Having her materials printed in Braille or raised text by a printing company wasn't viable. In addition to being expensive (the institution didn't have the resources to cover the costs, above all because the program was a small one and not financially sustainable), such an undertaking would be a long process, and by the time it was finished, André would probably have graduated already.

Another aspect that bothered Renata a great deal was that many of the exercises in her materials were carried out through trial and error, requiring the use of a pencil and eraser. Renata didn't think it was fair to have André write the answers in Braille only to have to do everything all over again because of one mistake, as correcting errors in Braille was not as simple as just erasing items from a page.

Therefore, she would sit next to her student to verbalize the exercises and assist him in finding the answers, which he could give orally. André would present his ideas for completing the exercises to Renata, who would, in turn, guide him in making corrections when needed. She tried this for two lessons and saw him make a great deal of progress. However, the other students in the class, feeling neglected, began to demand her attention - after all, they were her students too! Finally, the teacher concluded that she couldn't give André private lessons.

MORE COMPLICATIONS

There was another factor that complicated the situation: André's behavior. Though he had never been diagnosed by a professional,

the faculty suspected that he had autism to some degree, as he demonstrated a great deal of difficulty socializing, was very systematic about rules and agreements, hardly ever smiled or interacted with his classmates, and only spoke up in class when called upon.

Over the semesters, the other students in his class had distanced themselves from André, as they had tried to “help him” by describing images and situations, but he had proved not to be very pleasant company. Renata’s classroom was organized with the desks arranged in groups and, due to being blind and very systematic, André always sat in the same place. Over the previous few months, his classmates continued to do everything they could to avoid sitting next to him.

Renata believed inclusive education was possible and wanted her students, future teachers, to share this belief. It was for exactly this reason that she tried so hard to be a good role model for them. However, the more the class went on, the more she felt like a failure when it came to André. As he was the first blind student at the institution, no one really knew how to work with him. Renata was exhausted and still hadn’t figured out how to help André learn certain parts of the lessons. She decided that her lesson planning could wait for a while and chose to take a shower. For a few minutes, she would try to escape the frustration she felt. Maybe her suffering would be carried down the drain with the water.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Does the nature of some contents make learning impossible for certain students?
2. What are the responsibilities of each person involved in the education process when it comes to guaranteeing that students with disabilities have the opportunity to learn?
3. In your opinion, what percentage of class time could be dedicated to personalized, one-on-one instruction, considering that this same amount of time must also address the needs of other students in the class?
4. Are there any subjects or skills that should not be considered when taking into account certain disabilities?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In cases such as this one, how can one engage the teachers and the institution in finding a solution?
2. How could the professor have personalized her instruction in a way that it would also meet the needs of the other students?
3. Who could help the professor solve her dilemma?
4. What expectations could the professor reasonably have with regards to André's engagement, considering that he is an adult student?
5. Why does the dilemma presented in this case seem to be the professor's and not the institution's problem?

Helping Students Adapt to a Full-Time School

CASE

It was September of 2015. Paloma was in her office feeling uneasy as she looked at a document she needed to sign, repeatedly tapping her pen against the desk. She asked herself deep down if calling a meeting of the school board would be the best solution to the conflict that had taken root in her school.

Paloma was 52 years old and held degrees in both pedagogy and language and literature. She was short, skinny, and had black hair that fell to her shoulders. A bit vain, she was always elegantly dressed, wore high heels, and was noticed wherever she went. Due to her great dedication to teaching, she had been promoted to principal of a state school in a small town and, after having occupied the position for 16 years, she managed to transfer to a larger city in 2011, where she worked at a full-time public school with 350 students and taught 2nd through 5th-grade.

Paloma had a great deal of autonomy and authority at her job and had never had to face any great difficulties during her 20 years as a principal. Lately, however, she had been very worried, as she was being pressed on all sides and knew she would have to make an urgent decision.

Her school was in very high demand as it was a full-time school where students spent nine hours a day and offered additional learning opportunities with afterschool programs. It had been one of the first institutions in the city to implement the Full-Time School program, a proposal from the state government. Students attended the school from 7:00 AM to 4:00 PM and took classes in the standard subjects, as well as art, physical education,

and in the afternoon attended the after-school classes, which covered subjects such as dance, information technology, foreign languages, health and quality of life, sports, and reading. Furthermore, the school offered three meals a day and had a very well-planned recreational area with tabletop games, video games, ping-pong, and books, which occupied the children and kept them from just running around during their free time. Many families showed interest in enrolling their children there; despite being in an excellent neighborhood considered to be predominantly upper-middle-class, most of its students, 7 to 11-year-old children, didn't live in the surrounding area, a factor that affected the relationships between the students' families and the school. 75% of the students enrolled lived in distant neighborhoods characterized as underprivileged and commuted to and from school in school vans or private vehicles.

In August 2015, after winter¹ break, the children were very warmly welcomed by the teachers and principal. The team explained the disciplinary rules and regulations of the school, as well as the internal rules and agreements. Paloma always tried to resolve small problems through dialogue with the students, making them feel as welcome and cared for as possible, and had developed several projects with her faculty and staff geared toward students who presented inappropriate behavior that involved treating them with much love and care. Her troubles began two weeks before, on the Monday when all the students returned to class. She was in her always-organized office, carrying out her daily tasks, when Carla, the school secretary, interrupted her to tell her something important.

A REQUEST

“Mrs. Paloma, a social worker from the city’s Child Protection Services is here to speak with you. May I show him in?”

1. Translator’s Note: Brazil, being in the southern hemisphere, has the opposite season to the northern hemisphere.

Paloma was curious and, at the same time, worried: in her four years as principal of that school, she had never received a visit from the Child Protection Services. She asked Carla to show him to her office.

When she saw the social worker, her curiosity grew, as he was accompanied by a young boy. She greeted them both with a “Good morning.”

She heard in reply, “Good morning, Mrs. Paloma. My name is Roberto and I’ve come with a request from the superintendent for Pedro Henrique to be enrolled here at your school. He’s 9 years old and needs an opening in one of the 4th-grade classes.”

“Why is he being sent here and where did he come from?” asked the principal, showing great interest.

Roberto answered, “Pedro Henrique needs to attend a full-time school because his mother, who has just undergone rehabilitation for alcoholism, is about to start a new job and doesn’t have anyone who can take care of him while she works. Pedro lived with his grandmother while his mother was in treatment, but she is very elderly and no longer able to care for the boy.”

Paloma was moved by the little boy’s story and, even though she didn’t have an opening in any of the classes, agreed to enroll him at the school, as it had been the request of the superintendent. She was confident that Pedro Henrique would feel at home at the school and, just like most of the other students, would quickly adapt to the rules of his new learning environment. She had no idea of the chaos that would soon find a home at her school.

On the following day, a Tuesday, around six-thirty in the morning, Rita, the hall monitor, observed the coming and going of the vans and other vehicles in the parking lot. The children all walked over to the school with backpacks on their backs and lunchboxes in hand and waved to her as she welcomed them and directed them to the courtyard. Suddenly she saw an unknown woman walk in her direction, hand in hand with a young boy, both silent.

As she approached the hall monitor, the woman smiled, revealing a set of poorly-cared-for teeth, and said, “Good morning. My name is Patricia, Pedro Henrique’s mom. He’s going to start class today. Can you tell me what classroom he’s in?”

Rita, attentive, said hi to the boy, who returned the greeting with no hint of enthusiasm. "Very well, Patricia. You may leave him with me, and I'll take him to his classroom."

The first activities of the day went as usual. Soon after recess, however, Eduarda, one of the teachers, appeared in the principal's office saying she needed to speak with Paloma about the new student, Pedro Henrique. The principal wasn't surprised, thinking Eduarda was there to talk about Pedro's sound and spelling correspondence proficiency, as was routine. However, that's not exactly what happened.

The teacher took a deep breath, and began, "Paloma, it's been exactly three hours since Pedro Henrique came to our school and he's already started two conflicts. He won't sit still or leave the other students alone, disrupting the classroom environment. On top of that, several students saw him 'steal' two younger students' snacks during recess. This is not going to work out well in my class."

Paloma was unable to react, and finding it hard to believe that all that had occurred in only three hours, asked, "Eduarda, did Pedro refuse to participate in the activities?"

"No, he did everything, in his own time. But he wouldn't stay still."

The principal suggested that she wait until the end of the day to see how he behaved in the afternoon, during the afterschool programs. The teacher agreed, waved goodbye, and walked back up the access ramp to her classroom.

Paloma then decided to contact Pedro's previous school to find out about his behavior there; it had slipped her mind to talk to the city social worker about it. She finished her breakfast, already cold, and asked the secretary, "Carla, could you get the referral slip from the social worker, find the phone number of Pedro Henrique's previous school, and bring them to me, please?"

In a few minutes, the secretary returned to the principal's office with the number written on a piece of paper.

MORE INFORMATION

Paloma called Pedro Henrique's old school with her heart racing. Someone picked up after several rings. The principal communicated that she needed information about a former 4th-grade student who had been transferred to her school. The call was then passed on to the school's vice-principal, Rosa.

"Hello, how may I help you?" she asked.

"Pedro Henrique, a former student of yours, was transferred to our school and I'd like to know about his behavior during his time with you."

The vice-principal seemed to remember the boy immediately, as she responded right away, "Pedro Henrique was a student with average grades, but his family problems and difficult life made him a very needy boy who likes to do things to draw attention. He left our school because he could no longer be at a part-time only school, but there were many complaints about his behavior."

Paloma didn't understand what she meant by "difficult life" and "do things to draw attention," and asked her to explain more.

"Pedro's mom would leave him home alone when she went out drinking. She loved him, but she was crazy about alcohol. So, she would often go out and leave him all by himself. While she was gone, he'd be out on the streets getting into trouble, and the neighbors would complain.

"One day, his mother wanted to go out and, knowing that it would be dangerous to leave him at home without any adult supervision, since he was always fussing around, she chained him to the bed. No one knows how long he was there before the neighbors heard his cries for help and called the police.

"Pedro was then sent to Child Protective Services. His mother was in danger of losing custody over him, and he moved in with his grandmother. After being admitted to a rehabilitation center for more or less two months, she reintegrated herself into society, and the boy had a chance to go back to living with her. His grandmother said that she had already helped a lot and it was now the mother's turn to take responsibility for him."

Paloma was shocked.

Rosa continued, “In addition to all that, some suspect that Pedro may have ADHD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The school and his mother know about his issues, and all the signs point to the condition, but he’s never been diagnosed by a doctor. His mother has never taken him to a specialist that could evaluate him.”

With no further questions, Paloma thanked Rosa for her time and said goodbye. When she hung up the phone, she decided not to tell anyone else about Pedro Henrique’s life story for the time being. She wanted to wait several days to see how his behavior played out. After all, he was at a new school and it would take him a while to adapt.

After that, the rest of her day went on uneventfully. The bell rang, and Paloma, sitting in her office, soon heard the clamor of children’s voices rise as they descended the access ramp to leave school. The principal felt relieved, as no other teacher or student had appeared to complain about Pedro Henrique’s behavior for the rest of the day. So, she put her desk in order and went home.

THE NEXT DAY

On the morning of the next day, after second period, Paloma heard a loud scream, followed by tears. She quickly got up and raced from her office to a door that opened to the courtyard. She looked in both directions and found the location of the tumult: the sports court. At that moment she saw desperate children running here and there, some of them leaving the playground. The principal sped up and headed in the direction of the physical education teacher, Ana, who was helping Julia, one of the best students at the school. Screaming and crying nonstop, the girl had a pulled elbow and scraped knees, which were bleeding. Paloma called an ambulance and Julia’s parents, whose daughter was soon on the way to the hospital.

The rest of the students were sent to their classrooms, and the physical education teacher, looking very irritated, left with the principal to explain what had happened.

As soon as they entered Paloma's office, Ana exclaimed, "You need to do something about Pedro Henrique! He's impulsive, which is what led to Julia getting hurt! That boy shouldn't be at our school!"

The principal asked her to take a breath and sit down, offered her a glass of water, and asked her to recount everything from the beginning.

Ana began: "I went to the classroom, took attendance, like always, and the children told me there was a new student. That's when I saw Pedro. Everything was fine up to that point. While I explained on the board the activity we would be doing, I could see that he wasn't paying attention; he was just sitting there at his desk playing airplane with his eraser. When I asked if anyone had any questions about the game, he also didn't show any interest in participating.

"We went to the sports court and started the game. Not even two minutes went by and he pushed Julia against the wall. She slammed against it backward and then fell on top of her arm. I don't know why he did that, but we've got a big problem now."

The principal imagined herself in front of the girl's parents the next day. In addition to Julia being one of the best students at the school, her parents were also very involved. This could not have happened. Paloma asked the hall monitor to bring Pedro Henrique to her office immediately.

He arrived several minutes later and sat next to the physical education teacher.

"Pedro, what happened?" asked Paloma.

Without showing any sign of feeling or regret, the boy responded, "I was playing with Julia, just like the teacher asked. She ran past me and I went to catch her, so I tagged her. That's all that happened. I don't know why she fell."

Ana, furious, exclaimed, "That's a lie! You're lying! And, on top of lying, he's mischievous! Didn't you pay attention to the rules of the game when I explained them? The first one was: 'Don't push your friend.'"

"I didn't push her," Pedro murmured.

The teacher then replied, irritated, "Oh really? So, she fell all by herself, then?"

Pedro shrugged, showing that he wasn't very interested in the conversation.

Paloma asked the hall monitor to bring another student to the office. Sofia then walked into the office and the principal greeted her saying, "Good morning. Please, sit down."

Eyes wide, the girl sat in the chair next to Pedro.

"Sofia, you were playing with the children in the physical education class. Did you see Julia fall?"

"Julia was on my team," the student began, playing with a lock of her hair. "She ran to the other side and, when Pedro saw that she was going to make it, he pushed her really hard against the wall. Pedro was on the other team, principal. He did it on purpose. I saw it."

Paloma looked at Pedro, who looked away. She needed time to evaluate facts and asked the three to return to the classroom.

The principal then went deep into thought. Pedro was inattentive, restless and impulsive. His mother was an active alcoholic during her pregnancy with him and that could have affected his brain development. Paloma felt the boy was a student that needed special attention, as he was suspected of having ADHD, despite never having been diagnosed by a doctor. She realized with frustration that her faculty and staff were unprepared to deal with a child with such issues and, for an instant, felt guilty about not knowing what to do. The school, being a full-time institution, didn't accept children with disabilities, even though it had been physically adapted for such.

FOLLOW-UP

Paloma, who was already worried about the situation involving Pedro Henrique and the complaints of several teachers, felt surprised when, on the same day, the school secretary came into her office and said that Julia's parents would like to speak with her. The principal asked her to show them in. They greeted her with polite smiles on their faces, and sat down.

The mother spoke first, saying, "Paloma, we really like this school, and our daughter loves studying here, but we would like

to transfer her. Julia can't continue at a school that accepts aggressive children. We just left the hospital: she has a fracture and dislocated radial and ulnar bones. Julia is an excellent student and daughter and has never had a problem with other children before. We must put her safety first. She told us that that boy constantly picks on everyone and you don't even do anything to discipline him."

After listening attentively, the principal told her that she was thinking about sending the student to a psychiatrist to have him undergo treatment while he attends the school, as he was suspected of having ADHD. She explained the disorder to the parents, but they showed no sign of interest. They insisted that their daughter should be transferred, as they were certain that another school would be better for her.

Feeling crushed, the principal thought to herself, *What if other parents also want to transfer their children? What will I do?*

She decided to speak with Pedro's mother and requested that the hall monitor ask her to come to the principal's office when she came to pick up her son.

When Patricia arrived at the school, she was directed to the principal's office. Once there, Paloma greeted her and asked her to sit. Paloma explained to her what had happened and asked her opinion on the matter. The principal was astonished when the mother began to cry. She didn't know if she should wait, give her a hug, or offer her a glass of water to help her calm down. Finally, she said, "I'll give you a moment. When you're ready to talk, go ahead."

Patricia wiped away the tears with her shirtsleeves and began to unload, "Paloma, I can't lose my son again. Please don't report him. Child Protective Services is watching me. Pedro is just different; he doesn't do those things out of malice. They always called me to the other school because he didn't pay attention and 'lived in his own little world,' as the teachers would say. But I don't know what to do. I've already had him change schools two times because of the complaints and I don't have the money to have him tested. He needs help and I depend on you to be able to work. Please don't transfer my son to another school..."

“Don’t worry,” said the principal. “This situation will be resolved fairly.”

When Patricia left, Paloma felt like a liar, as she had no idea how to resolve the issue fairly.

Pedro Henrique was not supposed to come to school the following day, as he had been suspended for a day. However, bright and early, he was there. Paloma knew that his mother worked all day and didn’t have anyone to watch him.

That afternoon the faculty had their weekly group work meeting, during which the teachers usually discussed a proposal from the vice-principal. Paloma didn’t usually participate in these meetings, but that day she was notified that the teachers wanted her to attend.

The meeting began at five o’clock sharp.

Ana, the physical education teacher, began, “Paloma, we’re not here today to talk about pedagogical issues, but rather to talk about Pedro Henrique. On behalf of all the teachers here, I want to express to you that the situation has us very worried. It’s been two days since he began to attend our school and his behavior has been intolerable. He’s not fit to study at this school. He can barely stay seated for five minutes; let alone remain the entire day at school.”

The IT professor, Ronaldo, a tall, 38-year-old man with a deep voice and years of experience in education, chimed in, “If Pedro Henrique stays, we’ll lose a lot of good students. We know that Julia’s parents asked to have her transferred, and I’m sure other parents will follow. We can’t let the good students leave because of one child who doesn’t want anything to do with us.”

Paloma then explained to them the student’s history, from the problems with his mother to the fact that he may have ADHD. Some teachers listened attentively, while others whispered among themselves.

The principal concluded, “Pedro Henrique is a child who has had a difficult life and, if he really does have ADHD, deserves to be included in this school. We can provide him with special attention. Put yourselves in his mother’s position and think about how difficult this must be for her. She wants to have her son around, she wants to be better, and she needs our help while she

works. Even if the boy is not suited for a full-time school, we can help him.”

This last statement was met with more complaints. Most of the teachers claimed Pedro Henrique would undermine the other students’ ability to learn, that the boy was too aggressive and would cause more problems, and that the good students would leave the school, as their parents wouldn’t accept the situation.

Martha, in a calm voice, took the floor, “I also think the student suffers from some kind of disorder. He didn’t seem disinterested to me, because he completed all the tasks I gave him. However, he does have a short attention span, and we need to know how to deal with him to avoid him getting frustrated. Maybe he can undergo some kind of treatment, take medication, while he continues at the school. If he were my son, I would be very happy to know that the school tried to help him instead of excluding him...”

Roberto became indignant and interrupted her, “Of course, the school must be inclusive, but to what extent should we be expected to tolerate this? Is it fair to lose other students in the name of being inclusive with one? If that’s the case, it will only be a matter of time before our school ends up in the headlines. What’s more, we don’t have a plan for a hyperactive child to stay here for nine hours. I heard the boy doesn’t even eat lunch, because he says he doesn’t like it. How is he going to continue at our school?”

Paloma took a deep breath and suggested, “How about we take a little more time to evaluate the situation? Let’s observe Pedro Henrique and see if his case really is beyond what we can handle. Once we have the answers, we’ll take the appropriate measures, just like we’ve always done.”

The teachers didn’t seem very satisfied with the proposal but agreed. All the principal wanted was for the school to embrace the student and for the boy to be able to adapt to the rules and routine there. However, the school did not have the resources to deal with the situation properly. It didn’t have any specially-trained teachers or specially adapted classrooms, let alone a psychiatrist to talk to that type of student. She needed to find a solution, but how?

The next day, Paloma was informed by the secretary of Julia’s transfer. She felt very upset about losing such an exemplary

student and parents that were so participative in the democratic management of the school. As time passed, the complaints continued. Over a period of two months, the principal gave Pedro Henrique seven warnings and two suspensions, none of which were complied with, as he couldn't be left home alone. Everyone complained: students, teachers, staff members, and other children. Finally, the situation reached a breaking point. In every discussion that arose at the school, Pedro Henrique's name was heard.

In September, the teachers requested the principal's presence at the first group work meeting to talk about the situation. When she entered the room, Paloma was met by an uncharacteristic silence from the group.

"Good afternoon, teachers," she greeted everyone. "We all did as agreed and I would like to hear your impressions of Pedro Henrique during this period. Who would like to start?"

The English teacher, Fabiana, began, "It was tough. He didn't stop for even a second during my classes. One day, he almost stabbed one of his classmates in the hand with a pencil; he said he was just playing around."

Marina, a 2nd-grade teacher, added, "I'm not one of Pedro's teachers, but the children have been complaining that, during recess, the boy threatens to steal their snacks and they end up giving them to him. Several parents have asked me who this student is that their kids talk about so much at home."

Eduarda, who was Pedro Henrique's teacher, and therefore spent more time with him, said, "He completes all his tasks, but it's difficult. He takes longer than the other students and he distracts them the whole time. I tried giving him different tasks, which isn't even necessary, as he is able to do the regular ones. The problem is that Pedro doesn't pay attention and messes around the whole time. He didn't give us a single day of peace. I always have to defuse the clashes that arise between him and the other students, because he gets frustrated and acts impulsively and aggressively. His classmates are afraid of him."

Martha chimed in, "I tried to give him a chance. I put his desk next to mine and he carried out his tasks, but it was a lot of work, I'm not going to lie. I think that we teachers need to give him spe-

cial attention and use different strategies with him, which, without a doubt, is difficult to do in a class of 30 students like his, and that was the best I could do. If Pedro went to a part-time school, it would be easier for him since he has a hard time focusing.”

When no one else spoke up, Paloma then asked, “So, what is your suggestion?”

Denise, who has taught art at the school since it became full-time, responded on behalf of the group, “Madam Principal, we’ve decided that it would be best to call a meeting of the school board and ask them to vote on whether the student should be allowed to stay or required to transfer. Since Julia was transferred, the conflicts he’s caused, the theft of snacks and school supplies from his classmates, the threats, and all the other smaller problems have brought us to the conclusion that Pedro Henrique is not suited to study at a full-time school. He’s putting the reputation of this school at risk and it’s not fair to have all the work that has been put into an initiative that has progressed so well for so many years go down the drain because of one student. He doesn’t even eat the meals here, just snacks that he brings. How can he attend a full-time school if he doesn’t follow the rules and regulations? The children are always asking why he doesn’t eat lunch and can do whatever he wants without any consequences.”

Bringing the meeting to a close, Paloma said that she would take the teachers’ suggestion into consideration.

When she returned home, she thought about the disciplinary standards and regulations of the school, which should be followed by everyone, the reputation of the school, Pedro Henrique’s social problems, and ADHD, a condition he may have. The principal and all the teachers had developed a democratic form of management at the school and had always maintained a strong dialogue with the students’ families. She knew that the parents would start to take action, as complaints weren’t resolving anything.

Paloma believed that every child had potential. However, this humanist side of her could end up hurting her school, which was so well renowned and valued. She asked herself, *Is our full-time school inclusive or not? We have to make education accessible, but is it fair to keep a student that causes problems for everyone else at the*

school? Are only certain students suited to a full-time school schedule like the teachers are saying?

Paloma needed to decide whether to sign the document calling the meeting of the school board or not, a decision that was far from easy. She wanted to help not only the teachers, but also the student and his mother. How should she proceed in such a situation?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Should a full-time school offer accessible education and accept any and all students?
2. Are only certain types of students suited to full-time schooling?
3. What is the real function of a full-time school?
4. What preparation do teachers receive to deal with the wide range of problems that can arise at a school? Is this preparation enough?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Up to what point is fighting to keep a poorly-behaved student at a school justified?
2. What disciplinary measures should have the principal taken in this case?
3. What is the best way to deal with the faculty and the parents in a similar situation?
4. Should full-time schools have a specially-trained faculty?
5. Was calling a meeting of the school board to vote on whether the student should be allowed to stay or be forced to transfer the best option for resolving the situation?

Bullying in the Classroom and the Teacher's Response

CASE

It was a large school located in the downtown area of a large city in Southern Brazil which provided education from elementary through high school. The institution had 3,500 students regularly enrolled between the morning, afternoon and nighttime class shifts. It stood out from the rest for being a “model” institution. It had a playground and multi-sport gym, an auditorium that sat 200 and had a stage, runway, and sound and lighting equipment, a science lab with safety equipment and tools for experiments, and an IT lab in an air-conditioned room equipped with an interactive projector and 30 modern personal computers connected to the internet. The school also met accessibility standards.

It was also known for attracting outstanding professionals in the fields of education, culture, and politics to its faculty, for having well-educated and trained teachers (some also taught at private schools) and, above all, for the high-performance of its students. It was a democratically-managed public school that provided a welcoming environment to children and adolescents from various neighborhoods, but reserved 50% of its vacancies for students that lived in the surrounding area. Because it was a very large and diverse school, keeping the institution organized was a constant challenge for the administration.

That year the Department of Education had carried out an intervention at the school and appointed Ana and her colleague Cleide as interim principals.

Ana, who was married and the mother of a 10-year-old boy, was in a new phase of her life. She had lived in the extreme North

of Brazil since she was born. However, because her husband was transferred for work, she had moved to the South in the middle of winter—one of the most intense in the last decade—and had a bit of a shock when experiencing the difference in temperature between the two climates. But even more than that, she had experienced culture shock as she adapted to her new city. Nonetheless, Ana was ready to overcome it all in order to provide a better life for her family.

So, she had resigned from her position at her previous school to accompany her husband in what was a new phase in their life together. In the new city, she looked for a job in education and accepted the challenge of the intervention, something she had never experienced before and would never forget.

That Saturday morning in June, in the middle of winter, Ana was getting ready for a school board meeting. She knew that it wasn't going to be easy. The situation, an unprecedented one, involved teachers and students from one of the morning 5th-grade classes: a mother had filed a complaint.

AN UNEXPECTED VISIT

One week earlier, soon after having arrived at school, a desperate young woman burst into Ana's office. She claimed that Elza, her son Pedro's teacher, had been humiliating him in the classroom, exposing him to such ridicule that he no longer wanted to come to school.

"Are you the new principal? The one put here as part of the intervention to bring order to this school? Help me, please, because the previous principal didn't do anything and my son is being bullied by his teacher Elza."

Ana, who was on the phone, saw how upset the mother was. She gestured for her to sit. When she hung up, she said to the waiting mother, "Please have some water," handed her a cup and continued, "Good afternoon! Please tell me your name and what's going on."

"My name is Sonia. My son Pedro is in one of the 5th-grade morning classes that Elza teaches, and I've come to make a complaint. The teacher exposed my son to ridicule in front of the whole

class for three consecutive days, humiliating him to the point that he no longer wants to come to school.”

“But what happened, exactly?”

“My son is very shy. One day, during class, he raised his hand and asked if he could go to the toilet. The teacher ignored him. He raised his hand again and she responded by yelling at him. The entire class laughed.

“Pedro kept quiet after that, but his classmates didn’t. Some of them started saying, ‘What’s that smell, teacher? Do you think it’s Pedro?’ Before she could say anything, the bell rang and everyone rushed out of the classroom, except for Pedro, who stayed seated, waiting for the classroom to empty before he left.

“This happened for two more days. Pedro would raise his hand, the teacher would ignore him, he’d ask again, she’d yell at him, the class would laugh, and he’d keep quiet. Then the kids would start murmuring about a bad smell. The situation became absolutely intolerable from what my son tells me.”

Sonia sighed and, with tears in her eyes, continued, “Then the vice-principal called my work and said that Pedro was disturbing his class because he was being rebellious and doing things that made his classmates and teacher uncomfortable. I was surprised and asked what was happening, since Pedro hadn’t said anything to me about it. I work all day and his father doesn’t live with us because we’re separated, so I have to be both his mother and father.

“But a mother knows. During those days, after coming home from work, I noticed that something was really bothering him; he wouldn’t eat or go to class, saying he had a stomach ache. After that phone call, I put two and two together and realized the humiliation my son was going through.”

The mother could not hold back her tears, and in a choked-up voice went on to say, “My son is a good boy. He’s polite, he studies hard, and he’s introverted, which is very hard for him. I talked to him soon after getting that phone call. Because of how serious the situation was, I asked my boss to leave work early. When Pedro saw me come home early, he began to cry. I sat in front of him and asked him what was happening. He began to stutter. I helped him calm down and asked him to tell me everything.

“Then he told me, ‘Mommy, remember when I told you last week that I had a stomach ache and you gave me some tea and I went to school? Well... I felt better, but then during recess, I had a snack and started feeling bad again. Then, when class was almost over, my stomach started to hurt again and I raised my hand and asked Mrs. Elza if I could go to the toilet. She wouldn’t answer. So, I raised my hand again and she yelled at me, saying that I was interrupting the class and everyone started to tease me. I put down my hand and tried to hold it until I couldn’t anymore and messed my pants. Then they started to say that the classroom was stinking. Since I sit in the back, only some of the kids could smell it. I waited for everyone to leave before I got up to leave. But first I tied my coat around my waist so no one could see what happened.”

Sonia paused for a moment.

“Mrs. Ana,” she began again, “we live very close by, on the other side of the square. Pedro had always come and gone by himself. The security guard helps him cross the street. I didn’t even think about it at first. He always takes his bath and does all his chores before I come home. Some days I come home to see him watching television, others, he’s already in bed, trying to sleep. This situation happened for three days in a row and the teacher didn’t do anything to help my son. She preferred to listen to the other students, snub Pedro and be rude. And, even worst, she gave him the nickname ‘Stinky.’ That is more than a mother can take. My son only wanted permission to go to the bathroom. He’s developed a panic syndrome. He starts to cry if I raise my voice and he doesn’t want to leave the house alone, not even to go to the bakery. I took him to a doctor; he asked some questions, examined Pedro, and didn’t diagnose anything ‘other than that.’

“I demand that the teacher and his classmates apologize.”

Ana listened to the mother’s story in shock. She didn’t know what to do at first and couldn’t believe that a teacher would act that way.

She stood up, got a glass of water, took a deep breath, and said, “Sonia, is it?” She didn’t wait for her to respond. Ana assured her that she would bring the matter before the school board to find the best way to resolve the situation without it hurting Pedro’s

progress during the school year, and said she would speak with Elza to hear her version, as she needed to be fair to both sides. She asked Sonia to wait. Even though the semester was almost at an end, there was time to organize the meeting, and Pedro wouldn't miss finals.

A little calmer, Sonia agreed. Now standing, she told Ana that she trusted her, but this problem couldn't go unnoticed and that the teacher needed to be punished. If the teacher wasn't let go, she would go to the Education Department and report her to the Student's Rights division and go to the local press. She then said goodbye and left.

CONSULTING WITH THE CO-PRINCIPAL

Ana asked to speak with Cleide, the co-principal. She told her what had happened and said that she was going to call a special meeting of the school board.

Cleide questioned her decision, "Are you sure this meeting is necessary, Ana? We just came to this school in an unusual situation, and we don't know the faculty or this mother very well. Don't you think this could put Elza and us in a bad position?"

Ana, surprised, responded, "What do you mean bad position, Cleide? We must do something about this. After all, we accepted this challenge together and we are responsible for everything that happens here. We're going to investigate this complaint, because, according to the mother, what we have is a case of bullying. We need to find out if what she told me, in a state of panic, is true and, if it is, who began to discriminate against this child. We need to proceed with caution and listen to all sides, because, even if the teacher acted like she said and it doesn't constitute bullying, it's a very serious accusation and what happened could have some very serious consequences for the boy. I really hope that the mom is wrong. But to find out, we need to listen to both sides and work with the school board. Yes, we need to be cautious, but we will ascertain the situation in an appropriate manner, according to the rules and regulations of the school, and do what needs to be done."

THE TEACHER'S VERSION

The administrator called Mrs. Elza to her office and related to her what had happened. The teacher confirmed the story, but attempted to justify her actions and put the blame on Pedro. Ana saw then that the situation was more delicate than she had previously realized and called Delfina, the vice-principal, to her office, who confirmed Elza's side of the story, also laying the blame on the boy.

Thus, it became clear to the administrator that, considering the contradicting information, she would need to call a school board meeting to clear up the situation. Against her decision, Elza and Delfina thought that Ana should suspend Pedro for all the trouble that his actions in class had caused everyone. Cleide still seemed uncomfortable with the situation.

The administrator, however, did not back down. She dismissed the teacher and vice-principal, prepared the memo calling for the meeting herself, in accordance with the statutes of the institution, signed it and passed it to Cleide, who, hesitantly, signed it as well. They posted the memo on the message board on the established date and gave due notice to all the members of the school board. Ana needed to make sure that the meeting was legitimate and had sufficient participation from the board members in deliberating the matter democratically. She knew she would have to speak with Elza again, but now it would be in that context. It was a difficult situation, because, having been there for only a week, she didn't know the employees of the school very well and had to take a firm stance in the face of any challenge.

During the days leading up to the meeting, Ana read all the literature she could find on bullying, but couldn't settle on any one definition. Now, walking to the school to attend the meeting, she thought to herself, *How could a teacher who worked to become an educator, who knows her students' rights and responsibilities better than they do, and who has a big influence on her impressionable students turn an entire class against one defenseless student and, on top of that, expose him to such ridicule in front of his classmates, leading them to engage in bad behavior and, worse, be so conniving about it? If that's not bullying, then what is? Psychological abuse? Discrimination? Aren't those all the same thing?* The principal, however, didn't want to rush

to conclusions or take sides. She needed to clarify and understand the situation and see what the board members would say.

THE SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

Absorbed in her thoughts, Ana arrived at the school and made her way to the meeting room on the first floor. She was a bit nervous, but aware of her duty as a principal. She didn't want to take a position before listening to what the board members and teacher had to say. She didn't know what direction that awkward situation would take.

Soon Cleide appeared. She was visibly uncomfortable because, on the one hand, she didn't agree with Ana's position on the matter, but on the other, she thought Ana might be right.

The board members arrived one by one: Messias, the math professor, who represented the teachers; Delfina, the vice-principal, representing the school team; Helena the hall monitor, from the technical/administrative team; João, representing the support staff; Mrs. Lucimar, representing the parents/guardians; and Roberto, a third-year high school student, who represented the students. Finally, Elza also appeared. There was an air of uneasiness in the room, with everyone murmuring to one another. As soon as everyone was seated, Ana greeted them with a "Good morning!"

Everyone responded, "Good morning!"

Ana then began the meeting, "This is the second time we've met in less than a month. The last meeting was about our arrival to the school as part of the intervention, which everyone here supported. Today we're here to discuss another matter. Upon accepting this challenge, I know that it wouldn't be easy taking over the administration of an institution of this size. Now we're faced with an unusual situation that needs to be resolved, as it happened in the school environment. We're going to talk about a complaint and then decide how to act on it.

After pausing for a moment, she continued, "Among all the challenges that fall within the scope of the intervention, the biggest, in my view, is mediating interpersonal conflicts, as we are all human and need to act as such: in a humane and compassionate

manner. We need to listen, reflect, gather information and then decide. That's why Cleide and I have called this meeting. We intend to be fair and consistent with both parties."

Ana then related the conversation she had had with Sonia, Pedro's mother. Elza, his teacher, had difficulty staying still in her seat and tried to interrupt the principal, who asked to let her finish before giving her the floor. And so, she did. Continuing, she related her previous conversation with Cleide, Elza and Delfina and the decision to call the school board meeting because of the contradictory information in the stories. She then gave the floor to Elza.

The teacher, agitated, began in a loud and slightly rude tone of voice, "Ana you got here just a little over a week ago, you don't know anyone, and right away you listen to an out-of-control mother who lies and accuses me of bullying? That boy of hers is very mischievous and is always disturbing the class. Now that he's been given the nickname 'Stinky,' he's embarrassed and trying to pit his mother and the school against me?"

Ana could not believe what she was hearing from the teacher. She tried to calm herself and pass the floor to the other members of the board.

Delfina, the vice-principal, spoke first, "Elza is right. Pedro is a troublemaker and has thrown the entire school into an awkward situation. He's creating problems, not only for his teacher and classmates, but all of us. I know him well and know what I'm talking about. I've also known Elza for more than ten years and know she's not capable of any of that."

Messias, the math teacher, spoke next, "I also know Pedro; he and his mother are my neighbors. He's a good boy. Despite his father no longer living with him and his mother and his young age, he is responsible, helps around the house, as his mother works all day, and I've never heard a single complaint from him since he started here in first grade."

When João, the doorman, began to speak, Elza interrupted, "This matter has nothing to do with João. In fact, I don't know what those of you who aren't teachers are doing here."

Elza was so worked up that she ignored the role of each board member.

João didn't know what to say, so Ana intervened, "What do you mean, Elza? João, just like Helena, Lucimar and Roberto, are a part of this school board. All of them represent a part of this school and have a right to be here. Everyone has a right to speak, to be heard, vote, and to take a position."

Elza, annoyed, responded, "This never happened here before. The school board never worked."

The principal replied, "That's exactly why so many problems arose here and we were brought in as part of an intervention. If the school board had been more active, maybe the school wouldn't have gotten as bad as it had. Please continue, João."

João replied, "I have worked at this school for more than 20 years and I've known Pedro since he was in first grade. I help him cross the street every day. Before, his father would bring him and pick him up after work, but after he and Pedro's mom separated, he comes and goes by himself, because his mother works. He is not a troublemaker. To the contrary: he's polite, quiet, and might be being discriminated against by his classmates because he doesn't fit in with them."

Next was Helena's turn, "It's true; Pedro really is a quiet boy. He has never caused problems in the halls. Hearing about him causing trouble is a surprise to me. But Elza is also an exemplary teacher. I'm very puzzled by this whole situation."

Lucimar then took the floor, "I know that many boys are restless and disobedient, but I've participated in the activities of this school for five years and I know Pedro. He goes to choral class and is always on time. He is an intelligent and quiet child. I've never had any problems with him. As the mother of a student here, I need to know more about the situation to avoid being unfair."

Finally, Roberto spoke, "I'm here to represent the students and it's very important that we have a voice at this type of meeting. It's common for the blame to be put on us students, but we're not always the ones who are wrong. Mrs. Elza's attitude toward João leads me to think that she may very well have mistreated Pedro as well."

"I was chosen by the students to represent them, and that's not why I'm taking his side, but there is no arguing with the facts. Mrs. Elza was wrong. First when she didn't give Pedro permission to go

to the toilet, something we all have a right to, which she did for three days in a row. Do any of you know what that's like? She was wrong again when she let the class gang up on Pedro and laugh at him when he messed his pants. And then she was wrong again when she refused to stop his classmates from calling him 'Stinky' in the classroom.

"Do any of you have any idea what the boy is going through? Having an absent father and a mother who works full-time and can't be there for him most of the time? And what's worse is that she trusted in this institution. And now what? At least she is being an active parent and looking out for her son's well-being by facing this situation. Mrs. Elza was in fact bullying Pedro, and she should stop and apologize to minimize the harm she has caused Pedro."

Everyone was surprised at what Roberto had to say. They all knew he was intelligent, a leader, and influential among his classmates, but they had not known that he was so well-spoken and persuasive.

ANA'S DILEMA

Ana suggested they all take a break to try and organize their thoughts in order to make the best decision regarding the present dilemma. She was there as interim principal, but she was also a teacher. Putting herself in Elza's shoes, she asked herself if she would have done the same. At that same moment, however, she realized that she was certain she would have acted differently, as she knew it was her duty to respect the students' differences, their limits, and their right to come and go, in addition to maintaining order in the classroom. As a mother, she put herself in Sonia's shoes. She thought about how much she had suffered and how she would have to convince Pedro to return to school next semester. She then thought about her 10-year-old son, Joaquim, and asked herself what it would have been like for him to have to go through a similar situation. She wanted to cry and went to the bathroom to compose herself. When she came back to the conference room, Delfina informed her that Elza had received a call from her husband and had had to leave before the meeting was finished.

Ana was surprised at what the teacher had done, but she had to re-convene the meeting. She had to give her decision about the incident to the board. She sought a way to minimize the damage and, to a certain degree, protect the teachers' reputation in front of the board, especially after the argument Roberto had made. She also wanted to protect Pedro and talk to his mother, as she had promised days before, when she said that everything would be resolved. Now, however, she didn't know if that would be possible. Elza's attitude had caught her off guard. She knew she had to finish the meeting, write down the meeting minutes, and ask the council to sign off on whatever the decision would be.

Ana was faced with an interpersonal and professional conflict, a troubling situation that needed a resolution, even if that resolution didn't please one of the parties involved. The board was deliberating over the matter as she presided over it and they needed to come to a decision. The school and her colleagues needed to be protected, but, above all else, they also needed to comply with their duty to society, which was to provide quality and inclusive public education. The institution couldn't afford to be seen negatively by the community again.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Is school the same for everyone?
2. Is it common to see situations at school in which the teacher does not take his or her students' differences into consideration?
3. What is the difference between bullying, psychological abuse, and discrimination?
4. Why shouldn't the behavior of a teacher who discriminates against a student be considered bullying?
5. Is the definition of bullying settled or could it be revised?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Did the principal take the right course of action by listening to every side and calling the school board meeting? Why?
2. Should the teacher and classmates apologize to Pedro and his mother?
3. How would you act if a case like this one took place in your classroom?
4. Could Elza's conduct toward her student be characterized as bullying? Why?

Innovation at a Public School

CASE

At a middle school in a rural part of the state of Minas Gerais, the administration had developed a special initiative with its faculty and staff, investing all their efforts into co-creation and participatory management processes. A group had been formed to discuss the quality of the student-teacher relationships at the school, as well as actions to be taken regarding conflicts and disciplinary issues, as one of the main problems at the school had been aggression between members of the school community. Yelling, verbal attacks, and humiliation were commonplace in the classrooms, and often came from the teachers.

Having graduated recently, one of the teachers, Simone, was still in her probation period before being permanently hired as a teacher. Even with her lack of experience, she was very engaged in the pedagogical approach of the school, but was going through an important period of re-evaluating her own values and behavior, as she had often been aggressive with poorly-behaved students. Everyone at the school had seen her lose her patience and asked the principal, Priscila, to do something about it.

Priscila was also going through a period of big changes, thanks to the endless study that she had done to train her team, and was no longer a stern, authoritarian principal like she had been just a little while before. She had been going through some difficult times in her life and for a long time, out of defensiveness and fear, had maintained a hard and insensitive persona, which had caused her a great deal of suffering on a daily basis. When she accepted the proposal to lead an innovative project at the school, she never imagined that it would change her like it did. She was constantly seeking to engage in dialogue with her subordinates and made an

effort to understand every situation from various perspectives.

With regard to Simone, she noticed that the young teacher had begun to act in a more thoughtful manner and saw that she was in constant search of new methods of conflict management. During conversations among the teachers about poorly-behaved students, she provided important reflections regarding the most effective and respectful ways to deal with the students. Nonetheless, she would still lose control from time to time, and the school community had not yet been able to see that Simone was changing slowly but steadily.

The school atmosphere was tense due to the delicate political times the country was experiencing. Many in the population were organizing a general strike and Simone was at the forefront of this movement in their city; in fact, she was one of its leaders. The week the strike had begun, Priscila received a visit at the school from the educational supervisor, Reginaldo, who was requesting a document related to Simone's probation period evaluation. The principal found this odd, as, in addition to it not yet being time to hand in the document, other teachers at the school were also going through their probation period, but only Simone's evaluation was requested. Priscila knew that there was a list on WhatsApp, compiled by the supervisor, of the names of those allegedly involved in organizing the general strike. He, along with the city's mayor, belonged to the political party who had positioned itself against the strike.

Because of the changes that Simone was making in relation to her behavior toward the students, Priscila had written her entries for the performance evaluations document in pencil with the idea that she would change them, removing the parts referring to the teacher's aggressive behavior if Simone proved that she could make those changes permanent. Reginaldo knew about Simone's behavior, and Priscila was suspicious of his true intentions for asking for the document. The principal knew the supervisor a little. He was an unsmiling man of low moral standing who was facing several legal proceedings at the time. Several times, he used blackmail to manipulate decisions and proceedings. She greatly doubted that he was concerned about Simone's development.

Priscila managed to get one more day to deliver the report, claiming that she needed to meet with the other administrators to validate it. As soon as the supervisor left the building, she ran to her cabinet and grabbed Simone's evaluation.

Looking at what she had written, she thought about how she should proceed, knowing that the document could be used against the teacher. A barrage of questions began to assault her mind: Should she change what she had written in pencil? Should she bring the issue to the rest of the administration? Should she deliver the report with the description of the young teacher's behavior as it was, knowing that Simone could be fired?

MULTIPLE POINTS OF VIEW

Because she believed in collective problem-solving, Priscila decided to call a meeting with the other administrators and several representatives from the school community to discuss the matter. She called on Marcelo, the vice-principal, Julia, the co-principal, and João and Clarissa, who were long-time teachers with whom Priscila had a close professional relationship and whom she could trust to understand the importance of keeping the matter confidential.

Marcelo had occupied the role of vice-principal for many years, and, along with Priscila, believed that it was possible to structure relations between the members of the school community in a participatory, welcoming, transparent and honest manner. He was a man of integrity, guided by ideals of fairness. Very thoughtful, he always tried to look at every situation from multiple perspectives and made decisions based on his values. He knew all about the superintendent's character and behavior, as, at another school where he had worked, he had been persecuted for defending an employee who had been anonymously reported for holding "subversive" political beliefs.

After Priscila explained the situation and her concerns, Marcelo asserted emphatically, "I believe that we need to protect Simone. We know she has been undergoing many changes, and in processes such as the one she's going through, like the ones we

promote at this institution, it takes a little time before changes become visible and take a firm hold. People struggle along the way, have their good days and bad days. Please let me be clear that I am not defending the inappropriate behavior of a teacher, but rather taking into consideration the transformational process and desire to change particular to this case.”

While he was still explaining his point of view, Julia, who was breathing heavily, interrupted, visibly upset, “Up to what point should we defend this kind of teacher? I understand that changes take time, but it’s our responsibility, especially in the roles we occupy, to ensure that nothing happens to our students. If a teacher needs help, she should seek out a psychologist or therapist. It’s not the administration’s responsibility to concern itself with the well-being of every single employee, but rather to care for the students and their education!”

Julia was a very introverted person. Her relationship with the other employees at the school was based on trading favors. She often tried to coerce the group into doing what she wanted and would at the same time make herself out to be a victim of the school’s processes to get attention and make herself look right when, in fact, she was wrong. She always blamed other teachers for her mistakes and difficulties. Because she was so reserved, she was unable to establish and maintain meaningful relationships and suffered because of it. The administrative team often tried to help her by talking to her and offering her continuing education, but she was resistant to examining herself and trying to change.

João was calm and serious when he took the floor, “I agree with Julia. I believe that the administrators need to act and show that they are active and involved with the management of the school. Everyone needs to meet their obligations in full. A person’s emotional balance and the effort required to maintain it are solely that person’s responsibility! Those who choose to be teachers must know this; it’s an obligation! One’s personal life, their problems, and stress should be left at home. At school, a teacher must be professional. If Simone can’t do that, it’s because she’s a bad professional and therefore should be dismissed. She should look for a job to which she is better suited!”

Clarissa, an experienced teacher who was extremely engaged with the innovative proposals at the school, then spoke up, eyes wide, “People, please. We shouldn’t be so extreme! I feel like this meeting is taking place during the last century! Come on! We’re always saying that education needs to change with the times and that we need to see each student as a whole person. Now we’re failing to do the same when dealing with the problems and processes of our team! Simone is very young and, without a doubt, very critical and actively speaks out, and we need to consider that this behavior is part of who she is! We should think about the good things she has to offer and help her with the things she seems to struggle with—in this case, dealing with misbehaving students. Furthermore, I saw her husband this week, as we’re friends. I was made aware that Simone is seeing a psychologist. From my point of view, she has already recognized the areas where she needs to improve and is working to change. But it takes time. We’re human beings, not machines! If we put her in a difficult situation now, she won’t be able to continue with her therapy. We need to give her our support! I’m sure that she will be getting along better with the students soon.”

They talked for a while longer, each one emphatically asserting their point of view. Priscila left the meeting feeling confused. On the one hand she was happy, as she saw the seeds that she had planted at the school sprouting in the comments of some of the people at the meeting. On the other hand, she knew that there was still a lot of work to be done as many still believed that punishment was the solution when faced with a difficult situation.

The fact was that she still hadn’t come to a decision regarding Simone’s evaluation form. Priscila was a very ethical and honest person, and altering an official document, even if it were for a good reason, meant compromising her values. She spent the rest of the morning thinking about the problem.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE ISSUES

Priscila always had lunch at the same restaurant a little far from the school, as she liked to unplug a little from her problems at

work. That day was no different. Around 1:30 PM, she left to have lunch at the restaurant, where she ran into Carlos, Simone's husband. He looked sad, worried. They soon noticed each other and Priscila couldn't avoid sitting with him.

"Carlos, how's it going?" she asked.

The downhearted Carlos responded, "Hi, Priscila, not very well. In fact, I think God put you in my path today. I'm very worried about Simone. She is going through a really hard time emotionally. Her therapy has brought up several delicate issues. At the same time, she's dealing with the strike. Yesterday she confided in me that she had run into Reginaldo, the educational supervisor, during a meeting and went off on him. You know how she is... Simone was in tears when she told me, really regretting what she'd done. She's been changing, but she wasn't able to control her emotions at that moment. I'm really worried about her. If she loses her job, I don't know what we'll do. As you know, she's the one who provides for us financially, pays for the house and our kids expenses, everything. I've been unemployed for eight months; it's been really hard to find a job. Her salary is our only income."

Priscila, moved by what Carlos had told her, said, "Oh dear, Carlos! I had no idea the situation had gotten so bad. It will get better, don't worry. Simone is trying and has been getting better. Once she's able to get a better handle on things, you'll be in a better position to find a job. Have faith; things will get better."

They finished lunch, said goodbye, and Priscilla went back to the school, but was unable to focus on her work. Worry and doubt consumed her thoughts. She knew that the superintendent would be there the next day asking for Simone's evaluation.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Under the current bureaucracy and regulations, is it possible to develop new school models?
2. With the growing movement for making changes to standard curricula that promote education of the whole person, are faculty and staff prepared to meet the current call for including the emotional development of students in the scope of their education?
3. Young people seem to be more and more unprepared for the needs of the job market, and content-centered pedagogies are being called into question. Is it possible to prepare students for this new society in a comprehensive and emotionally-supportive manner, attending to their needs as a whole person and the various connections they establish with the world around them?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do public schools have the autonomy to implement innovative initiatives?
2. When it comes to the development of the teachers, does the administration of a school have the conditions and autonomy to deal with and resolve conflicts internally?
3. How can principals strike a balance between meeting the macro-political expectations held for administrators and developing the pedagogical framework and policies of the school?
4. How can one establish the political and structural conditions to cultivate a pedagogical framework that takes into consideration each student and teachers' holistic development at a public school?

The Role of Affection in Education

CASE

In one of the most populous cities in Brazil, 700 students in grades 1 through 9 attended a part-time school on the outskirts of a town. Starting at 7:00 AM, traffic at the school would begin to pick up and the bell would soon ring. The hall monitor opened the gate, and, little by little, the patio would fill with children and teenagers. The second bell would ring and each teacher organized their students in lines to lead them to their classrooms.

In one of the 8th-grade classrooms, a teacher named Paulo entered the room, dropping his big black briefcase, which could have just as easily been a doctor's. Paulo was a 30-year-old tall, blond and very well kept man. His dream had been to become a doctor, but circumstances led him to graduate in biology. He waited a minute for everyone to settle in and asked, "Did you remember that today was the deadline for your reports?"

Several pairs of eyes went wide; others looked at the floor. For a moment, it seemed like time had stopped.

"As I've said already," continued the teacher, "the highest grade possible for this assignment is 8." He then sat behind his desk and began to take attendance.

The students felt apprehensive and their hearts began to race. One of the boys, indignant, thought, *It's not fair! It's not fair! I can't even assert my rights!*

One of the girls lowered her head and whispered to the closest classmate, "I guess I learned my lesson: it's better to keep my mouth shut."

STUDENTS IN SEARCH OF A CHANGE

Fabio, a dedicated student who applied himself to his studies, rested his chin on his hands, stared at the book and began to think about something that took place the week before, when he and several of his classmates went to the school principal, Vilma, asking for help.

When they entered the principal's office, Vilma greeted them with a "Good morning," and asked what had brought them there.

One of his classmates, Theo, took the initiative to speak first, "We're here to say that we're having problems in our science classes. We have trouble understanding the teacher's explanations and, whenever we ask a question, he just tells us not to interrupt him."

"Last class," added Alice, her voice shaking, "I asked the teacher to explain a concept to me, and he told me I should re-read the text, because it was an easy concept to understand and it didn't hurt for me to study at home a little."

Vilma listened to the complaints of the other students, looked firmly at each one and told them, "Very well. It's always good to hear from you. Now, go on back to class. I'll bring the case to the school vice-principal and we'll figure out what's happening." With that, she stood up, opened the door, and watched as the students walk down the hall.

Fabio remembered clearly their disappointment. The English teacher didn't even ask where they had been; he just told them to copy his notes on the board to their notebooks.

What Fabio didn't know, was that the principal had spent some time reflecting on their visit to the office, *Those students like to complain. I'm not sure, but I think they've already complained about other teachers. As soon as I get a chance, I'm going to call on Paulo to find out more about what's happening.*

Vilma has been head of the school for more than ten years, and always tried to resolve conflicts by listening to everyone involved. This, however, was not always possible, due to all her bureaucratic commitments and the fact that the faculty was short of several teachers.

Some weeks later, Fabio remembered, he and the other classmates had the impression that the principal and the vice-princi-

pal had spoken with Paulo, but not in the way they had expected. During one of the classes, the teacher, even more reserved than normal, reviewed the content of his lecture briefly and then assigned the students the task of writing a report on the subject they were studying. He commented that some students in the class, and everyone knew who they were, would have to do an excellent job, developing and justifying it well, since they liked to be so demanding.

Then, he said in a deliberate pace, “We have a group of people that think their teacher should be more dedicated to his work. So, show me how good you are. I’d like to see someone get a better than average grade. They need to learn to struggle for their rights, rather than their wants.”

As if everything had happened in mere seconds, Fabio came back to the present moment. It was the day the report was due. He did his best and it seemed like several of the other classmates had also worked hard, but getting the highest grade? What criteria would the teacher use to grade them? It was all the boy could think about.

THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

After the students placed their reports on the desk, Paulo put them all in his briefcase. He then began another subject, and the next 50 minutes went by without a problem.

That day, the teacher finished work earlier and, as soon as he left the classroom, he headed for the parking lot to go home. He wanted to rest a little, as he taught at two schools and had given lessons to various classes that day, each with their own challenges: some more calm, some more disorderly.

Paulo sought to fulfill his role as a purveyor of knowledge and teach the established curriculum. He always believed that school was a place for knowledge, a space for scientific learning. But more and more, he was getting the impression that the students only wanted to be given attention and made happy. He saw that, for some people, a good teacher was one who, even during class time, listened to the students and tried to understand and resolve

certain situations. The young teacher thought that was a waste of time. To him, transmitting knowledge is what mattered, and it was clear that family issues, personal problems, and conflicts between classmates should be resolved outside school. He arrived home lost in these thoughts.

THE CRISIS

Finally, Friday arrived. Paulo taught ten classes in a row. The first of which was the 8th-grade class, which still walked the halls saying that he not only taught poorly, but also went around saying the students didn't know how to deal with their own emotions.

Even Maria, the reading teacher, heard several students venting about him, saying that they had a difficult time understanding his science classes and that they felt discriminated against by the teacher, who always seemed to make fun of them. Maria then commented to them that they should respect the teachers' individuality and their different teaching approaches, because, after all, they were in 8th-grade now, not in elementary school.

THE COMPLAINT

On the same day, after morning classes, Paulo had lunch at school as normal and went back to work. In the middle of the afternoon, right at snack break, the teacher passed the principal's office, whose door was open, when the principal asked him to come in.

"Can we talk, please?"

Paulo entered the office, where he found Carla, one of his 8th-grade students and leader of the group that was always making their opinions known and arguing. Her expression was serious as she sat next to her mother, who looked anxious.

The principal began the conversation in a calm voice, "Paulo, Carla came to me saying that for some time now she has felt discriminated against in your classes. She described your relationship in the classroom and says to have noticed that you don't like her, which is holding her back in her studies. As a matter of fact, her grades have dropped this semester."

Paulo, who held a bottle of water in his hand, put it down on the desk, looked at the girl, and spoke firmly, "I don't like you, Carla? So what? I have to like you for you to learn? I never imagined that for my students to learn, I'd have to like them! Your grades have dropped because of your lack of interest in your studies."

When she heard this, Carla became furious and in a shaky voice exclaimed, "Teacher, I've had to deal with you looking down on me and my classmates for two years! You've always been arrogant and never cared about us! You know what I think? You never should have become a teacher! I want a teacher who respects me and doesn't always point his finger at me saying that I'll never amount to anything in life," as she spoke, the girl began to break down in tears.

"I *don't* like you! Who says I have to like my students? I'm here to teach! And why are you crying? If anyone should cry, it should be me..."

The mother, who up to that point had been quiet, stood up from her chair and, in a state of agitation, said in an angry voice, "My daughter always liked coming to school and never had any problems. But this year she's being rejected. It's true! The situation cannot go on like that."

The principal tried to calm the mother, while the teacher turned his back and declared, "I'm going to take care of my life, my health! If I have to listen to everything these students complain about, soon I'll lose my job due to stress," and with that he left the office and went to the teacher's room, where many of his colleagues were having a snack.

THE TEACHERS' OPINION

"That was enough to ruin my appetite," said Paulo as he entered the room, and everyone turned to look at him.

"What happened?" asked Jackson, one of teachers, in a casual voice.

"I just had to listen to something ridiculous in the principal's office. One of the students, accompanied by her mother, complained that I don't like her and started crying, making a scene.

I told her I really didn't like her... That girl is a pain! Now low grades are the teacher's fault!"

Paulo was indignant about the situation, and in just a few seconds the entire room was in an uproar.

"That's ridiculous!" exclaimed the geography professor. When have you ever seen a student show up with her mom to say the teacher doesn't like her? Students need to study!"

"And thank God for having a teacher to teach them," added the Portuguese teacher. "Because the way things are going, teaching will become a career no one will embrace before long."

"It's like this: when we asked to talk to the parents about their kids, they won't come because they have to work. But now, when it comes to complaining about the teacher, they've got plenty of time," argued the math teacher.

"Folks, things really are bad," the religion teacher spoke up, much to his colleagues' surprise. He had always been so reserved. "Today I also got into an argument, with some girls from a 7th-grade class. And what bothers me the most is that we can't do anything about it. The vice-principals spend the whole time trying to understand the students."

Paulo, now speaking in a softer voice, related to everyone present what had happened, when one of the elementary school teachers interrupted.

"Paulo, who is this girl?"

"Carla," he responded wryly.

"Carla?! That's impossible... She was my student when she was in 2nd-grade. She was an excellent..."

"You know what happens? They grow up and change," argued the math teacher. "That girl was an excellent student, but now she doesn't care. I found out that her parents separated and her brother, who also goes here, is involved in drugs!"

"Ahhh... and that's the school's fault?" exclaimed Paulo in a serious tone. "Everything is messed up, people! We need to value the good students."

The bell rang. Everyone needed to get back to their classrooms to teach the last classes for that Friday. However, the climate was tense, and many continued the discussion.

In light of what Paulo had said, one of the other teachers felt her heart begin to ache and murmured to the colleagues sitting next to her, who remained quiet, “Our job is to promote equality, to help the least advantaged. Knowledge can be found anywhere, but not love and care. That’s the perspective a school should have!”

Paulo, when he heard the comment, responded, “Go ahead, then! Meanwhile, I’d like to see you find time to teach.

Loving and caring are a mother and father’s job. If they don’t do that at home, it’s not my problem!”

Another teacher continued, “I agree in part. If things keep going this way, in just a few years schools will take on all the responsibilities of the families. And what will happen to their duty to teach?”

Exasperated, Paulo replied, “There are even teachers that believe that, and as a result, we now have a lot of families that think that way. That type of teacher reinforces the false belief that we have to like their children.”

The conversation gave rise to a whirlwind of thoughts. The teachers walked slowly to their classrooms, asking themselves things like: *What’s going on? Every year the students’ attitudes change. What about the families? Maybe it’s time to change professions.*

THE PRINCIPAL’S DILEMMA

In Vilma the principal’s office, the atmosphere was calmer than that of the teacher’s room. Carla had stopped crying and her mother was seated again.

Sighing, looking to bring balance back to the situation, Vilma said, “Carla, Paulo is an excellent professional and, just like all of us, always has room for improvement. Sometimes we have to focus on some things and ignore...”

The mother, however, interrupted, “Mrs. Vilma, couldn’t we transfer my daughter to another classroom?” she suggested a little sheepishly. “That way, she wouldn’t have to deal with that person anymore.”

“Well, I’ll talk to my staff and see if it’s possible and we’ll talk again next week.”

Carla, still upset, nodded her head, agreeing to what the principal proposed.

But her mother responded firmly, "If it's not possible, I'll go to the Education Department, because things can't continue this way."

Vilma promised her that she would give her an answer soon and with that, mother and daughter said goodbye and went home with the hope that better days would follow. The principal quickly wrote down in her schedule for Monday, "Meeting with vice-principal and school counselor to discuss what decisions to make about Carla's situation."

While she was writing, she thought, *Will transferring the student to another class really solve the problem? Paulo has had that attitude since he started working here, and I've seen it get worse every year.*

She then remembered hearing a few days before a colleague comment, "My role here is to teach. Those who want to learn will learn... Those who enjoy it will enjoy it... I don't give a darn about those terrible teenagers."

She also remembered what Paulo had said just a moment ago, "I never imagined that for my students to learn, I would have to like them!"

Finally, she asked herself, *Could Paulo be right? As professionals, our duty is to teach the students! We don't need to like them for them to learn, but we should respect them. Has Paulo been showing a lack of respect in this situation? He seems to me to be very focused on himself..*

The principal then made a decision: she would call Paulo to her office to talk as soon as possible. It was already five o'clock and she hadn't even had her afternoon snack. Her life as an administrator was very busy, to the point that she spent 12 hours at school on some days, and she was very tired lately. She closed her datebook and stood up to get a cup of coffee.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Can a teacher put their student's education first without taking into consideration their affective relationship with them? What arguments support your opinion?
2. Should the school principal get involved in this type of situation? In what way? Should they hold a one-on-one meeting with the teacher to talk with him about his attitude or call a meeting of all the teachers to deal with the issue collectively? What actions should be taken?
3. Does the relationship between teacher and student affect how the student learns? What should be done when this relationship is strained?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What should the teacher-student relationship be like to encourage learning? Does affection have an important role in learning?
2. Would transferring the student to another class resolve the situation? Why?
3. Should the school concern itself with the affective relationships between the teachers and students or only focus on teaching content? How should this take place?

The Effects of a Teacher's Personal Problems on Class

CASE

At an elementary school on the outskirts of the city of São Paulo, Ana, a teacher in charge of two 3rd-grade classes during the afternoon shift, was about to distribute tests to her students, when she realized that there wasn't enough for everyone.

Nervous, she looked for Alice, the vice-principal, and asked her what to do. The vice-principal said that the copier was broken, but some of Helena's students hadn't come to class in the morning. Maybe there were extra copies in her cabinet.

Ana ran to the teacher's room, retrieved the key to Helena's cabinet, and opened the door. She then began to go through the piles of paper. When she grabbed one of them, she noticed that it was made of old tests; then she found another similar pile, then another. A "movie" played in her head: students, tutoring, low grades... She stared at them for a long time trying to determine if they really were what she thought they were.

"Did you find any?" asked Alice, standing in at the door.

Ana startled and then, with shaking hands, put the old tests back into the cabinet. Next to them were the ones for today and, yes, there were some blank copies. She hurriedly grabbed them and closed the cabinet hard, going to meet Alice at the door before she saw what Ana had seen: the old tests.

"Great!" declared the vice-principal when she saw the copies. "Go ahead and use those and we'll get more tomorrow for Helena's students that missed class today."

Ana returned to class, handed out the tests, and, while the students took the test, she became pensive. She was one of six

3rd-grade teachers at the school. Since many children at that grade level had learning difficulties, she and her colleagues had organized extra classes, which they taught taking turns, without extra pay, to avoid anyone becoming overloaded. Helena was the only teacher that didn't participate, as she taught at another school as well and had a sick child who required much of her attention and took up all her free time. She couldn't even manage to go to the planning meetings, because as soon as she finished at that school, she would have to run to the other.

When she opened Helena's cabinet a little while ago, Ana noticed that Helena hadn't corrected her students' old tests. *Did she correct the other work, like homework assignments? Without correcting their work, how could she find out if the students didn't understand anything and help them figure it out?*" Ana asked herself.

Helena is going through a really rough time right now, she thought. Her son has health issues and she needs to work two jobs to be able to pay for his treatment. Nonetheless, the lack of time to dedicate to her students is affecting their performance.

Suddenly, Ana heard, "Teacher!"

By the tone of voice, she could tell it hadn't been the first time they tried to ask her something. It was only then that she realized how much the incident had caught her off guard. She wasn't even paying attention to her students.

VENTING

At the end of the afternoon, Ana left school quickly. She came home tired—and worried—not knowing what to do. She found her husband in the living room. Just what she needed: someone to talk to.

"Can you believe that I opened Helena's cabinet today to get some blank copies of a test for my students and I found piles of old tests that had never been corrected? It was a lot of tests, from throughout the entire year! They were just sitting there, with no markups or grades. What's the purpose of giving tests only to leave them locked away in a cabinet?"

"She must not have had time yet. You know that Helena is overwhelmed right now," her husband responded.

"I'm not talking about tests from today or even last month. There were tests from the beginning of the year, none of them corrected, and we're in the last month of the school year! In fact, I even found tests from last year! I saw the names of children I know. If she didn't correct their tests, how can she evaluate her students' performance?"

"That's true... So how is she grading them?"

"I don't know," She responded. "One of Helena's student's father asked me about how we grade the students, and the other day a woman who works at the bakery, who also has a child in Helena's class, wanted to know if our school gave back the corrected tests to the children."

"But how does she grade them?" her husband asked again.

"That's the problem. It's ridiculous. Now I'm starting to put the pieces together. One day I heard a student talking to Helena on the way out, saying that he still didn't understand some things, and she commented to him that he would get a 5.75 on the test. At first, I thought it was a prediction, but the number was very specific for that, don't you think?"

After relating a few more incidences that she had witnessed and concluding that she needed to speak with Helena, Ana drank a cup of chamomile tea and went to bed.

THE CONVERSATION WITH HELENA

On the following day, Ana arrived early to the school and went to Helena's classroom as soon as her class ended. She wanted to talk to her and find out how she could help her.

But she barely entered the classroom when Helena, in a harsh and angry voice, told Ana that she knew she had gone into her cabinet. "You had no right," she scolded.

Ana tried to explain that it was an emergency and was the only solution at hand, since there were no other copies of the test available, and that it had been the vice-principal's suggestion. She then took advantage of the situation to mention the piles of old, un-

corrected tests she had found. She wanted to see if her colleague needed help.

Helena said that Ana was making it up: she would never leave a test uncorrected, not one. She finished by saying that she always knew that Ana was jealous of her, just because she couldn't spend more time at the school, and was now starting to make up stories to try and get her fired. She was being very aggressive and left the room before Ana even had a chance to continue the conversation, declaring that she would take the key with her so no one could put anything there to incriminate her.

THE PLANNING MEETING

After the conversation, Ana bought a sandwich at the cafeteria and, still apprehensive, went to the planning meeting for the extra classes that the teachers offered the 3rd-grade students of their own initiative. It was an extra, unpaid project, but they knew that if they didn't give the students that extra support, some of the children wouldn't be able to move on to the next grade.

Paula was the first to speak, "A few children that we didn't invite to the class showed up, all from Helena's class."

Cristina confirmed this, "It's true. I don't understand why some students that have good grades are not only wanting to attend the extra classes, but also don't seem to be able to follow the lessons very well."

"Let's limit the classes to those we recommend take them, the neediest," affirmed Patricia. "Otherwise, the classes will be for nothing and we won't be able to help those who need them."

"I agree," responded Ester. "Every one of us is spending an extra day or more a week here in addition to our lesson planning time. I can't do any more than that. Yesterday, Caio, from Helena's class, told me that he couldn't answer anything on the test. Alice commented that none of his grades are lower than a 7. So, I told him he couldn't take part in the extra class."

Ana defended the student, "I think you should let him."

The others questioned this: there were students in other classes with lower grades than that, and they still hadn't been in-

licated for the extra classes. Upon Ana's insistence on the matter, they asked her for her reason.

Ana thought that she shouldn't say anything, but ended up telling her colleagues what she had found.

Silence fell over the room for a moment.

"She hasn't corrected the tests?!" exclaimed Patricia finally, indignant and irritated. "And we're here working extra to try and make up for the work she's not doing?"

Ana regretted what she had done immediately. She saw that there had been no corrections written on the tests, but what did that prove? How could she be sure she knew what was really happening? Hadn't it been unprofessional to tell everyone?

"We're working extra to help all the students with difficulties," said Paula, "not just Helena's."

"I think more than half of them are hers," noted Ester, almost yelling. "More than the other five classes put together! And she's the only one that doesn't help with anything, not even preparing the activities for our classes."

Trying to defuse the situation, Paula argued, "She probably hasn't had time to correct some of them, but I don't believe it happens all the time. A few years ago, we used to have lunch together every Tuesday, and she would always tell me all about the difficulties her students were having and the progress they were making."

Ana then told them, "I tried to speak with Helena, but she was very aggressive and took the key with her so that no one could, according to her, make false accusations against her."

"Why would she take the key if she's innocent? She's hiding something," said Patricia, raising her voice. "Let's go force open her cabinet and see what tests she didn't correct. Alice needs to know about this," Patricia was becoming more and more upset.

"Tell the vice-principal?" cried Cristina. "She's not tenured; they could rescind her contract! She has a lot of responsibilities. She wouldn't be able to cover her son's treatment. On top of that, we don't know for certain what's going on."

Patricia continued to argue, but this time, instead of angry, she seemed pensive, "Look, she has more than 30 students under her responsibility. These children come to school to learn. As

teachers, we can't just give classes. We must give feedback to the students on their progress. We need to know what they're having difficulties with. They won't be able to make much progress if the teachers don't help them learn from their mistakes..."

Cristina interrupted, "Helena has always been considered a good teacher. Also, both the students and their families like her."

"Such a nice teacher! And her students always do so well on their tests, don't they?!" commented Ester sarcastically, reminding everyone about the good grades of the boy who wanted to attend the extra classes. She then continued, more serious, "She's a big liar, that's it; she's making up the grades without knowing if the students are really learning or not!"

"Haven't you ever had a personal problem that interfered with work?" asked Paula. "I need to tell you all something: the activities I brought last week were prepared by Helena. She came to my classroom and I was nervous because I hadn't prepared them yet. Helena told me she was there exactly because she was feeling bad about not being able to share in the extra work. So, she prepared some activities for us to give the kids. I didn't say anything before because I was embarrassed about not doing what I said I would."

Assertively, Ana interrupted them and put an end to the discussion, "We don't know exactly what happened and we can't make hasty decisions. We should be careful to avoid hurting Helena and her students. Please, don't say anything about this to anyone outside this room or keep talking about it among yourselves. We need to take a few days to think about the situation and, only then, will I tell you all my decision."

When she finished what she had to say, she grabbed her things and left the room.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Dedicated and responsible teachers often find themselves in difficult situations that affect their work performance, and those who end up suffering the consequences are the students. What would the best course of action be for an administrator in this situation?
2. Planning, correction, and support classes are activities that require time from the faculty. Some teachers work at only one school while others hold positions at various. Should work be divided equally among everyone or is there another way to take into consideration everyone's needs?
3. Like the children, every teacher is different and each one has his or her own needs. How can one consider the personal needs of teachers without undermining students' right to an excellent education?
4. When a colleague at work notices that another is failing in their classroom duties, is it their duty to find ways of not letting it affect their students' education or would it be interfering in an issue that is outside their purview?
5. When a teacher tries to alert another to a situation that is hurting his or her students and the other is closed to dialogue, how should the teacher who noticed the situation proceed?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What should Ana have done when she found the uncorrected tests in Helena's cabinet? Should she have acted immediately?
2. Was it right for Ana to share what she found in Helena's cabinet with the other 3rd-grade teachers? What options did she have?
3. When Helena realized that she had accumulated more work than she could handle, especially due to the needs of her sick child, what should she have done? Should she have asked for help?
4. One of Helena's colleagues commented that she was hurting

her students. Another then related that, in the past, she had proven herself to be a responsible and dedicated teacher. Is it possible for these two Helenas to be the same person? Are some teachers always responsible while others always compromise their students' education? What are the ways in which a vice-principal can deal with the various aspects of a teacher's work and personality, as well as the various phases they go through during their professional life?

5. Could Helena's colleagues have noticed that she needed help and redistributed some of her responsibilities? Is it right to assume the responsibilities of a colleague?

A Teacher Under Threat: How Should a School Deal with Violence?

CASE

André was a teacher who worked at a school in the state of Minas Gerais, in a city of around 250,000 inhabitants. The institution had prestige in the city and around 1,700 students, divided among three shifts. Many parents from nearby neighborhoods and even neighboring cities wanted to enroll their children in the school, recognizing its strong tradition as an institution of learning. The students there formed a diverse student body. Most of them lived in the same mostly middle-class neighborhood located in the center of the city, but many lived in another neighborhood close by that was known to be quite violent. Most of the parents worked in local industries and only had a high school education; few had higher education degrees.

André was average height, had light skin, short hair and a jovial appearance, despite the serious expression he often wore. He was 30 years old, and had worked for around nine years as a history teacher, having taught at various public and private schools. In his opinion, being young helped him relate to the students, as he always tried to understand teenagers' speech and communicate with them. André, being single and without children, lived alone in a house very close to the school where he worked.

To cover his expenses, André taught during two different shifts at the school: the morning and afternoon shifts. In the evenings he studied English and took a specialization course. Despite

the long, tiring work hours, he was well-respected at the school, as he was very serious about his work and was able to maintain order in the classroom, something he considered essential to promoting an adequate learning environment.

André spent a lot of time at the school, even outside his normal working hours, and always told everyone how proud he was to teach at that institution, which he considered his second home. However, the educator found himself faced with a difficult decision when he began to receive threats, including death threats, from one of his students.

THE CONFLICT

It all began when, during one of the first-year high school classes, André came to the attention of 16-year-old Carlos. A resident of a low-income community in a neighborhood close to the school, the student was black, short and skinny, spoke using a lot of slang, wore earrings in both ears and had bleach-blond hair. That day he was standing in the back of the classroom causing a disturbance that made it impossible for André to continue his lesson.

Carlos did not like being reprimanded by the teacher and his reaction was confrontational and disrespectful, yelling at the teacher saying, “Who do you think you are to tell me what to do? You’re not in charge here! You’re just a teacher and I don’t give a damn about you! Put yourself in your place! Watch how you talk to me or you’ll find out what happens!”

At that moment a silence overtook the classroom. The rest of the students looked at the teacher with fear in their eyes, waiting to see what his reaction to Carlos’ threats would be.

André tried to keep calm and sent the student to the principal’s office. Despite the tense atmosphere, the class continued. When class was over and he left the classroom, he found Carlos in the hall. With a threatening look on his face, he stared at Carlos, trying to intimidate him. André didn’t take him very seriously, as disrespect and confrontation were so common in his profession that he had gotten used to it.

During a break, in the teacher's room, André asked his colleagues how Carlos behaved in their classes. The response he heard worried him.

Mariana, the math professor, advised him, "If I were you, I'd ignore him, not confront him. I worked at the school where he went to before and the principal there ended up having to put together a class of "difficult" students like him because they were too dangerous. He doesn't know how to write or read well. He only made it as far as high school because the school didn't want to flunk him out of concern for the students and teachers' safety, in addition to wanting to get rid of him."

Maria Clara, the English teacher, who was listening to the conversation, added, "And there's more... Most of Carlos' family is in jail. One time, he told me that his dream was to become a drug dealer and kill a police officer. His classmates have told me that he sells drugs in and outside of school. That's why I just pretend he doesn't exist and ignore his disruptions in class. It's not worth it to be a martyr for Education, because Education doesn't care about its martyrs!"

The things he heard from the other teachers left André deep in thought, unsure of how to go forward. Was ignoring Carlos really the best course of action, as his colleagues advised him? If he did that, wouldn't he lose the respect of the other students in his class? Was it really that risky to scold that student?

It was an unfamiliar situation for André; however, the fact that it was so common for his colleagues scared him. Threats of violence had become a fact of life for them, but the teacher felt that something needed to be done.

THE REQUEST FOR HELP

Not knowing what to do, André went to the school principal. The principal related that in other occasions she had asked the adults responsible for Carlos to come to the school and they didn't show up. Nonetheless, she would try again.

But she warned him, "We know that his case is a serious one, that's why we put him in that class, separated from his classmates

from the other school: to see if he would be less disruptive. Various students have told us that he brings drugs to school in his backpack, but we can't search him. He's already had several run-ins with the police. What can we do if the police won't even do anything? Since he lives in this school district, we can't transfer him. We're also at a loss for what to do, but will make a few more attempts."

The following day, Carlos's grandfather came to the school, saying he was responsible for the student, as his mother had several mental health issues and his father and brothers had been in jail for years. With a tired expression on his face, the man, quite elderly, promised to speak with his grandson, but admitted that it was difficult to discipline him. He said that Carlos had already been arrested several times and often spent time with bad company in the vicinity where he lived. He claimed that his grandson was a good boy, but had become violent due to drug use. He also confessed to the administrators that he had recently found him with a knife, saying that he wanted to kill a rival in the neighborhood because he owed him one real [Brazilian currency] and didn't want to pay him. Downtrodden, he stated that he didn't know what to do anymore.

Carlos' guardian's words left the teacher frightened and distressed. However, he resolved not to let it bring him down; he decided to approach the student to talk with him and try to resolve the situation. He knew that it wouldn't be an easy conversation, as the young man was very withdrawn and never wanted to talk.

THE NEXT ENCOUNTER

A week after the episode with Carlos, André was apprehensive about seeing him in the classroom again and asked himself how the boy would react to his grandfather coming to school. Would he change his aggressive and confrontational attitude?

The last lesson of the day, the one with Carlos' class, would be the most difficult. The teacher walked to the classroom feeling a mixture of discouragement, anxiety, and fear, but didn't let it show, as he knew he would have to face the situation no matter

what. Much to his surprise and relief, Carlos wasn't in class, which gave André the sensation that he had one less problem to deal with that day.

As usual, the teacher took attendance, and was alerted that several students from the group were skipping class and hanging out elsewhere in the school, Carlos among them. As per the rules, André informed the administration and continued his class, which was productive and included a lot of participation from the students.

At the end of the workday, as he was leaving school, the principal called André to her office to tell him what she had done regarding the absent students he had reported, "André, as soon as I received your message about several students skipping class, I went to find them. I was about to give up when I decided to look in the sports court bathroom, which was locked from the inside. Carlos was there with another student and they didn't want to open the door. We almost had to force it open. They came out totally messed up; heavily drugged and aggressive. We didn't find anything on them, as they had thrown everything down the toilet. We called the police, which haven't shown up yet and probably won't. We suspended both students and called their guardians. Unfortunately, that's the best we can do at this point."

André decided to go back to the teacher's room and talk with his colleagues about what had happened. Alice, the physical education teacher, told him something that worried him even more. According to her, when he found out that André had alerted the principal about the students that weren't in class, Carlos began to tell everyone that he was going to kill the teacher, that he'd pay the price for turning him in to the principal, and that he and his friends would "take care" of him.

It was not a pleasant thing to hear. André was worried, wondering if he should take those words seriously or if they were just words spoken in the heat of a moment of anger. The entire way home he felt apprehensive, constantly looking over his shoulder. A mix of fear, worry, and insecurity overwhelmed him.

POWERLESSNESS

That afternoon and the night that followed were difficult for the teacher. Despite his efforts to distract himself, those threatening words from Carlos played over and over in his head as he watched the evening news reports replete with stories of violence. He could barely sleep that night, as every little noise would startle him.

The following morning, André decided to seek advice from Marcos, a friend of his who was a police officer, regarding what he should do about the situation.

What he heard did not lift his spirits much: “The school didn’t make a police report about the threat? Well, then he’s going to attack or kill you for sure! He’s got nothing to lose, and the law doesn’t hold minors accountable for anything in this country. The Children and Adolescent Statute protects him. But I’ll tell you one thing: if he does attack you or another professor, the school and anyone else who knows about the threats will be held accountable by omission. After all, you knew and didn’t do anything!”

André then decided to call Lucia, a fellow teacher with many years of experience who always gave him good advice.

She told him, “I’ve also gone through a similar situation. Honestly, there’s not much you can do. There are no laws that protect the teacher; we’re hostages in such cases. I don’t think it’s healthy for you to continue working under those conditions. You should seek help from a psychiatrist, ask for a month of medical leave, wait for the situation to pass, and put your thoughts in order.”

Despite his friendship with Lucia, her advice did not satisfy him very much. Was running from the problem really the best solution? Wouldn’t it give the threatening student a sense of victory? Should he abandon teaching, something he really enjoyed doing, because of a situation like this?

In light of what his police and teacher friends had told him, André decided to express his concerns once more to the principal. He found that she was also worried about the situation and wasn’t certain on how to proceed.

In particular, she said, “If you want, we can call the police again and file a report about the threats, which is your right. But think about it, because it might make Carlos even angrier and he

could take it out on you. I'm worried about your safety; after all, you do live all by yourself!

"Furthermore, this situation could create bad publicity for the school, which would not be good. We also can't expel him, because he lives in the neighborhood and the law won't allow us to do so."

The principal stated that she had tried to speak with Carlos one-on-one in an affectionate manner, but he would have no part of it. She tried to advise him to change schools, but he said his grandfather wouldn't let him because they could lose their "Bolsa Familia" ("Family Allowance") benefits if he went to another school. Because of Carlos' violent behavior in and outside of school, several parents had expressed concerns to her and several of his classmates, out of fear, had requested to be transferred.

Lucia's advice to the teacher was to try and ignore the student, pretending that he didn't exist, and to have patience, as unfortunately there wasn't much he could do in the situation.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In what ways does violence in the school environment impact teaching and learning?
2. To whom can teachers who experience such violence go for help? What assistance would be needed in such cases?
3. For many educators in Brazil, one of the biggest causes of violence in schools is a feeling of impunity enjoyed by the students. For this reason, they end up blaming the Child and Adolescent Statute (a Brazilian law that, among other things, prohibits minors from receiving the maximum penalty for certain crimes) as one of the reasons for or an accomplice in the occurrence of violence with impunity in Brazilian schools. Considering the case presented and similar experiences had by other educators, what are the possible relations and responsibilities of the Child and Adolescent Statute with regard to such situations?
4. In Brazil, teaching is one of the professions more likely to have workers on sick leave. Is it possible that violence and a lack of discipline in the school environment could be largely responsible for physical and mental illness in teachers?
5. In cases of violence carried out by adolescents in the school environment, the only form of punishment often adopted by schools is to expel the aggressor. Is this measure an effective way to resolve the problem or does it only pass it along to the next school?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In this case, a teacher claimed that the school that Carlos attended before would promote problematic students to get rid of them. Is this an isolated case or a common reality for schools? Is it the best way to deal with the situation?
2. André was hesitant to report what happened to the police, for fear of reprisal from Carlos. Are cases of violence in the classroom under-reported due to teachers' fear that they will suffer more violence?

3. From André's conversations with his colleagues, it's clear that violence at school is a commonplace reality for Brazilian schools and many have come to accept it. Do you think that situations like André's are common in Brazilian schools? Is violence in the classroom becoming an everyday reality for educators?
4. André's police friend claimed that the Child and Adolescent Statute (CAS), in practice, protects adolescents such as Carlos from being held accountable for their actions. Do you think this law actually does more good or more harm when it comes to the realities of school life?

Exclusion from Inclusive Education

CASE

Marta, a teacher, had been transferred to the Laranja State School located in a small city in the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre and attended by 540 students over two different shifts. A group of 24 teachers from different disciplines taught ten 1st through 5th-grade classes and eight 6th through 9th-grade classes. The administration was composed of six people including the principal, supervisors and school counselors.

Marta, who had been in her profession for 10 years, believed that the challenge of making education inclusive was nothing new, since, unfortunately, a risk society presents numerous causes for its current state of vulnerability and social exclusion. Things were no different at the Laranja School. Some of the students came from broken homes, and their only support came from their mothers, who had to play the role of both parents. Most were seen as undisciplined and not having many prospects for the future, which made this challenge even greater in the classroom, where, as one can imagine, the students arrived already having experienced exclusion in innumerable ways.

Ever since she graduated from college, Marta had always been the first to arrive to the teacher's room at all the schools where she worked. As soon as she arrived at the school, she would carry out her daily ritual, separating the assignments, checking her notes, and watching the students arrive.

Little by little the quiet of the school would give way to the characteristic sounds of a school environment. One particular day, however, while getting her coffee, the behavior of one student, Luis, who was about 10 years old, made Marta pensive and worried. Over the following days, while observing Luis more closely,

the teacher noted that he didn't interact with the other students, he was always aggressive, and would scream, make obscene gestures and say unpleasant words in an apparent attempt to get attention. Marta soon noticed that the boy often would get into conflicts because of his behavior, and some students, and even teachers, seemed to avoid him.

Marta had been at the Laranja School for a short time. She liked to organize her classes in a way that promoted the integration and cohesiveness of the class, always paying close attention to the students' actions, reactions and needs. For her, talking with the students in the courtyard about their expectations and difficulties was a good way to get to know them.

Even though Luis wasn't in any of her classes, the teacher was intrigued by him, felt a desire to do something about the situation, and asked herself, *Why is this student acting so aggressively? Could it be due to some kind of diagnosed disorder? How do my colleagues work with him in the classroom?*

After several days observing Luis' behavior in the courtyard, Marta thought that a solution for his challenging behavior could start with a conversation with the school administration. So, she decided to go to the vice-principal to ask for more information about him. Taking advantage of the fact that a pedagogical meeting would soon be taking place, she wanted to ask about the Laranja School's policy regarding students with visible psychological or behavioral disorders that include symptoms such as aggression, who have special educational needs.

At the school coordination meeting, Martha said, "My dear fellow teachers, I would like to ask you about one of the students, named Luis. Since I arrived at the Laranja School, I couldn't help but notice the way he treats his classmates in the courtyard, often acting out in an aggressive and, at times, threatening way."

Despite the annoyed expressions she detected on the faces of some of her colleagues, she kept with the subject and, not knowing the reason for her colleagues' reactions, continued, "Regarding this worrying situation, I have two questions: has Luis been diagnosed with an issue that may explain his behavior?"

And what is the school doing to ensure his inclusion in the classroom, in accordance with the National Inclusion Policy?”

Marta had never worked with special needs children before and, due to her inexperience, she felt unsure about the best way to act in that type of situation. For her, it was an opportunity to have an educational conversation with her colleagues that would allow her to expand her knowledge. However, she found that her questions had caused a bit of a stir among the teachers gathered there. The majority showed annoyance at a newcomer questioning the way the Laranja School taught its students.

Marta, in an attempt to defuse the tension in the room, added that, because she was unfamiliar with methods for working with special needs children, she wanted to know more about the subject. She went on to explain that she had some theoretical knowledge from her college studies and believed that future teachers should be taught much more about how to work with students with physical, psychological or behavioral limitations who are diagnosed as having special needs that require accommodation.

When Marta finished voicing her worries, the guidance counselor, Marilia, asked to speak and began to mediate the conversation, as it had seemed to generate a certain climate of irreversible tension. She began by saying, “I understand your concerns, Marta, but Luis’ family won’t allow the school to treat or teach him any differently than the other students.”

The family was completely closed to the idea that his aggressive behavior could be due to some kind of psychological condition. According to the guidance counselor, Luis’ mom claimed that he was only undisciplined and hungry for attention because of the birth of his baby sister.

It was then that Rosane, one of the teachers, interrupted Marilia and, with profound irritation, exclaimed, “I don’t know why we’re wasting time with this subject. I’m tired of this, and I think students like that shouldn’t serve as an excuse for us to divert our attention away from those who really need it.”

Rosane backed her argument saying that students like Luis were nothing more than a case of a simple lack of discipline, and that that was the reason students like him couldn’t get pass grades

during the semester. She then went on to emphasize that student evaluations were exactly the reason the meeting had been called in the first place.

In the face of this reaction, Marta decided to take the hint and follow the instructions she was given for the time being, as she felt she lacked good enough arguments to continue the conversation. Still, she disagreed with her colleagues and was determined to find a way to return to the subject at a more favorable time, which was bound to arise sooner or later.

THE CONFLICT

Unfortunately, Marta was justified in her concern. Several days later, Luis had an aggressive episode and, screaming, began to threaten the safety of his schoolmates and teachers. Martha, still reeling from the situation and faced with the risk that Luis might hurt himself or other students, confronted Afonso, the principal, and Marilia, the school counselor, asking them once again about how the school should conduct itself in such situations. If they did nothing, would the school be held responsible if someone got hurt during a new episode?

Faced with these questions, the administration decided to call another meeting with the teachers to try and find a resolution to the dilemma. Marta was hopeful about the new opportunity and believed that the Laranja School might be able to get assistance from local psychosocial support centers.

But Marta would be unpleasantly surprised.

During the meeting, the verdict was handed in: Luis' mother would be directed to look for another school for her son, one that would be staffed with professionals trained to provide for his special educational needs. For that group, there was a very fine line between inclusion and exclusion. They argued that the school was not prepared to provide an inclusive education, which they considered to be a specialized job that went beyond their role as teachers. The fact was that they had decided their school wasn't the place for Luis or any other student that presented them with similar challenges.

Another argument used in the groups' justifications was that the student's meltdown had set off a series of complaints from parents who found the idea of Luis having another episode around their children unacceptable.

"These parents are worried that we will lose control of the situation," said the principal.

The student would be excluded, or rather "transferred." Afonso thought that it might be better for Luis that way, as the school really didn't seem to be prepared to help him or show any interest in doing so. The failure to include the student, however, far from resolving the situation, made some of the teachers, both the ones directly and indirectly responsible for educating him, uneasy in a different way.

Though the student had shown visible signs of an emotional imbalance and maybe even some kind of mental health issue, what remained for the teachers was a feeling of powerlessness. Without knowing what to do and moved by Luis' case, those teachers questioned the position of some of their colleagues, feeling that it bordered on neglect. On the other hand, they also couldn't find a solid practical basis for a course of action in the current national policies regarding inclusive education, which proposed that all schools accept all students despite their particular situation, considering them all to be equally special cases.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. When talking about inclusive education, it's of the utmost importance that we rethink the role of formal education and search for new conceptions and concepts about educating individuals, and do so in a way that engages with the complexity of the subject. This being the case, what is the role of the school in the social structure that develops the processes that lead to the inclusion or exclusion of students with special needs?
2. There seems to have been a dispute between the family and teachers when it came to where the responsibilities of the family ended and where those of the school began toward students with special needs. Reflecting on discussions about educational and social policies regarding these students, what actions are or could be taken in your community to resolve or mitigate these challenges?
3. Efforts to provide an inclusive education to students with special needs are generally met with resistance from both family members and teachers who look for magic solutions that solve everything, which often leads to disappointment and frustration. Considering this point of view and that many family members and teachers from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds won't accept recommendations on how to work with students who have special needs, a reflection on this problem can lead to the following question: where is the school system going wrong?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the impact of schools not being prepared to educate students with special needs?
2. What should be done at schools and universities to make sure professional educators receive the support needed to successfully work with students who have special needs?

3. In the case of a school accepting students with limitations, whether they are physical or psychological, how should the students be taught?
4. Should schools accept all students regardless of their situation, even if they don't have the means to attend to their limitation adequately?

Challenges of Implementing Innovative Education at a Preschool

CASE

Marta had been the principal at the Escola da Mata for five years. She had moved with her family from the city of São Paulo to a smaller town in the same state in search of a life with greater meaning and purpose. She had left her job as the principal of a school that paid very well but suffocated her with a content-focused approach to teaching that used materials geared toward beginning a formal education during early childhood, something she disagreed with. She firmly believed that small children should be outside playing most of the time.

Therefore, the work of the Escola da Mata fit her like a glove. It was a non-profit preschool that served children aged 2 through 5 years old, in a rural area connected to a small and charming countryside town. She also liked the fact that it was 100% sponsored by a large industrial company in the region that sought to promote innovative Early Childhood Education and at the same time provide a quality preschool for its employees' children. Not being pressured to do things a certain way was a relief to her. She had had the experience of dealing with paying parents who considered themselves consumers making demands as how a service should be provided to them. Marta had found fertile ground, along with a dedicated team, for creating a very innovative educational program that had won several awards. The children had time to play outside, planted and harvested food, climbed trees, created

art, went for hikes in the forest, conducted scientific experiments and practiced meditation. It was the kind of comprehensive development that she believed in.

As she was packing her bag for work that morning, she came across the month's mortgage pay slip for the house she had just bought, located right next to the school. Her dream was coming true.

A CONVERSATION AT SCHOOL

Luciana, the school cook, was the first to greet her that day. She had a tense look on her face and restlessness in her eyes. She tugged Marta by the arm over to the laundry room, saying that she had something important and secret to tell her. Keeping her voice low, she related that her neighbor, the mother of a former student, had gotten together with three other families of former students and went to the sponsors. The parents told them they had evidence that the Escola da Mata educational approach didn't work: their children had difficulty adapting to the town's public schools, the only option available for children to continue their education in the region. The kids had difficulty concentrating, wouldn't sit still, and weren't used to paper activities and assignments, and worst of all, didn't know how to read and write already when they started 1st-grade, like the other children in town.

Marta wasn't concerned at all by the news and assured her, "Don't worry, Luciana, those types of complaints from families are very common. With time, they'll see that the students adapt little by little. Do you remember Augusto?"

"I remember, Mrs. Marta. Augusto's family lives right next to me. I followed his situation very closely. His mother told me that he had a hard time when he started 1st-grade. He would have to spend recess doing extra school work and couldn't go out to play with the others. But after two months the boy took off. He got nothing but good grades."

"And that, Luciana, is why we don't have anything to worry about."

"But, Mrs. Martha, it's different this time! These families went to Mr. Paulo's office to complain."

“Don’t worry about that. Paulo knows the school’s methods very well and has always supported us.”

Marta gave Luciana a hug and asked her not to tell anyone else about what happened before going on with the rest of her day. She didn’t want the subject to turn into gossip between the school’s employees.

As she walked to her office, Marta remembered a meeting she’d had with Paulo several weeks before. During the meeting, she had given a short presentation on the school with images and financial data. At the end of the presentation, Paulo had asked her about the high teacher-to-student ratio and the absence of traditional subjects, such as mathematics. Because the meeting was short, Marta couldn’t properly respond to Paulo and left feeling a little frustrated. She tried to schedule another meeting with Paulo and the team of sponsors to answer his questions better, but without success.

She was still worried when she got to her office, *I shouldn’t have left that meeting without answering Paulo’s questions! Does he really understand the school’s methods?*

Marta’s contemplation was interrupted when the secretary entered the office, “Good morning, principal!”

“Good morning, Patricia!”

“Today I have good news and bad news. Which do you want first?”

“I’ll take the bad first.”

The toilets in the student bathroom are clogged again and Mr. Genaro, our maintenance person, is out sick.”

Martha sighed and thought about all the things she needed to resolve. Her mind wandered back to Paulo’s questions and his meeting with the unhappy families.

Patricia called her back from her musings, “Marta! What’s the matter? You looked lost there for a moment.”

“It’s nothing. I was just out of it for a moment... What’s the good news?”

“Remember how we were trying for weeks to schedule a meeting with Mr. Paulo and the team of sponsors? The company secretary just called me and scheduled a meeting for the day after tomorrow. Isn’t that great?”

Silence overtook the room for a few moments. Marta was confused: she didn't know what the good news was and what the bad news was. The fact that the toilets were clogged again reinforced her argument that the students' bathroom needed to be remodeled; while the much awaited meeting could involve ramifications from Paulo's questions and his conversation with the unhappy families.

Marta, mind back in the conversation, responded to Patricia with a humorless smile, "Of course it is! That's great that we could finally get onto their schedule."

A certain tension hung over the following days. Marta couldn't hide her worries and anxieties. When the day of the meeting arrived, she was ready to answer all the questions Paulo had asked during their last meeting. Nonetheless, she was shaking when she entered the company's luxurious conference room, holding her notebook close her chest, as if it were a good luck charm. Everyone was already there waiting. She took a deep breath, filling herself with courage. She looked each one in the eye with the certainty that everything was going to work out, and sat across from Paulo, who had a firm, determined look in his eye.

The secretary called the meeting into session, announcing the main item on the agenda: changes at the Escola da Mata.

The principal felt her heart sink instantly.

Paulo made a statement: "In light of recent events and on behalf of the sponsors, I request that you, Marta, enact several changes at the Escola da Mata in order to ensure more adequate service—"

On an impulse, Marta tried to interrupt Paulo, but the words wouldn't come out.

"—we contacted several educational consultants and have come to the following conclusions: 1. The curriculum of the Escola da Mata should be altered immediately; 2. Five-year-old students should be taught basic reading, writing, and math skills, with more of their schedule dedicated to Portuguese language and math exercises; 3. A semi-annual evaluation system should be put in place to monitor the students' educational outcomes, with the sponsorship being tied to these results as of next year."

After listening to each point presented by Paulo, Marta said, “But Paulo, our school has an innovative methodology!”

“An innovative approach and results must go hand in hand, Marta,” asserted Paulo, the sponsor. “Do your innovative work, but prove that the students can learn more and better than students at traditional schools.”

“It’s not a question of results, Paulo. It’s a question of choices, of ideals. Preschool is not the time to start teaching them formal content that belongs in elementary school. We need to be on the same page about what we mean by results. Making students learn how to read and write at 5 years old can be a violent process if they’re not ready for it.”

“But the children won’t be going to elementary school at our institution. They’ll be going to the public schools, where they’ll find many other children that already know how to read and write. Would not failing to give them the same kind of preparation also be a kind of violence?”

“But they know basic reading, writing, and math because the 5-year-olds’ classes spend the day in classrooms learning Portuguese and math lessons, while our students are outside, learning a variety of different things through exercises that involve different styles of learning. It’s a very high price to pay.”

“We believe in your ability to overcome this challenge, Marta. That’s why we hired you for this position. Furthermore, the image of the company has always been one of success and good results, and the parents’ perception is that their children are failing.”

Marta didn’t know what to do. She believed in the revolutionary approach of the school. She knew how much learning time was precious and needed to be used in favor of the comprehensive development that she worked so hard to promote, but she depended on the sponsors to continue that work. She also needed to represent the interest of the teachers who devoted years of their lives to create the program. She knew she could count on many parents’ support, but what she didn’t know at that moment was what to do about the fact that the children were not at her school for very long and, once they left, would need to adapt to the rules of the system. It seemed there was no way out.

CONCERNS

After a sleepless night, she called a meeting with all of the teachers to communicate the changes they would have to make to the school's program from then on. Marta was torn, literally off balance, to the point of beginning the meeting by greeting everyone with, "Good morning," even though it was the beginning of the evening. The teachers all sat facing each other around a round table in a small room. Some of them noticed how nervous the principal was.

She went on in a shaky voice to present the subject of the meeting, "I called this special meeting to inform everyone of some changes to the Escola da Mata's methodology."

The room broke out into an uproar. Marta knew that she was about to be buried in an avalanche of question and challenges. The group of teachers wasn't very used to receiving announcements without discussing the subject to exhaustion first.

Henrique was the first teacher to make himself heard, "Marta, I don't understand. What do you mean, 'changes to the Escola da Mata's methodology?' We didn't discuss this before. What is being changed? We need more time to decide on this together."

The principal was so nervous that she didn't even hear what the teacher said and continued, "Starting now, we're going to introduce the 5-year-old students to reading, writing, and math. We need to think of a way to incorporate a focus on Portuguese language and math into our activities, because that's what our sponsors and families value. If we don't produce the results they want, they'll shut us down. There's nothing else we can do."

The group resented this and a new uproar overtook the little room. It was like a bomb had gone off in that little corner of the school. The school management had been democratic up to that point. Everything was discussed among peers. Some went quiet while others began to attack the principal, who was visibly nervous. The tension in the room had come to a breaking point.

Clara, the youngest and newest teacher at the school, asked to speak, "I came to work at the Escola da Mata because of its innovative ecological literacy program. We're facing changes in our climate that could put an end to our species' existence on this planet

and there are still people that think learning the language of nature should be extracurricular?

“The children at this school can plant, harvest and cook food. They can compost. They know that natural cycles should be allowed to complete, that diversity is a value, and that operating in networks is more efficient than acting alone. The children in the city don’t even know the difference between an eggplant and a zucchini. Do you really think we’re giving priority to the wrong things?”

Clara was a young single teacher who came from a well-to-do family that supported her. She had traveled across Brazil for a year in search of new approaches to education. She had taken many courses on organic farming, permaculture, and natural cooking. She was convinced that ecological literacy was the only way to make the needed changes to Brazilian education and fought tooth and nail for it.

“Clara, we’re not going to eliminate the program, just dedicate a little more time to class work and more structured activities. Two hours a day may be enough.”

“You know how much time we spent planning this year’s curriculum and how many things we had to eliminate to include everything we thought was important to include. I don’t have to tell you that we’re going to have to give up something. You know this is the wrong decision. If you want to do this in the name of financial interests, count me out.”

“What if it’s what we have to do to keep the school open, Clara?”

“Make them understand that our program is what the world needs. Remind them of our purpose, Marta. That’s your job.”

One voice spoke up in defense of Marta: it was Livia, the teacher who had been at the school longer than anyone else. She had a degree in biology, but had left the field to raise her child. As her child grew, she fell in love with the field of education and went on to earn a degree in Education with a focus on non-violent communication and school assemblies.

Livia was a thoughtful person who believed that conflict led to growth. She had already seen many similar battles at the Escola da Mata. She wasn’t worried.

“No, that’s not Marta’s job only, Clara,” said Livia. “It’s all of ours. Our fight is not with the principal, but with a failed educational system, which still operates under the premise of producing workers for industry. We need to come together and show them that the children here learn Portuguese and math, along with many other things they may not even know about.”

Clara rebutted, “We already do that, Livia. But you know that counting the eggs the chickens lay in the chicken coup every day is not going to help them fill out worksheets, let alone math worksheets in their 1st-grade workbooks. That’s what we’re being told to prepare them for.”

Another teacher, Horacio, the only biologist in the group and an expert on children’s interaction with nature, made his position clear in a loud voice, “This school is a benchmark in innovation. You don’t have the right to destroy an important example like this! We’re building a new legacy for Brazilian education and we have a reputation to protect. What are we going to say to people visiting the school? And what if we’re ridiculed on our Facebook page? Are we going to make a post explaining that we changed our minds regarding the type of people we want to send out into the world? Are we going to say that exploring the forest, meditation and musical instrument classes, and round table debates don’t teach the students anything and that’s why we’re substituting these experiences with worksheets? And what about the awards we’ve won?”

Horacio was the teacher who clashed with the principal the most. He was a young man with many dreams and thought that Marta was very unprepared for her job. Nonetheless, he was sure he was only passing through the Escola da Mata, as his desire was to travel the world and give courses and seminars on the relationship between children and nature.

The atmosphere in the room continued to become tenser and tenser as the teacher spoke and banged his fists against the table. Marta could barely breathe. That was when the phone rang. She looked at the number and saw that it was her house. She asked the group to excuse her for a moment and walked out of the room to answer. It was her husband, saying that he needed money to go to the pharmacy, as their 5-year-old was feeling sick. Marta’s hus-

band had been unemployed for six months and she was the sole provider for their family. The principal hung up the phone telling her husband that she would be home soon.

“How can you throw a bomb in our lap and then just walk away like that? Are you going to leave us to deal with this situation by ourselves?” asked Clara indignantly.

Marta was a very private person, who didn't like to involve the faculty in her personal problems. Therefore, she decided not to explain the situation to them and called an end to the meeting.

Horacio left the room furious, shouting in a mixture of anger and sarcasm, “The Escola da Mata is dead!”

Mercedes, one of the custodians, not knowing what had happened, asked him, “What do you mean the Escola da Mata is dead?”

“It's dead because I'm leaving. I'm not going to stick around to watch this school become like all the other ones in this district!”

“But so many children here need this school, Horacio. And what about those of us who need this job, what are we going to do, dear boy?” said Mercedes, thoughtful and worried as she stood and rested the end of the broomstick in her hands against her chin and watched the teacher walk away without answering her question.

In two days, they would have the bimonthly meeting with the students' families, who were divided in their opinion of the news about the school, which had already gotten out, and wanted to know the official position of the school's direction.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are both the challenges and opportunities of implementing an innovative educational program?
2. How does one manage the expectations of the students' families that are based on traditional evaluation methods?
3. What is the best way to ensure that the innovative education given to the students in preschool will survive the following years at institutions that use traditional methodologies?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. After the decision that was made, how could the Escola da Mata continue to meet its objective of not only preparing good workers for the market, but also global citizens?
2. What could be done? Should they comply with the sponsors' request to change the program or defend the innovative method created by the faculty as it is?
3. What would be the best way to deal with the situation with the faculty at the Escola da Mata?

PART II

External Aspects

Drugs at School: Whose Problem Is It?

CASE

It could have been just another regular day at that school located on the outskirts of Brasília, but that day would remain carved in memory of that community forever. Education, health, and security are fundamental rights guaranteed by the Brazilian constitution, and cooperation between the sectors that provide for these rights is essential to the well-being of the population. Nonetheless, the high crime rates of the large urban centers plagued Brazilian society and not even the schools could escape the ensuing conflicts.

The students at one of the largest high schools in the federal capital felt the effects of the coordination between Education and Public Safety. The crime rates in the neighborhood where the school was located were among the highest in the district. A significant portion of the students grew up seeing their parents or other members of the family go to jail for selling drugs.

Near the institution, there was a large state prison, and many of the families of inmates moved there to be closer to their relatives. The school served around 3,000 adolescent and adult students, between the ages of 14 and 67 during three shifts (morning, afternoon, and evening). It was normal to see parents and children attend classes in the same period, as well as mothers and fathers in law with their sons and daughters in law, or aunts and uncles with their nieces and nephews, as the school adhered to the Adolescent and Adults Education modality (EJA for its initials in Portuguese, standing for *Educação de Jovens e Adultos*).

THE VICE-PRINCIPAL

Carolina had been working at the school as vice-principal for three years. She had always had a special interest in working with that community, as she believed that education could provide the possibility of a dignified life to its members, endowing them with knowledge and preparing them to be citizens who know their rights. However, it had not been an easy task, considering the precariousness of the facilities, lack of financial resources to invest in air-conditioned classrooms or a roof over the sports court, the lack of accommodating spaces for innovative classes, and the countless other obstacles that made advances and improvements difficult.

Even with all the obstacles the school faced, in the last several evaluations conducted by the government, it had presented significant improvements, which were the result of the collective efforts made by the administration, students, and especially, the teachers. They had developed extra projects along with renovating the curriculum with the goal of giving the students a place to both socialize and discuss successful practices.

However, there was no consensus among the faculty regarding the school's role in educating underprivileged citizens. The diverging perspectives and opinions rose to the surface on that cloudy Monday afternoon. The conflict mediation project, based on the concept of a culture of social peace, was still in the process of taking root. The concepts employed were based on the practice of non-violent communication and considered the way that the relationship between the parties involved directly affected learning. For some teachers, this project was primarily responsible for making the students at the school hungry for knowledge, as it was through it that the students had come to have a voice at the school. For others, the open-ended framework for interacting with the faculty could open the door for serious disciplinary issues, as it threatened the authority of the teacher and, as a result, could undermine the social order.

A HAPPY VISIT...

At the beginning of that afternoon, Carolina was overjoyed to have reunited with a former student that had been accepted to a university. They talked for a long time in front of the cafeteria about how the school had helped him have access to higher education. However, sitting on the wooden bench next to the main entrance late that evening, waiting for her husband to take her home, she recalled the conversation. She heard several students still chatting, a siren, and cars driving by on the street, but her feelings were conflicted, as she couldn't stop thinking about how that day, which had started out so well, could have ended in such a disturbing way.

That was when she remembered one of the mottos of conflict mediation: "Every conflict is an opportunity to promote learning." Her heart began to calm down slowly, her breath lightened, and she closed her eyes to appreciate the smell of food being prepared in the school's neighbor house.

... AND AN UNUSUAL INCIDENT

Something unexpected happened that same afternoon, minutes before recess. Carolina was caught off guard by a request from Danusa, the school principal.

"Carolina, I need your secrecy and discretion for what's about to happen in 2nd F high school class room," she said in a tone of voice that indicated that something very serious was about to take place.

Without hesitation, Carolina made herself available for another task that day.

Danusa was a teacher with more than 15 years of experience in the classroom, and was on her second term as school principal. The principals of the school were directly elected to their positions by the school community (teachers, teacher's assistants, students' parents etc.). Carolina quickly complied with her request: when she entered the 2nd F class room, the students were in physical education class. There were only two people in the room, both standing next to the teacher's desk: Mário, the 2nd-year chemistry teacher, and Mr. Igor, the chief of police.

“Good afternoon, Carolina. I don’t know if the principal has briefed you on the situation. There has been a report claiming that a package of cocaine has been hidden in this classroom and that one of our students is a drug dealer sought by the police. Out of respect for our school, the chief insisted in coming here himself to investigate the accusation and, when the students return to their classroom, the police will search everyone.”

The package of cocaine was found inside the classroom, behind a cabinet. The students were searched, one by one, but nothing was found on any of them. When it was all over and the police had left, Carolina and Mário went to the teacher’s room but before getting there, they were stopped by a student from the class. “Teacher, I don’t agree with what has just happened. Getting searched by the police is something I’m already used to, because the police’s biggest dream is to put in prison everyone. But it feels strange that it happened inside our school.”

THE TEACHERS’ REACTION

Carolina and Mário listened to the student respectfully, but avoided giving any more details about the situation. When they entered the teacher’s room, the principal was explaining to the rest of the teachers what had happened in the classroom of 2nd F group.

Before Danusa was even able to finish her explanation, Tarsila, a sociology teacher and a newcomer from another neighborhood, took the floor in a trembling voice, “What just took place at this school is an affront to our students’ rights. How can we teach at a school that reproduces the same injustices as our society? Look, when I arrived at this school, I could tell that the work being done here was different from all the others. The work you do here to bring about a culture of peace is excellent and should be applied to all situations. Even though I do not know the students of this community very well, my more than 10 years’ experience in the classroom tells me that we could have called on the suspected students and talked to them without the need for a police search.”

Tarsila had been transferred to that school due to a lack of vacancies for her subject area at the other schools in her neighbor-

hood. She was still adapting to her new workplace and the new approach to teaching. Finally, used to teaching younger students, it was her first-time teaching at a high school. She liked children so much that she had five of her own, all boys.

Showing clearly that she disagreed with her colleague's statement, Vitória, a math teacher, also spoke up, "I have authority to speak on the subject, because my son is a military police officer in another state and I know well the work that law enforcement officers do. As far as I understand, cocaine is not an educational issue, but rather a public safety one. Even if the accused is our student, it's the duty of this and any other establishment to call the police to resolve such an issue. Curbing drug traffic is a way to reduce this problem, which is not only being faced by this school, or even this neighborhood, but is, in fact, a problem of our entire society. Therefore, Mrs. Tarsila, I invite you to get to know the neighborhood in which you teach better before you start decrying the decision made by the school principal."

Vitória was close to retirement. She had dedicated 25 years of her life to public education. She lived half a mile from the school and came and went on foot—therefore, she knew better than anyone the problems of that area. She had been invited by the principal to become the vice-principal, but she declined, as it could have delayed her retirement, which was planned for the following year. Carolina had a great deal of admiration for Vitória, but had been, at the time, annoyed with her decision to decline her colleague's offer of the vice-principal position. Over the years, however, she had come to understand that the decision had opened the door for her to become the vice-principal, an opportunity for which she had dreamed.

The words of the teachers echoed in Carolina's mind. Still seated on the wooden bench waiting for her husband, she realized that she had been there for an hour. When the cold began to bite, she received a message from her husband letting her know that he was on his way.

A DICHOTOMY

Carolina went back and forth between thinking about her student that got into college and the situation she had experienced minutes after their conversation. What a dichotomy for just one day at work! The school was a vital, dynamic place, but on that particular day, it had left a different taste in her mouth. She understood both Tarsila's and Vitória's positions.

But what had bothered her even more, at that moment, was a call she received from the mother of one of the students who had been searched, "Carolina, my son told me that he was frisked by the police at school today and I would like to request his transfer to another class. I don't want him in 2nd F class anymore. The only place I feel he's safe is at school. Now I learn that there are criminals in his class? And that these criminals are hiding heavy drugs in his classroom? For the love of God, I want my son in another class immediately. I know my rights and, if he's not transferred immediately, I'll go to the press tomorrow."

REPERCUSSIONS

Until that phone call, Carolina had had no idea of the situation she found herself in. *How many other mothers will call with the same request? What should I tell them about the incident?* Her husband finally arrived and she went home, where, after such a difficult day, she would try to rest.

On her way home, Carolina continued to think about the teachers' meeting and how much everything had shaken up the school. Danusa had explained to her that she had been approached by the neighborhood police chief a week earlier to talk about the report alleging that several of their students were possibly involved in illegal drug trafficking.

The chief related that he had already authorized a search of their houses, but nothing had been found. The informants, however, confirmed the involvement of at least two people at the institution. A fact that puzzled the police was that the suspects were never seen on the streets, but always at the school or participating in social projects that the school coordinated in other places. Be-

cause of this, he would need the support of the administration and faculty to determine if the report was true.

Arnaldo's words in the teacher's room came back to her mind, "Danusa, even though I now understand the reasons that brought you to accept for all of this to happen at our school, I believe that the situation still should have been discussed with the teachers and employees. After all, we can't accept that such a serious decision be made by you and your team alone.

Since the implementation of the culture of peace project, we have been convinced that group decisions should be honored, even by those who disagree with the majority. How can we trust one another after this?"

Danusa lowered her voice and slowly finished, "Mr. Arnaldo, it's part of how the police operate and it was fundamental to the investigation that the least amount of people knew what was about to happen, that way no one could interfere. What's more, the police have not ruled out the involvement of school employees in the situation."

After that last statement, everyone went quiet. It was the longest silence that room had ever seen. The teachers sat there just looking at each other and no one said another word. That phrase had shaken everyone to their core. Vitória, Arnaldo, Carolina, Danusa, and Tarsila looked at one another as if they were asking for someone to break the awkward and deafening silence. As if by magic, the bell rang, announcing the end of that school shift. Everyone left, except Carolina, who would be waiting for her husband for a long while.

SINCERELY,

When Carolina arrived home and began to put her things in the closet, she noticed a note fall from her planner:

Good afternoon, Mrs. Carolina!

I didn't come to you in person because I was worried about what my classmates would think of me, so I decided to write you this note. The school really needs to do something and not let drugs take over our

school like they've already taken over our city. My son takes drugs and I would be happier to know that the school won't let this happen within its walls. Please don't tell my son about this note, as it is nothing more than the confession of a father that cries himself to sleep every night asking God to help his son escape the world of drugs.

Sincerely,

Felipe

Felipe was the father of one of the students and a custodian at the school. He had never spoken with Carolina, as they worked different shifts. The vice-principal had no idea how that note had gotten into her planner. Nonetheless, she felt honored to receive the message.

As she lay in bed, Carolina realized that she was in the middle of a real dilemma. The next day would be extremely important to how the school would move forward from there. Various aspects had to be taken into consideration to analyze an event like that one. The drugs were found and that was indisputable, but what is the role of the school in public safety situations that go beyond the realm of education? Do schools have the autonomy to resolve all of their own conflicts or do they need to resort to other sectors of society in some cases? There was still a long road ahead, but no doubt that everyone wanted the best for that school and everyone connected to it.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. When there is no consensus between the teachers of a school regarding issues that affect everyone, what role falls to the principal: mediating the discussion or determining the school's strategy?
2. The police search occurred within the classroom of a school. Could this situation have been handled in another manner?
3. There is no doubt that there should be a certain level of integration among all the public services provided to a community, but to what extent should one sector cooperate with another?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What would you have done in Carolina's shoes?
2. Do you agree with Arnaldo that everything should be discussed collectively?
3. When Danusa, the principal, was approached by the chief of police, could she have responded in a different manner?
4. What would you say to the student's mother who called Carolina asking to transfer her son to another class?
5. To what extent could or should law enforcement operate within an educational institution?

Is School a Place for Aggression?

CASE

Is school a place for aggression? Regardless of the group to whom this question is posed, the answer will always be a unanimous “No!” That’s the consensus; hours and hours of class time that, when added together, make up days, weeks, even months are spent telling students that “Aggressive behavior in the school environment is unacceptable,” or rather, that school is a place for listening, dialogue, and affection. But this being the case, how does one explain what happened at a public elementary school in São Paulo, more specifically, in one of its 8th-grade classes?

What kind of school was it in which the occurrence took place? The institution was founded in the 1970s, on the outskirts of a city that was experiencing exponential growth. During its first 20 years of operation, there had never been a major problem, but as of the 1990s, due to the large number of students enrolled, the number of interpersonal conflicts increased, as did disciplinary issues, in addition to a slight drop in the quality of the education provided there.

A LOT OF TALK

The specific event that the author would like to relate here occurred in 2005, when the number of public schools was, just like today, too low for the numbers of students and, therefore, had to operate during four shifts: one from 7:00 AM to 11:55 AM, another from 12:00 PM to 2:55 PM, one more from 3:00 PM to 6:55 PM, and the last one from 7:00 PM to 11:00 PM. At the time, the school had approximately 1,800 students, which meant there was a great deal of hustle and bustle between each shift. With only 5 minute-in-

tervals between shifts, and more than 450 students coming and going, there wasn't even enough time to clean the classrooms.

All of this traffic brought with it another problem for the school: the rush, the turmoil that took place in the halls and stairways that provided access to the classrooms. All the talk and concern from the teachers, vice-principals, and principals regarding aggressive behavior had everything to do with that moment, as a student that ran down the stairs would inevitably crash into another, who would then get angry and try to retaliate—chaos was sure to take place. There was, for example, the case of the girl who took great care with the wheeled backpack her godmother gave her and another girl, a little older, who didn't see her and walked right on top of it, trampling and creasing one side and immediately suffering retaliation in the form of verbal aggression combined with a punch to the stomach.

Anyway, every time the first class of the day started, regardless of the subject, the teachers would start their endless "chorus": "Boys and girls, settle down. No pushing, hitting or saying mean things to your classmates! Let's talk to each other nicely to resolve our problems."

It was believed that every problem could be solved with dialogue, at least that was the main instruction that the adults gave the children. When conflicts couldn't be solved through much needed and forbearing conversations, parents or guardians were called to the school and asked to help correct their children's behavior for the sake of a more harmonious school community. However, after several attempts, when not even that worked or more serious aggression was involved, the school would resort to suspending the aggressive student for a week.

On that 30th of March—a rainy day—the children and pre-adolescents were even more agitated than usual under the circumstances: something had put in check the principle of trying to resolve everything first and foremost through dialogue.

THE FIRST INCIDENT

Larissa, an 8th-grade student from class C, entered the vice-principal's office in a hurry with two hands pressed against her nostrils, which were bleeding. Luzia quickly rose to help the student, just like she always did in the face of any emergency or need.

Luzia had been a literacy teacher at the school from 1992 to 2002. She knew everyone and had good relations with all the members of the school community. In 2003, she was chosen by her fellow teachers to become the vice-principal, as the previous one had retired. During the previous three years as vice-principal, she had established a reputation for being a conciliator when it came to the relationships that arose within the institution. She was always ready to mediate conflicts and respond to the demands of the community; so all classes could take place under the best of circumstances. She knew most of the students (there were so many!) and she made a great effort to treat everyone very well and equally.

Larissa was a shy girl, who had spoken very little to Luzia. However, as they walked toward the bathroom that was close by, they spoke a great deal about what had happened. Larissa related that a classmate had punched her in the nose unexpectedly and unprovoked, just because she had asked him to stop yelling and running around the classroom, as she was trying to do an activity that required her to concentrate—a tall order in that situation. The classroom as already very noisy and the classmate was making it even worse.

At the time, Luzia thought that the teacher of that class had been absent that day and was already asking herself why one of the hall monitors hadn't informed her of the situation so that she could bring in a substitute or teach the class herself.

She had barely formulated the question asking which teacher was absent, when Larissa added, much to her surprise, "The worst thing, vice-principal, was that the art teacher was so busy taking care of her own stuff, she didn't even scold him. In fact, she didn't even notice that I came here looking for help..."

"Taking care of her own stuff"? What do you mean? What "stuff" was she doing other than teaching the class and disciplining the stu-

dents? Feeling upset, Luzia preferred not to ask the student anything else, as she had already inferred that what had happened in that classroom was unacceptable. After all, she had already talked to the art teacher twice regarding administrative issues and lateness, both when it came to arriving to class and handing in grades.

While trying to imagine what the new issue with the teacher would be, she helped the young woman clean up and, once she saw that the bleeding had stopped, went back to 8th-grade C classroom with her. As they walked, they talked a great deal about the incident, always with the premise that hitting never solved anything, that the boy was wrong to have attacked Larissa, who had done nothing more than make a request, and that the boy could have talked to her about it if he didn't want to do what she asked. When Luzia stopped at the door of the classroom, she encountered total chaos: students running in all directions and yelling all over the place, and the art teacher "taking care of her own stuff," just like the student had said.

THE SECOND INCIDENT

The art teacher didn't even notice Luzia enter the classroom with Larissa. She was engrossed in her personal problems, with bank statements spread across her desk, jotting down something someone was telling her over the phone. The vice-principal stood there watching the scene for 20 or 30 seconds. Then, in a dash, she let go of Larissa's hand, which she had been holding affectionately since they left the bathroom and, without thinking, headed toward the teacher's desk. Luzia yanked the telephone away from the teacher with one hand and, with the other, grabbed her by the arm and shook her, as if trying to make her see the gravity of the tumult that had overtaken her classroom. However, she was doing so with force. The phone fell to the floor.

The teacher, stunned, hadn't seen anything; she hadn't even known that one of her students had been hurt by a classmate and left for help. She was absorbed in her financial problems instead of teaching the class, even though it was during the time of day that she should be teaching. The students suddenly went quiet

and began to watch the scene: the vice-principal Luzia shaking the art teacher by the arm, demanding that she explain what she was doing and acknowledge the aggression that she didn't even realize had happened. The students were perplexed, trying to understand if what they were seeing was indeed aggressive behavior between the two adults.

They began to comment on what they were watching.

Mariana exclaimed, "Look, Luzia is attacking the teacher! She's the one always telling us to talk things out instead of trying to resolve things aggressively."

Another student, Pedro, replied, "But Luzia is right. That teacher doesn't pay attention to anything; she had to grab her by the arm. If not, how would she be able to get her attention?"

Startled, Janaína cried, "The vice-principal is really attacking the teacher!"

The teacher, trying to break free of the vice-principal, stammered as she explained that she was going through a very difficult situation at home, that her husband was unemployed, the banks wouldn't stop calling her about the loans, and she didn't know what to do anymore.

That was when Luzia began to realize, little by little, that she had let her anger at the teacher's lack of commitment to the class completely overtake her. She looked at the students, then at the teacher, and realized that she was acting physically aggressive on impulse, probably in the same way the students did every day, whom she had instructed never to do.

Now what?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How can teachers manage large classes? It is a reality that many schools in different parts of the world, both public and private, have to deal with and that often detracts from the quality of the classes. What strategies and didactic modalities can be applied to these cases?
2. What is the vice-principal's role at educational institutions, both regarding the students, as well as the teachers?
3. We know that only talking about the most desirable ways to co-exist at school doesn't work. This being the case, what is the best way to impress the right attitude upon children and adolescents?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Luzia had a student come to her office with a bloody nose after the student had been the victim of aggressive behavior and Luzia soon inferred that the teacher of the student's class was absent that day. Does the absence of a teacher or the hectic trip from one classroom to the next justify an environment in which aggression can occur?
2. It's important to think about and discuss Luzia's actions: why did she react in that way? What would you have done in her place? How would you have handled the conversation with the art teacher after that situation?
3. How can she revisit the incident and discuss it with the students who had witnessed it?

Daily Life in Areas of Conflict: What Is the School's Role?

CASE

Every day Patrick got up at 5:50 AM and started getting ready for work. He would take a shower and then drink his coffee while standing by the sink, without even enjoying it properly. It was a hassle to get his daughter Juliana out of bed and take her to school before work. Around 6:30 AM, he would drop her off at her school and continue on his way. He was 41 years old, had gray hair and was a history and sociology teacher. When he was a kid, he had studied at a public school and always emphasized the importance of education to everyone's lives. For him, it was the only currency that never lost its value. Patrick worked as the head principal at a public school on the east side of Rio de Janeiro.

DAILY VIOLENCE

The school where Patrick worked was in one of the most violent communities in that part of the city. The government didn't seem to concern itself much with the conditions in which the people of that community lived. When the government did act, it was in the form of brutal police crackdowns. The school had a student body of 378, between the ages of 12 and 17, studying at both the middle school and high school level. Most of them lived in extreme poverty with only very basic hygiene and healthcare. The principal had been in that position since 2014, which meant he had been in office for two years when the events in this account occurred. In the past, the school had been known as "the branch from hell," due to internal violence and threats leveled at teachers and other employ-

ees, which resulted in a high dropout rate. Various principals had come and gone.

The violence beyond the school walls was also very prominent and the residents of the neighborhood lived daily with its manifestations. The Rio de Janeiro state police frequently came into the community in search of drug traffickers and would search the residents' houses looking for the suspects. According to reports, all the residents were regarded as suspected criminals by the Military Police. It was a clear case of prejudice: the residents were poor, mostly black and living in a *favela* (Brazilian slum, also called *comunidade*, or community)—that was enough to make them all suspects. Shootouts happened all through the night and continued into the morning.

At the school, many felt that the students' parents and guardians were not nearly involved enough in their education. This bothered the administration a great deal. Everyone engaged with the students' education at school wondered, "How do we make the parents and guardians more active in the students' school life?"; "How can the school help make this happen?"

One day, Laisa, the vice-principal, had the idea of creating groups for all classes using instant messaging applications, which they would use to communicate information to parents about their children. The main idea, she said, was to strengthen ties between the school and the family, something that had been neglected by previous administrations.

AN UNUSUAL DAY, OR NOT SO MUCH

It was the 12th of May, 2016. Patrick got up at his usual hour and began the rush. Juliana, like always, took her time to get up. He then got in the car, which took a while to start that morning. He thought to himself, *As if it weren't enough that Juliana made me late for work, now it is the car!* After several tries, he got it to start and hit the road.

At the beginning of his daily journey to the school, the parents and guardians on the instant messaging groups began to ask if they would have classes that day. The first message was from class 1701

group, in which Eronilda, one of the guardians, asked if the school would be open that day.

Patrick, puzzled, already started to worry that something bad had happened, but he was driving and couldn't respond. Therefore, he sent an audio message asking, "Good morning, Mrs. Eronilda! Why do you ask?"

She responded, "Because the alley where I live, known as the Wetlands, is full of police looking for drug traffickers and there is a gunfight going on. We're laying on the ground waiting for things to calm down. Drug traffickers have already let off fireworks and everyone knows that it means that the *favela* is being taken over by the police."

It was, in fact, well known that drug traffickers that were on the lookout let off fireworks to warn the others about a police crackdown.

Soon after, the family member responsible for Kaylane, who was in class 1803, wrote, "I'm not sending my daughter to school today, because I'm afraid. I request her absence be pardoned today."

This was all very worrying for Patrick the principal. There were no rules or protocols to follow in this case: should he close the school or keep it operating as usual?

ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL

Patrick continued on his way, feeling tenser, and began to think about what he would do if the crackdown wasn't over by the time he got to school. On the way to school, he always stopped in front of the vice-principal's house to give her a ride to work. While he waited for Laisa, his mind began to race. She had been vice-principal since 2015. An English teacher, she had a big dream: to someday visit an English-speaking country to improve her skills in the language that she had been studying and learning most of her 29 years. She was very dedicated to her educational activities and invested a great deal of her time in coming up with strategies to help improve the students' school performance.

The first questions she asked Patrick was, “Have you seen the WhatsApp groups for the classes? If you have, do you have an answer yet?”

The two began to debate if they should open the school or not. The vice-principal gave her opinion: “Patrick, I don’t think we should open the school. We’re getting bombarded by messages saying that the atmosphere in the community is very tense. Whether we want to or not, we can’t—we can’t even guarantee the safety of those who come to school.”

He responded, “But Laisa, what will we do with the students that come to class anyway? Send them home? Wouldn’t the school be the safest place for them? Let’s see if the police operation is being restricted to one focal point in the community. Maybe it will be far from the school and we can open it.”

On the WhatsApp group for the teachers, people also started sending messages asking if the school would have classes that day. They had already been made aware of the day’s rumors about the violence. To make things worse, Amanda, the religion professor, was part of the group. She was 58 years old and had an anxious personality that often led her to fall into catastrophic thinking—every little incident she was exposed to soon became the end of the world! Her reaction was understandable, as she had been diagnosed with a panic disorder and, after a long time in treatment, had come to manage it. Her greatest worry was that her mental health problem would return in full force.

Patrick and Laisa’s stress was increasing. What decision should they make? What would be the more sensible approach, to have or not have classes? Time was ticking and Patrick still didn’t have a concrete answer. The pair arrived at the school and everything seemed calm. However, thanks to years of experience working there, both knew that, when everything was quiet around the school, there was something wrong.

EMERGENCY MEETING

It was already 7:10 AM and the students would arrive at 7:50 AM. He had only 40 minutes to come up with a decision. He and Laisa

hastily called the teachers present into a meeting of the “Community School Board” to help them figure out what would be the most sensible decision in that moment.

Elisabeth, better known as Beth, was 55 years old and had been a school teacher for a long time, more than 15 years. She always had something to say, and took the floor, “Patrick, I would like to make it clear that this is not only about the students’ safety, but about our safety as well, both teachers and staff members. Opening the school in such a situation would be absurd! If anything happened to any of us here, we would hold you responsible for putting us in a dangerous situation.”

Patrick felt his face go red in a mix of anger and feelings of powerlessness before the situation. He knew that Beth always got excited when classes were canceled for any reason. He figured she was tired of being in the classroom and saw an opportunity for a day off, even in times of conflict like this.

Now Margarida, the geography teacher, who had taken on the role of a kind of conciliator during critical situations at the school, spoke up. Margarida was 37 years old, always calm and very dedicated to her students, she understood the transformative power of education. In a calming voice, unshaken by the situation, she said, “I think we could have class for the students who come, since it would be dangerous for them to go back home now. They could get caught in the crossfire between the police and the traffickers on their way home. How could these students go back home without any protection? What would happen to our conscience if we found out one of the children was hit by a bullet? It would be safer to stay here at school.”

These questions and concerns made Patrick more apprehensive than confident about what to do. At that moment he wanted nothing more than to simply disappear and not make any decisions, as anything he did could later reveal itself to be the wrong decision. His stress only continued to rise as he began to hear the voices of students arriving to school while he still didn’t have a definite answer.

THE RISKS

At that moment, Alana, the hall monitor, entered the room. Only 33 years old, she was one of the employees who had been at the school the longest: 13 years. She knew almost all the students by name. She entered the room out of breath, having just climbed three flights of stairs, and reported that around 180 students—about 50% of the student body—were waiting in the courtyard to find out if they would have classes.

“Would it be fair if half the school had classes and the other didn’t?” asked Patrick.

At that very moment, a message came in from one of the students’ parents in class 1902: “I already sent my daughter to school and went to work. I hope you’ll have classes. Otherwise, she’ll have to go back and stay home alone.”

The school was the only one in the area that taught grades 6 through 9. All of the students were adolescents, which made the situation worse: when the drug traffickers fled the police, they tried to hide among the students. Patrick reminded those present that on another occasion three strange armed men had entered the school and asked for uniforms to pass as students and hide from the police that were searching the community. He explained to the teachers that it had been very difficult to contain the situation—he had had to show the criminals the storage room, where there had been no extra uniforms they could use, as they would only leave once he had proved it to them.

Carlos Henrique had worked at the school as a judo instructor for a little more than two years. He was a young man of 25 years old with a promising career. Being a national champion in Brazil, he sought to encourage students to get involved in sports. Always perplexed by the violence that surrounded the school, he asked to speak, “Something similar to what Patrick said about the strange men from outside the school happened to me. The other day, on the school sports court, there was a guy who, when he realized that the police were coming into the community, climbed over the wall and told a student to keep a pistol inside his backpack for him. I saw that the boy didn’t want to do it, but couldn’t say no; otherwise he might face reprisals after the situation passed. My hands

were tied. The only thing I could do at that moment was to finish class on the sports court and take all the students to their classroom. We left a volleyball practice class for a theoretical class on basketball. For this reason, on days like this, I'd prefer that we suspend classes."

THE DECISION

Patrick was anxious to come to a decision and asked for a vote. On that day, those in favor of not having classes won. Tightness in his chest, the principal asked Laisa to send a message to all of the instant messaging groups informing everyone that there would be no class that day. The message said the following:

*Dear parents and guardians, good morning!
Unfortunately, all classes are cancelled for today. As most of you already know, it is too dangerous in the community today for the students to come and go. We thank you for your understanding.*

The Administration.

Patrick had the feeling that the decision made wasn't the right choice, as he believed that the school was the safest place for the students in the community. He knew the importance of that giant four story tall building to protecting the students. Nonetheless, he couldn't make the decision alone, as the school had always made democratic management of its affairs a priority.

Patrick went to the front of the school, looked out onto the community and saw a certain tranquility. Far off on the horizon, there was only a pillar of smoke. It was the well-known "black bridge," i.e., the smoke of burning tires set on fire in the street by drug traffickers to warn others that the police had entered the community, as well as to prevent vehicles from passing. With a cup of coffee in his hand, he felt a certain anguish thinking about the children who were making their way home in the midst of such violence.

A MOTHER'S PAIN

The principal went back to his office and began to do paperwork. Suddenly, a woman of about 30 years of age appeared asking for the principal in a loud voice. It was Wendel's mother, a teenager in class 1803. He had been going back home and, halfway there, was harassed by the police.

The mother came to Patrick exasperated, "Are you the principal? I want to tell you that it was very irresponsible for you to send the students that were already here home! My son ran a huge risk of being taken as a thug and end up getting shot! If anything happens to him, you can bet that I'll sue you! Do you by any chance have children? Put yourself in my place. Would you like your child to be put in danger because their principal was being irresponsible?"

Patrick promptly responded, "Ma'am, after an exhaustive meeting, the Community School Board thought it was better to cancel classes due to the tension in the community. You can be sure that we made the decision with the intention of protecting the students."

The mother asked that it never happen again. However, the principal knew that police operations in search of drug traffickers were a constant fact of life in the community. What decision would they make the next time?

REFLECTION

Once again, Patrick called on Laisa, the vice-principal, and asked her if they had made the right decision. It upset her to learn that the students went home without any security. He drank one more cup of coffee to try to calm himself, but his feelings of guilt continued to haunt him.

At 5:00 PM, after an exhausting day, Patrick ran his hands through his hair and, when he looked down at the floor, saw a wad of paper. He kicked it in an attempt to vent all the tensions that he had accumulated that day. As he closed the school soon after, he felt certain that it wouldn't be the last time he had to choose between opening or closing it, and went home with the feeling that there would be no right solution to the problem.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Do you think that teachers and students should go to school on days that there is violent conflict in their community?
2. In an area of conflict, is it more dangerous for a student to go to school or stay home?
3. If you were a teacher at the school featured in the case, what position would you take during the “Community School Board” meeting?
4. Should the “Community School Board” create a policy regarding such days or evaluate what to do on a case-to-case basis, depending on the circumstances?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are there cases in which a school's management finds themselves facing dilemmas that require immediate responses? How can the management find the “best” solution for situations like those described in the case?
2. What would justify opening or closing a school?
3. Is the responsibility of schools in violent underprivileged communities only to teach or also protect their students in dangerous situations?

Repercussions of Domestic Violence on the School Environment

CASE

Clara came to the teachers' room at the Tradição school looking for Maria, the Portuguese teacher, who was having coffee with their colleagues during an interval.

“Come here, I need to talk to you urgently,” said Clara, who was visibly distressed and didn't say hi to anyone else.

Everyone was surprised by her behavior, as she had always been very warm and friendly with everyone. Something serious had happened. Maria left her cup of coffee on the table and both retreated to a corner in the large teachers' room.

“Did you see that André is wearing a cast on his hand?” Clara asked her colleague and, without waiting for a response, added, “It was his father who broke it.”

THE TEACHER

Clara had been working at the school since it opened six years before, teaching history to the students in grades 6 through 9. At the beginning, it was only another school with just more students, but time had created affectionate bonds and a sense of mutual respect between her and her students, strengthening the relationship between them. Now, they were her boys and girls, and she felt proud to be able to offer them an attentive ear and sincere affection, in addition to an education.

The teacher lived in another part of the city, an upper-middle class neighborhood, and traveled the 12 miles that separated the school and her house always feeling motivated by the possibility of making a difference in the lives of those children. The Tradição school was a private institution of approximately 2,000 students located in a neighborhood far from the downtown area of the city, where there were few job opportunities available. There were retail shops, banks, shopping malls, and a varied transport network in the area. According to the official data, the population of the neighborhood was composed of low-income families with an average level of social vulnerability. The school was part of a private system maintained by members of the Military Police Corps for children of military and civil police, that offered better quality education than the public-school system did. Tuition fees were directly proportional to the salary of the student's parents or guardians, and the children of both corporals—the highest rank in the Corps—who paid full tuition, and of soldiers, who received large scholarships, studied at the school. Orphans of police officers received a full grant. The school also accepted children that lived in the surrounding area who were not related to the police corps.

STUDENT ANDRÉ AND HIS SISTER ISABELA

André, 12 years old, was in 6th-grade, and his sister, Isabela, 5, was in kindergarten. He was a gentle boy, who learned more slowly than the other students in his class. He had gaps in his writing and reading abilities that had been accumulated over his years in elementary and middle school. His participation in the classes was irregular: he was sometimes attentive and interested, asking questions and making pertinent statements; other times he would sleep with his head against his desk or play around with his classmates while they were supposed to be doing their work.

Isabela was a sweet little girl who was very affectionate. Her teacher always commented on how she charmed the other students. Intelligent and constantly wanting to be helpful, she always completed her tasks promptly and never complained. She and André were very close. She was proud to have an older brother that

took care of her, washed her clothes, made her food, and helped around the house, and she would tell everyone that.

The boy confessed to Clara and Maria that he thought he wasn't very smart and recognized that he had a lot of difficulties.

That's why he often played around with his classmates during class, as an attempt to stop being a target. He wanted the class to think that he understood everything taught in class and, therefore, could play during class time; that it wouldn't make any difference for him.

Some teachers, like Clara and Maria, sought to involve him in the class activities, encouraging his participation. Others felt that the boy's behavior was disrespectful and often sent him to the principal's office with a reprimand, a serious punishment at the school. There were also the indifferent teachers, who believed that the role of an educator was restricted solely to teaching educational content and if the students didn't show the expected performance in their studies, the responsibility was theirs alone and due to a lack of effort. For these teachers, a student sleeping in class was nothing other than one less problem to be resolved.

CLARA AND MARIA

Both teachers were very dedicated to their work, which brought them together and led them to form a solid friendship that distanced them somewhat from their other colleagues, who fulfilled their roles in more bureaucratic ways and weren't very involved with the children. With master's degrees in their respective fields, they shared the conviction that education could transform people's lives and that well-educated children were better prepared to make good choices in their lives.

They were upset about what had happened to their student and searched their memories for previous signs of violence that may have gone unnoticed by them.

"Have you noticed how André always comes to school with sleep still in his eyes, all disheveled, and wearing a shabby, slightly dirty t-shirt?" asked Clara.

"I have," responded Maria, expressing sympathy for the boy.

“And if you come close to him, you’ll notice that he doesn’t always brush his teeth.”

Clara related her conversation with André. He had gotten into an argument with his father when the latter had gotten home at 2:00 AM from working at a nightclub, where he was a security guard. The father was furious that the boy hadn’t done all of his chores; on top of that, he had to sign another warning from the vice-principal. During the argument, he had slapped André and threw him to the ground. André had tried to cushion the fall with his hands, when he felt a terrible pain in one of them. His hand swelled and his father took the boy to the emergency room, where they found a bone fracture in his hand and put a cast on it.

Dismayed by the situation, both decided to take the matter to the principal. They knew they had a duty to report cases of violence suffered by their students, and the school had the obligation to report them to Child Protective Services. Not reporting such cases could even result in a lawsuit against the school for negligence.

THE PRINCIPAL

Isabel, the principal, had worked in the Tradição school system for many years. She was an extrovert with a degree in Education, but had never specialized in a particular area or taken any further courses. She was very dedicated, and kept the school functioning in an organized manner, despite never involving herself directly in the pedagogical aspects of the school. She imposed limits and goals on the teachers, and expected them to adhere closely to all rules, which were many. She was well-respected, even though everyone recognized that she didn’t know how to deal with situations which were not explicitly covered by the rules. She was a “hard-liner.”

Clara and Maria introduced the subject commenting that the boy didn’t seem to receive much care at home. He had related to them that he washed his own clothes and was responsible for making his sister Isabela’s lunch when he came home from school.

Isabel listened to everything attentively, but from the position of a bureaucrat. She opened André’s file on her computer. There all the notes on all the times he had not turned in homework or re-

ceived warnings for disciplinary issues or lack of dedication in the classroom were registered. Finally, she said, "His father is a corporal in the Military Police and the times I've called him to my office to talk, he caused problems. He didn't want to leave his weapon with Security at the door, as required by the school's regulations." And she added, "He's a 'tiger.' Those guys always cause problems."

"Tiger" was a designation that some members of the Corps received. They were violent officers who didn't always follow the rules, especially those meant to contain their own violent actions. There were places that encouraged that type of behavior.

The two teachers argued that they were aware that André's father was a police officer, but he had attacked the boy and the school had to report him to Child Protective Services to protect his children from abuse and other violent acts.

Isabel then related the details of a conversation she had had with André's father on another occasion. He had told her that André and Isabela's mother had fallen for another man and abandoned the family when their daughter was only 2 years old and the boy was a bit older than 9. Since then, he has taken care of both children and did all he could to give them a good education, as he knew his profession involved a high level of risk. If something serious happened to him, there would be nobody to take care of them until they became adults.

Despite the fact that he cared for the children, the life he led and the way he took care of them was far from adequate for raising two healthy children. The stress from his profession and his second job as a security guard at night could put them at risk.

The more the principal explained the situation, the more worried the teachers were and the less certain they were about the best course of action. The father seemed to in fact care about his children. However, to keep them in school, he couldn't be given a warning. If a report was made to Child Protective Services, the school would have to communicate it to the Corps, which would result in disciplinary action that could lead to the two children losing their partial scholarships. That could put their enrollment at the school at risk, as their father didn't have the means to pay the full tuition.

Isabe, however, saw in the situation an opportunity to solve one of her problems, “Let’s report him. The boy is a bad student and all he does is lower my quality indexes. I hope he leaves.”

Clara and Maria realized then that bringing the problem to the principal wouldn’t result in a quick and simple solution. They argued that it would be better to take some time to reflect more on the situation and talk with the other teachers before deciding on a course of action; after all, if they reported the father to Child Protective Services for the incident, the children would have to leave the school and have fewer opportunities to receive a quality education. It had been the first time that the boy had showed up with signs of having suffered violence and it could have been only an unusual situation that wouldn’t happen again. On other occasions, he had referred to his father as someone he respected and admired.

As Clara and Maria were leaving the principal’s office, she added that the father’s family lived outside São Paulo and didn’t have any contact with the children’s mother’s family. If the father lost custody over the children, they would be placed in an orphanage. Asking him to come to the school and talk could also be a risk—if he felt threatened, he could transfer the children to another school, a possibility he had already raised when he was called in to explain why the children didn’t do all their homework.

The teachers needed to decide if they were going to report André and Isabela’s father to Child Protective Services or not. The report would result in an investigation within the Corps, which might make matters much worse for the children. If the father became unemployed, he could lose custody over the children and, because the whereabouts of their mother was unknown, they could be taken to an orphanage. Even if Child Protective Services resolved to keep the children with their father, in the hypothesis that it was found that he wasn’t a danger to them, he could lose their scholarships and the children would no longer attend the school. However, not reporting him meant leaving the children at the mercy of a violent person, who might attack André again, or even Isabela.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Is it possible to justify the use of physical violence by a father to discipline or punish his child? Does the fact that it happened once indicate that it could happen again?
2. Is it right to judge how a father disciplines his children?
3. Should the teacher follow the rules and laws without question or is it necessary to take what is best for the children into consideration?
4. Is separating the children from their father to guarantee that they will never fall victim to violence by his hands again the best option?
5. If the father took the children out of the school for being reported, but maintained custody over them, would the children's lives be better?
6. If a report wasn't filed and the father attacked the children again, could the teachers and institution be accused of negligence?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is an educational institution capable of deciding what's best for a child's education or is that the sole role of his or her family?
2. Is it possible to identify signs of violent abuse that a student might have suffered in a classroom of more than 30 students?
3. Where is the line between using physical means to discipline a child and violence?
4. How can an educational institution better serve children who are victims of a broken home? Is it part of the school's role?
5. Whose decision should it be to report or not an incident of aggression? Is it the decision of the teachers or the administration?
6. If a report wasn't filed and the father attacked the children again, could the teachers and institution be accused of negligence?

Low Student Count, High Basic Education Development Score²: The School that Could Not Close

CASE

News travels in a flash in small towns, like the spark of a gunpowder fuse. It was January and the rumor that shook that small town was that the Professor Robson Garcia school was about to close. In operation for more than 20 years and located in the Bela Vista neighborhood, the branch was attended by children from other neighborhoods, as well as the surrounding rural area. Unfortunately, crime had risen a great deal in that town, and Bela Vista had become a center of drug traffic. Alleging lack of security, several families had transferred their children to the school downtown, even if that meant a long walk to school or paying for transportation. For many families, the school was the very symbol that ensured them the safety of their children in a welcoming environment.

2. The *Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica*, known as *Ideb*, is Brazil's Basic Education Development Index. It was created in 2007 by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, known as *Inep*) and was formulated to measure the quality of national learning and establish goals for improving education. Source: <http://portal.mec.gov.br/conheca-o-ideb#:~:text=Ideb%20%C3%A9%20o%20%C3%8Dndice%20de,para%20a%20melhoria%20do%20ensino>.

Terezinha, the principal, opened her eyes to see that it was already time to wake up. Vacation was over and she had to go to work. Images of the previous year played in her head: children running through the courtyard, the *capoeira* class, which was a success, and the beautiful end-of-the-year party. She also remembered the various conversations she had had with members of the students' families and the teachers. It had not been easy to reestablish dialogue after the authoritarian actions of the previous principal, but she had managed to do so during her first year as principal. Above all, the importance of the school had become evident to that community.

She ate her breakfast and checked if her teenage daughters were ready to go to school. She put on her sneakers from which she was inseparable, and began the journey to work. As she herself liked to put it, the 30-minute walk to the school guaranteed that energy she needed to face the challenges of the day. While she was thinking about a reorganization of the library, her phone rang and she saw the name of the town's Secretary of Education appear on the screen, "Good morning, Suzana! Did you wake up early too?"

"That's right, Terezinha, there's lots to do at the beginning of the school year, as you well know."

"I sure do. Today we begin our planning and a reorganization of the spaces at the school."

"That's great. But I'm calling because the mayor would like to talk to you, today."

Upon hearing that, Terezinha stopped walking, "Of course. Go ahead and schedule it. But why so urgent?"

"I can't tell you on the phone, but it's related to the school. Can it be today at 2:00 PM at the city hall?"

"Sure."

"We'll see you then."

The call worried Terezinha so much that she stood paralyzed. She had a bad feeling, but soon dismissed it. *I'm going to have to reorganize my schedule today*, she thought as she started walking again, now at a faster pace.

As soon as she arrived at the school, she heard someone call her name, "Terezinha, Terezinha!!!" Margareth, mother to a student named Gustavo, was running breathless down the street.

“Good morning, Margareth! Take a breath, I’m not going anywhere.”

“I need to speak with you. It’s urgent!”

Everything seems urgent today, and it’s still morning, thought the principal. “Of course, let’s go inside and we can talk.”

“That’s OK, we can talk here. I’m very worried. I just heard at the grocery store that the mayor is going to close the school.”

The thought that had gone through Therezinha’s mind after the phone call from Suzana returned in full force: was the Department of Education re-evaluating whether to keep the school open? She didn’t let her worry show and reassured the mother, “Don’t worry, Margareth. I haven’t heard anything about that. I’m here and I came to work today, you see?”

“But every year it’s the same thing,” complained the mother, very frustrated. “They threaten to close the school because there aren’t many students.”

“But last year we worked very hard and everyone saw how important the school is to Bela Vista, didn’t they?”

“That’s true, Terezinha. You and the teachers are very dedicated, and those of us that live in this neighborhood know that. But you’re not the ones who decide if the school stays open or not.”

“Margareth, I don’t have any information about the matter. What I can tell you is that today we’re going to start planning and preparing the school for the children’s arrival.”

The mother left feeling a little more at ease, as she had absolute trust in Terezinha. Little did she know, it was the principal that was worried now.

LOTS OF DATA AND A DECISION

Terezinha’s suspicions were confirmed right at the beginning of the meeting. The mayor and his advisors presented a variety of figures that demonstrated the high costs of the school.

The principal argued that the school was important to the neighborhood, adding that the families were very involved and it provided the full-time students with an environment that guaranteed their safety and education.

Nevertheless, the mayor declared, “Terezinha, I recognize your commitment and the importance of the school, but the children will be transferred. We can’t keep a school open for only 60 students.”

“But Mr. Mayor, as I explained, the school is one of the best places these children have. Many have all their meals with us.”

“We will guarantee that all that will continue at the other school,” asserted the mayor briskly.

“But the children will have to walk for a long time and there’s no guarantee that there will be openings for everyone in the full-time classes.”

At that point, the Secretary of Education, Suzana, spoke up, “We’re working on that, Terezinha. We only need to make a few adjustments.”

“You have shown me various figures, but you’re forgetting one thing: the residents of Bela Vista won’t accept the closure of the school. This very morning, a mother came to me concerned about that possibility.

“That’s why I’m asking you to call a meeting with the families this Thursday. We will set out the reasons for the community and guarantee that the children receive a quality education,” said Suzana, and with that she called the meeting to a close.

Terezinha left the city hall devastated. All the work her team, both teachers and staff members, had done had gone unrecognized. Many figures were presented, but they failed to point out that the school had obtained the highest Ideb score in the municipality. However, it seemed that the “high cost per student,” as the Secretary of Finance had put it, counted more than a quality school for underprivileged children.

A SENSE OF INSECURITY ENSUES

As much as she understood the importance of the school, Terezinha knew her position’s boundaries, and felt powerless in the face of the school’s imminent closure. Nonetheless, she needed to talk to the faculty and staff and still call the meeting with the families that the Secretary of Education had requested.

The next two days consumed all of the principal's energy. Many families came to the school worried and questioning the reason for the closure. Terezinha attended to everyone as well as possible, ensuring them that everything would be answered at the meeting with the Secretary of Education. In her conversation with the teachers and staff members, she passed along all of the information she had received, but could no longer hide her dejection.

After listening attentively, Mônica, a teacher who had been at the school for 15 years, and was feeling discouraged said, "Terezinha, it's been five years that they have been talking about closing this school. I'm tired, you know? It seems like they don't even recognize all the work we've put into this place, not to mention the insecurity of not knowing where I'm going to work. I love this school, I love the children, but I'm starting to think it will be better to close the school after all. That way the problem is over and done with."

Terezinha saw several heads nod in agreement with Mônica. She hadn't even thought about how insecure the situation must have made her colleagues feel.

It was then that she heard the voice of Gustavo, the physical education teacher, who said, "Mônica, I see where you're coming from. In fact, all of us have felt that way. But we can't forget how important this school is to the children and to the community."

Lúcia, the school secretary and resident of Bela Vista, added, "That's right, everyone. I live here and I know how much this neighborhood needs this school. You know what I don't understand? The problem here is not with the number of students, but the crime. I haven't seen any concrete action from the mayor to try and guarantee our safety. If this neighborhood was as quiet as it was before, the school would have more students. We've lost students over the years because the neighborhood became violent."

A TURBULENT MEETING

"We won't accept the closure of the school!"

"The problem is not the school. The problem is the violence, and the mayor doesn't do anything about it."

“If they need to save money, they should cut something else, not our children’s education!”

From the door, Terezinha listened to the parents’ indignant words. Suzana and her advisors found themselves in a room full of mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers who were visibly tense. The secretary gave various explanations for the need to close the school and guaranteed that the students would go to the school downtown.

Maristela, a city councilwoman and a local resident, was asked by the families to participate in the meeting and spoke in defense of the school. One of the advisors tried to rebut the concerns she raised, but it only served to increase the tension. Many parents began to say that they wouldn’t accept the school’s closure and that, if necessary, they would conduct a sit in at the city hall. As far as they were concerned, the neighborhood had already been sufficiently neglected by the town’s administration and, on top of that, they wanted to close the best thing about it: the Robson Garcia school.

Suzana realized that closing the school would be more difficult than they had anticipated. With no more room for explanation, she gathered her things and retreated with her team.

EVERYONE’S INVOLVEMENT

Two days after the turbulent meeting, Terezinha received a call from Suzana telling her that, after a new evaluation, the school would no longer be closed. Oh, what glorious day for Bela Vista! There were even fireworks! For Terezinha, the joy soon turned into a sense of even greater responsibility. She remembered very well the warning given by the Secretary of Education over the phone: “Terezinha, the school won’t be closed this year, but you can’t lose any students. Ideally you should get more students to enroll.”

The principal’s first action was to call a teachers and staff meeting, which included the secretaries, custodians and kitchen staff.

“Ladies and gentleman, thank you for coming. We are very happy that our school is not going to be closed.”

“Are we ever! We love working here!” affirmed Gustavo, the physical education teacher.

“I’m very happy to hear that,” responded Terezinha. But we can’t forget that we have a big challenge ahead of us: the school can’t lose a single student. In fact, it would be better if we had more children enroll.

“But there is still a lot of prejudice against our school, because we’re here in a poor neighborhood. Even parents who live here in the neighborhood send their kids to the school downtown. And there’s still the violence,” reminded Carmen, a 4th-grade teacher.

“So, our challenge is to show the neighborhood and the entire town that we have done excellent work here. And that we have a well-organized school that is a safe and happy place for the children to learn and grow. I know I can count on you all!” declared a hopeful Terezinha.

Dorinha, the school cook, asked to speak, “I live here in the neighborhood and I’ll talk to everyone. I can guarantee that there will be delicious and healthy food to help the children grow and learn. And good coffee for the teachers, because I know you all like it.”

DAILY CHALLENGES

For several days the feeling that something wasn’t right in the 2nd-year class, taught by Daniela, had been bothering Terezinha. She remembered well the time Marisa broke down in tears at the door of the classroom, refusing to enter because she didn’t want to take a test. Then the image of the substitute teacher came to mind as the children reacted to her arrival, applauding and insistently asking if she would return the next day. When she looked at the clock, the principal realized that it was already time to meet with Odete, mother to Renato, one of the 2nd-year students.

“Hi, Odete, how are you? We have a meeting today, right?”

“Yes, we do, Terezinha. I came here because I don’t know what to do anymore with Renato,” the mother confessed, visibly worried.

Terezinha noticed the worried look on Cláudia’s face, the school’s vice-principal, who was also in the room. “Odete, can you tell me more about what’s happening with Renato?”

“Terezinha and Cláudia, you both know Renato. He never had a problem with going to school, never ever. But for days now, he’s been crying and saying that he doesn’t want to come no matter what.”

“Did he tell you why, Odete?” asked the vice-principal.

Visibly uncomfortable, Odete responded, “Terezinha, you know that I love it here. I was one of the mothers who fought to keep the school open. After you became the principal, we saw that we could talk to you about things, that’s why I felt like I could come today. Renato has been complaining a lot about Daniela, his teacher, saying that she’s too picky. He doesn’t want to go to class no matter what, and if things keep going like this, I’m going to have to pull him out.”

“What does he mean by ‘picky’, Odete?” asked Terezinha.

“He says that the teacher only complains about him and his classmates, telling them that they’re lazy, and won’t let them go to the bathroom when they ask. Have you seen the homework she assigns them? The other day there were five pages that Renato couldn’t do. That’s wrong, Terezinha.”

The conversation went on for several more minutes. The principal assured Odete that she would look more into the situation and take the necessary measures. Once the mother left, she asked the vice-principal, “Cláudia, have you already spoken to Daniela about the excessive homework?”

“Yes, more than once. She won’t accept criticism and always says that the children don’t want to study and just mess around.”

“I know that Daniela is a very competent teacher content-wise, but the classroom, especially when the students are children, requires more than that. Care, patience, and respect for everyone’s time are essential to the children’s integral development. We need to find out what’s happening with the 2nd-grade class and resolve this issue.”

IN THE SCHOOL HALLS

While Terezinha and Cláudia were talking, Carmen, the 4th-grade teacher, ran into her colleague Silvia, and said, “Did you know that

a mother of one of the 2nd-grade students came to talk to Terezi-
nha? I bet it was to complain about Daniela.”

“We don’t know that, Carmen,” responded Silvia, not wanting to get carried away.

“But of course it was! Remember what happened two years ago? Unhappy mothers and fathers were flocking in. A mother went to the mayor to ask him to fire her.”

“But Daniela is an effective teacher, who passed the public qualification exams just like us. She has tenure and can’t be fired,” said Carmen.

“To try and solve things, she became the on-call substitute teacher last year. Cláudia wanted to do it again this year, but I did not accept the idea. We have an agreement to take turns being the on-call substitute teacher and it would be totally wrong to ignore it to privilege a teacher who doesn’t even do her job well.”

“It’s true; Daniela really doesn’t involve herself in the group activities at the school. She didn’t even help organize the end-of-the-year party...”

“If only that were all there was to it. She won’t listen to anyone. If she’s like that with us, let alone with the kids. That’s why that student of hers cries every day.”

“I’ve noticed that too. I hope that Terezinha fixes the situation.”

“I hope so too. But I hope it doesn’t come back to harm us, you know?”

A PICKY OR DEMANDING TEACHER?

Clearly annoyed with what Terezinha was saying at the meeting, Daniela asserted, “So, you’re just going to believe everything the children tell you? And those parents only hear what they want. When I ask them to come to the school, they don’t want to come.”

“Daniela, this isn’t about listening to one side more than the other,” responded the principal politely. “I’m here to have a conversation with you so I can find out what’s going on. The children and their families have given me a picture of a difficult relationship...”

Interrupting the principal, Daniela said, “My students don’t have to like me, they need to learn. And that’s what I do: I’m a teacher, I teach, and I’m demanding! It’s not my fault if they are lazy and don’t want to study.”

“Daniela it’s important that our students learn and be happy here at the school. Remember that we can’t lose any students no matter what.”

“There you go again about happiness. That’s all you care about, making the children happy and not losing students. What about my happiness, huh? As far as I’m concerned, this school can close. I’m a good teacher and I’m going somewhere else.”

Terezinha had thought that everyone in her team was ready to fight for the school, but it appeared that she was wrong. What should she do? The school couldn’t lose any students. Exhausted, she looked out the window and saw two more 2nd-grade mothers arriving, at the same time she heard Lúcia’s voice saying that she was transferring a call from the Secretary of Education.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLEXION

1. What justifies closing a school?
2. Is it the employees' place to fight against the closure of a school?
3. How can an effective partnership with the community that goes beyond concerns about keeping the school open be established?
4. What can school managers do to create a happy workplace for everyone?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Should the school be kept open, even though it's in a violent neighborhood?
2. What should the principal do to increase the number of students?
3. What actions should the principal take to resolve the issue with Daniela, the 2nd-grade teacher?
4. What should the management do with the information presented by the parents and children? Should everything they say be taken into consideration?

PART III

Identity Issues

When Teacher and Student Have Conflicting World Views

CASE

The car swerved and Hannah immediately started paying attention to her driving; she'd practically been on autopilot. The potholes in the asphalt informed her that she was arriving at work.

It was 6:40 AM on a cloudy day in October and she had to hurry, as she was supposed to teach a class at 7:00 and still had to prepare the multimedia projector, the microphone, and all the other gear she used in her classes to make them more fun and engaging; in addition, of course, to getting copies of the handouts, which were in the copy room of the school. Even with all the work she had ahead of her, she couldn't stop thinking about an issue she'd been having with one of her students.

Just like her student, the school had not been around for very long. It was only 16 years ago that São Sebastião, a satellite city from which came the bricks used to build the capital of Brazil, saw its first high school open to serve the growing population. There were many more students than the school had capacity for, which made the classrooms overcrowded. Education wasn't truly a priority.

Like many other schools in under-served urban areas in Brazil, it was surrounded by high walls, had bars on all the windows, and armed guards at the entrance. The school, one of the few state apparatuses present in the area, opted to isolate itself from the community to survive the harsh reality it faced—conflicts between

drug gangs and the forces that tried to repress their activities were a constant occurrence.

Hannah thought about all these elements as she tried to understand why she couldn't get through to a student as brilliant as Julia, a 16-year-old in her second year of high school. Hannah was a Portuguese teacher, and had conceived a project about historical narratives, integrating them into her discipline. Her work aimed to promote, among other things, academic research strategies in the instructions for nearly 350 students over seven classes. There was something inherently positive about passing on the knowledge of the various subjects and disciplines, but, inspired by her academic studies, the young teacher sought to tear down walls, not just those that surrounded the school, but also those that had been built around the perspectives that were included in the basic education of young Brazilians. She wanted to help her students develop the tools to think independently and, above all, practice good citizenship through the use of language.

The project was very important to her, as she had to paddle against the tide of suspicion and traditionalism in order to propose an interdisciplinary program that, above all, required the young people to be more than mere parrots of information memorized for exams. Instead, they should effectively produce works of knowledge through scientific tools. The vice-principal, as well as the principal, had given her room to implement various projects, but did not support the teachers whenever any kind of complaint or concern arose. The work of a teacher had always been a solitary endeavor, and any outcome that didn't meet expectations would be laid at the teacher's feet.

This was made even worse by the fact that there was a total absence of class consciousness among the faculty. Hannah's peers were, in their majority, much older than she and had been educated based on conceptions of the world that were much different than hers. For that reason, they didn't see her as an equal.

With the move to a basic public school, she, who at the beginning of her career taught language and literature undergraduate classes, was always questioning every decision she made for her classes. She had uncertainties about discipline, the rigor of her

evaluations, and the life situations of her students, among others. For example, “Should I or shouldn’t I scold students that don’t collaborate?” or “Could I ask the students to buy ruled paper and colored pens for their assignments?”

Despite constantly being so demanding with herself, even with all her uncertainties, Hannah felt confident about the choices she had made and had enough of a clear conscience to sleep well at night. However, one student would change all of that. She had chosen a path that she couldn’t abandon and didn’t know how to resolve the issue.

CONSERVATISM AND CONSCIENCE

In addition to all the problems related to poverty, crime, and the low literacy of the students’ families, the lack of access to symbolic and material goods, which severely resulted in enormous difficulties for the students, the people that composed the community she served were very conservative and showed a great deal of resistance to any kind of innovation. This made challenging the status quo an even more arduous task than normal, even though that community represented a small part of the population that suffered the most from the economic and social exploitation that characterized the rampant inequality in Brazil. Families and students, as well as several of her colleagues, would express profoundly prejudiced opinions that were rooted in the country’s colonial tradition of segregation and misogyny.

Hannah was having a great deal of difficulty planning for her classes. However, she was extremely dedicated to making her projects successful. Constantly researching and learning, she was a teacher that wanted to “change the world through education,” as she had been accustomed to telling anyone who asked her why she chose to become a public-school teacher. Therefore, she sought to utilize innovative teaching methods and address relevant social themes in her classroom. She included a variety of texts, music, movies, books, and educational games. She had even invested her meager salary into a PA system, a multimedia projector, and a good laptop to be able to develop the strategies required to teach

young people born into the information age. Just “spit and chalk” (as they were accustomed to calling the old teaching style in which the teacher did little more in the classroom than lecture at the students) wasn’t enough to sufficiently engage the students.

She invested much energy, money, and willpower into transforming the school from the inside out. Nonetheless, the structural limits of the institution made themselves felt. She had 30 hours of lessons per week, that is, hours that she had spent in the classroom with one of the seven 1st or 2nd-year high school classes she taught. Each one was composed of 45 to 50 students, all packed in a small classroom meant to fit only 30 teenagers. The poor ventilation, precarious lighting, cheap blackboard, broken desks, and overcrowding began to weigh on her.

Hannah was always on time, but never had time for anything. She managed her time and tasks sufficiently that she was able to give attention to her husband and small children—she breastfed one of them, still an infant, in the middle of the night—and still arrive to school with enough energy to teach six hours of classes in a row. That day, she parked her car in the parking garage exclusively for school employees, gathered her materials and, upon closing the door, saw herself reflected in her car window. In addition to the high walls, that restricted parking garage served as yet another obstacle to integrating the school into the community. The school had a closed campus and the employees there feared the public they served, something that was reflected in the architecture of the institution. With texts by Michel Foucault and Paulo Freire resounding in her mind, Hannah saw that she looked tired—her poor night’s sleep was written all over her face, but she didn’t have any time to think about that. The day needed to begin and there would be no class if she didn’t show up in classroom B for the 2nd-year high school students. Her grief would have to wait for a moment in which life was not asking so much of her. She even had a faculty meeting to go to that day.

DIVERGING IDEAS: A PROVOCATION OR ONLY AN ACTION?

On one of those days when the number of things to do far exceeded what could be done in the hours left in the work day, Hannah went back to work after the morning classes on a pile of papers to correct with a cup of coffee and a pair of colored pens on the dinner table. It was the beginning of the year, and she still hadn't learned everyone's name. Therefore, the time she spent correcting her students' work was also an opportunity for her to get to know them better through their ideas.

With intense focus, she read the research papers that would serve as the foundation for the work planned for that semester. She was very zealous when it came to that particular task. To avoid violating her students' right to self-expression by imposing her perspective on them, she strove to revise their work in the most supportive and encouraging way she could. She wrote notes in the margins and other blank spaces on the pages for every part that needed improvement, suggesting ways of rewriting them. Despite the instructions she gave in the classroom, many papers had no sources, others had parts that were plagiarized, while various didn't follow the format given and lacked cohesion and coherence, among other issues encountered, such as diverging from the theme of the assignment. Several of the papers, even having a variety of problems, were easy to revise, and suggestions for ways to improve the work came naturally to her in these cases. But there was one in particular that actually disturbed her.

It was the work of a young woman named Julia, a name she couldn't manage to associate with any of the faces she'd just seen in one of her classes. The text was well written for her grade level and followed the standards given for the research project, however it diverged from the subject of the assignment. Was the student trying to provoke her? Or had she only not paid attention to the objectives of the assignment?

With a green pen (she avoided using red, based on her studies of Gestalt psychology) in a carefully written hand, she outlined various instructions for revising the paper. In addition to spelling and syntax corrections, she wrote several questions to help guide the student's work, such as, "Where did you get this from?" and

“What’s your source?” The more formal issues, however, were not the worst of it. The paper was full of firm assertions that reiterated unfounded “common sense” assertions that denied many scientific advancements. Little by little, the distress she felt at what she read grew, until she came to a particular line in which she found the following phrase: “Fascism, then, was the best option.” So great was her shock at reading those words that she wrote next to that phrase, “How?! SOS!!!”

Upon having read the entire paper and feeling quite irritated and sad about what had been written by a 16-year-old girl, she suggested in the header, next to the grade, that she redo the assignment, this time following the thematic criteria she established when she explained the task. How would the young woman take her feedback? As much as we may try to think before we speak or write, much of what we feel inevitably shows through in our words. How do we separate, then, who we are from the roles we have a duty to fulfill?

THE CONFRONTATION

The moment to return the corrected papers to the students arrived, and Hannah proposed they hold a revision workshop. Each student took their place and went straight to work. One girl then asked to leave the classroom. The teacher gave her permission, thinking that she needed to go to the bathroom or something along those lines. She didn’t, however, come back to class for the rest of the school day. In all the rush, the girl’s actions were disregarded, with no new explanation assigned to them; Hannah had no idea what had begun at that moment. The young woman had been Julia, the student whose work had been so difficult to correct.

The following day, Hannah was thinking about the many things she had to do during the workday as she had a cup of coffee in the teacher’s room. Her mental list making, detailing everything she needed to accomplish, was interrupted by a colleague informing her that a student was waiting in the hallway to speak with her. The two greeted one another, but something obviously wasn’t quite right. The girl had her corrected paper in her hands

and, looking very agitated, but in a respectful tone, told the teacher that if the subject she wrote about wasn't acceptable for the assignment, she wouldn't continue it. Hannah tried to reason with her, but Julia wouldn't accept anything but the teacher's approval to continue with the subject she had chosen.

What followed was a struggle that the teacher could never have expected: "You have to remember what I said in the classroom. Remember that I said that your assignment was to research a historical event from the 19th century and associate it with a Romantic or Realist piece of literature?" asked the teacher.

"I know. But I don't want to talk about that. That stuff doesn't matter. I want to talk about the 20th century," explained the student.

"I understand, but you have to do the same assignment as your classmates."

"I'm not going to waste my time researching something that doesn't interest me."

"OK, but you have to understand that you need to follow the guidelines of the assignment and the curriculum for the 2nd-year of high school."

"I'm not going to do research about something I don't believe in. It doesn't have anything to do with me. You said we could choose."

"I know, but within certain limits. Even though you can choose, it must be in line with a larger project for the semester, and the fact that you didn't use reliable sources has to be taken into consideration; there is a little bit of prejudice and a few unsupported opinions in your paper. Why don't you sleep on it?"

"I don't want to do it, and I don't think it's fair, because you said we had to talk about something that mattered to us."

"OK. But you won't get any credit for the following assignments then."

"OK! I'm sorry, but I'm not going to rewrite the paper."

Hannah tried to maintain her calm, even with her heart in her throat. She said she wouldn't accept the subject chosen by the student and based her position on the guidelines of the assignment given. However, there was much more at play: two ways of seeing the world that were in conflict and, just like her student, the teacher didn't want to do something she didn't believe in.

The conversation hadn't resolved the issue, and worst, nothing constructive had resulted from it. It was as if the two had spoken to one another, but neither had heard the other. Julia wouldn't receive credit for the following classes and that would put a stain on what was, according to what Hannah had learned during a bi-monthly class council meeting, a previously spotless record.

WITHOUT STUDENTS, THERE IS NO TEACHER; WITHOUT A TEACHER, THERE ARE NO STUDENTS

After that, the classes with Julia became tense, hostile. The assignments she gave during every lesson didn't seem to interest anyone in the class, apart from a few students who had shown themselves to be very dedicated to their education and, therefore, always participated in class. There was something very wrong about the apparent apathy in the class, but the teacher couldn't read what those stolid faces were telling her.

Even without understanding exactly what was happening, she knew that her lesson plans were not being successful. So, she tried alternative approaches, adapted various teaching/learning situations, and included movies, analyses of song lyrics, and debates on themes suggested by the students in the classes, but nothing seemed to work. It wasn't what Hannah wanted, nor was it the type of education in which she believed.

Several weeks had passed when one of the students in the same class, with whom Hannah had a better relationship, decided to talk to her after class. Sitting under a tree in the school courtyard, he showed her something on his cellphone that he thought she should see. It was a WhatsApp group composed of his classmates and the debate raging in the midst of the memes and laughs (*kkkkkk*, *rs*, *ahahahaha* – in Portuguese), between two opposing sides, was Hannah. Some defended her, others condemned (“That doesn't make sense!”; “Dude, she's the best *teacha!*”; “Shut up! She sucks!”). She felt a chill go down her spine and feared what that conversation could end up leading to—Hannah's dismissal, or worse, a fatal blow to her reputation as a professional. There were various texts from Julia that expressed sentiments that she never

could have imagined: “I want blood!”; “I want to see a rightful termination!”; “She can’t be allowed to keep teaching!”

Hannah was in shock. This was very serious. Other teachers in the same situation could have gotten angry, or even just ignored it all. But to her, those words cut like a knife. Her greatest dream was in danger. How could have things gotten so far without her even noticing it? How could the chain of events unraveled right under her nose?

Hannah had faced challenging situations in the classroom before, but this time the surprise caught her completely off guard. She had no idea what to do. There had always been good debates among the students of that 2nd-year class. She always arranged the class in a circle or semi-circle so she could see every student, so everyone could see her as well, and, most of all, to encourage dialogue.

From the beginning of the year, she had organized the class in a way that encouraged debate. One day, disagreements arose during a discussion about the boundaries between tradition and scientific advances, as well as those between the power of certain sectors of society and freedom of thought.

Every student had a chance to express their opinion and, when it was Julia’s turn, referring to *Life of Galileo*, the theatrical script they were discussing, the young woman said, “That wasn’t true! The Church never did that. Actually, they gave Galileo the means to continue his research.”

It was impossible that Hannah hadn’t noticed the growing tension there. As always, she sought to base her arguments on the findings of scientific research, but there was no getting through to the young woman: the student was set in her way of seeing the world, and the teacher in hers, formed by all that she had learned from her studies to that point. Neither of them could have a conversation together or even talk to one another. On top of everything, there was an audience that was eager for any slip. Now, after having read an explicit defense of fascism, Hannah was able to put the pieces together and read between the lines. But before, even being a linguist, she had been incapable of interpreting what the context and multiple languages were telling her.

Something that was unacceptable to her.

She ruminated on those memories, trying to find a way out of the impasses in which she found herself. As she made her way home, she couldn't hold back her tears during the entire journey: nearly 25 miles of deep reflection, and no perspective or sense of direction. She needed to resolve the issue, or issues, that were now accumulating and complicating the situation even more.

BETWEEN MAINTAINING A POSITION AND MAKING A CHOICE

Working at the dinner table once again, noting grades for the end of the semester in her record book, her thoughts went back to that moment that she wrote "SOS" on Julia's paper and her insistence on maintaining her position and not allowing the student to express a favorable opinion of fascism. She couldn't calm her thoughts. She had silenced her student and that, definitely, was not something she had imagined herself ever doing. Her professional ethics and everything else she believed in had been placed in check when she shut down the dialogue between them. *Why didn't I handle that differently? What can I do now? Is she going to sue me for writing 'SOS'?*

On the other hand, she was backed by science, historiography, the legal framework that governed her profession, which required certain subjects to be taught in the curriculum of each grade, in addition to ensuring teachers' freedom and their right to choose their own methodology. Even the *Enem*³ college entrance exam, in its essay section, disqualifies candidates that take positions that are in opposition to human rights. But she wasn't there to eliminate candidates for higher education. Hannah couldn't hide behind those fragile legal and procedural safeguards. She conflicted with her very conscience.

3. National High School Exam or *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio*, also known as *Enem* for its initials in Portuguese.

THE CONSEQUENCES

An infinite amount of doubts resounded in her mind as she saw herself at a dead end. At that point, it was no longer possible to take back her decisions—the student would stay in her class and would even have a chance to recuperate her grades in the second semester, despite all the awkwardness that would be there at every interaction during their working relationship. And this is what happened next: after both sides refused to concede, the student began to constantly challenge the teacher during their weekly classes. Reestablishing a dialogue between them seemed impossible, and that hurt the young teacher. More than that, she had no idea what to do and there was no one she could go to for advice that might lead her to a possible solution. Her dilemma was also one of solitude, and she thought out loud to the computer, “How could I ask for help from the vice-principal? Not even the principal will want to listen to me. I’m certain I’ll be summarily condemned. How could I open my classroom to the vice-principal or principal, who will not understand and won’t be supportive? And what if this takes on greater proportions...? I can’t lose this job.”

Based on her previous experiences during the three years she had worked at that school, she didn’t think she would be able to get help from anyone. But that was all or there was something else? She knew that there was; she felt the fear in that moment: what would they say about her? What would be said about her behind her back if she showed any weakness or uncertainty? All of the criticisms about her “absurd” ideas, all the times her methods had been put in question – all that would be validated by that situation. The others would be right. Again, Hannah chose to stand her ground and nothing was resolved. She felt that she needed to defend herself, even knowing that she had made a mistake, and even knowing she had been right from the beginning.

How could she escape that feeling of uncertainty and distress that followed her everywhere she went?

ANOTHER CUP OF COFFEE AND THE WORK OF A TEACHER

The coffee cooled between Hannah's hands as she looked out the window of her house, lost in her thoughts: had she been authoritarian or was what she did just a harsh exercise of authority? Either way, her goals hadn't been accomplished and one of her students had fallen behind. That class, which seemed to fit so well with the plan she had drawn up at the beginning of the year, no longer listened to her.

She had to hurry, as it was already 5:45 AM and soon a bell would ring at the other end of town, announcing the beginning of yet another day.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLEXION

1. The clash of ideas and liberty to discuss them are fundamental to building teaching-learning practices that are truly liberating. However, where does one draw the line between freedom of expression and speech that violates human rights?
2. Given that an oppressive way of thinking, anchored in sectarian individualism, is what is traditionally taught in schools, how can a teacher establish, in his or her classroom, a space where students are free to be themselves and think, and where everyone is respected?
3. Today social networks have become lawless territory where anonymity has allowed the proliferation of hate speech without serious consequences for the perpetrators. How can a teacher, with the short time they have in the classroom, provide counterpoints and promote the exercise of critical, ethical, and moral thought?
4. What actions could be considered to make the school a place of learning where students can acquire the skills and tools they need to creatively transpose social barriers in their daily lives?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Could the teacher have handled the situation in another manner?
2. What activities could be proposed as an alternative?
3. Could another teacher intervene in the situation?
4. In the case of such a delicate relationship like that which exists between teacher and student, is it possible to mend a broken bond?
5. Can there exist dialogue between a teacher and student in situations that expose ways of thinking that are completely antagonistic to one another?
6. How can a teacher deal in a fair and balanced manner with a student that has different values from those he or she holds?

Integrating Foreign Students: How Should It Be Done?

CASE

On the north end of the city of São Paulo, there are several clothing workshops where many Bolivians that left their country of origin for economic reasons work. They came to Brazil to work in this area and now lived at the workshops where they worked.

A school located in this region came to enroll students who came from Bolivia with their families. Before the arrival of the foreigners, the school already faced many disciplinary issues and low student performance. Because of an increase in the number of fights breaking out during the intervals, especially between 6th-grade students, who had come to make cruel jokes and comments about their new schoolmates during class, Samara, the principal, called a meeting with the teachers and parents that made up the school board. The principal also requested all the 6th-grade teachers to attend the meeting, as the fights were more common in that grade, which had a higher number of Bolivian students compared to other classrooms: out of 40 students, 15 were foreigners. Samara, like always, was worried about the progress of the school.

D-DAY: THE SCHOOL MEETING

From the beginning of the meeting it became obvious that various participants were unsatisfied with the direction the school had been going and the incidents that were frequently taking place among the 6th-grade students.

As soon as Samara called the meeting in session, indicating the need to think of a solution for the increase in disciplinary

problems in the classroom and fights in the courtyard, a teacher named Daniela, who was close to retirement, interrupted her saying, “I always do the best I can; I can’t do any more than that... Those students just sit there staring at me and I don’t know if they understand what I say, because I don’t understand what they say. I feel like I’m in another country at this school, the difference being that I’m not traveling but working. It’s impossible to teach them math. I have to repeat the same thing ten times for the Brazilian students that don’t understand math and twenty times for the foreigners that don’t understand math or Portuguese. I always thought that Spanish and Portuguese were very similar — I was wrong.”

Other 6th-grade teachers echoed Daniela’s sentiments and blamed the immigrants for their difficulties teaching class. Then Giovana, mother to one of the 6th-grade students, expressed that she was unhappy with the school, “I’ve never seen such a free for all! My daughter keeps telling me about life in Bolivia. What does that have to do with anything? She needs to know things about Brazil, learn how to read and write.” She shot a critical glance at Leticia, the recently-graduated geography teacher, and Juliana, the Portuguese teacher.

Leticia understood the look and responded, “The students need to know about the world, not just Brazil. We’re not isolated from the rest of the world. Countries have relations, people immigrate—nobody lives in a cocoon. It’s important to learn about immigration and the cultures of other peoples, which is important to discourage prejudice.”

Giovana retorted, “So, then you should be talking about that and not asking a student, who can barely even speak Portuguese, to tell everyone about his country. My daughter said that he speaks really slowly and mixes Portuguese and Spanish. Class time is being wasted on stories about his country. That’s not what schools are supposed to be for.”

Juliana, the Portuguese teacher, interrupted the student’s mothers and said it was important for the foreign student to speak and have his time to express himself in class, so he could also develop his Portuguese language skills.

At that moment, Janete, a mother who was very involved in the school community, but who had a short temper, interrupted the teacher, talking over her, “He can practice his Portuguese during the intervals, but the classroom should be for class. My daughter is here to learn how to speak better, write better and she comes home saying to me, ‘Mom, did you know that grandma in Spanish is *abuela*?’ Now my other, three-year-old daughter, who heard the word and must have thought it was pretty, only says that. Everything is *abuela*. What’s going on? Then when I ask my daughter, your student, what a word in the Portuguese text means, she doesn’t know the answer. But she knows what *abuela* means. Does that seem right to you?”

The principal saw that the discussion was getting too heated and decided to intervene, asking everyone to reflect on what they should do about the situation.

That was when a father yelled, “Close enrollment at the school! Ever since those Bolivians came, my son has only been having problems at school... And he’s being bullied.” Despite being a dedicated father and participating in the school meetings, Otávio had difficulty seeing his son, Augusto, as he really was, i.e., a person with qualities and flaws.

“Bullied?” the Portuguese teacher asked. “You have no idea the things your son does in my class!”

Otávio yelled again, calling the teaching incompetent, “You’re the one that doesn’t know what happens in your own classroom! You don’t know how to teach and are blaming my son for it.”

Augusto was a talkative boy who liked to make friends. Charismatic, he used his popularity to influence his classmates toward bad behavior. Because he had difficulty with Portuguese, he always caused disruptions during class. He tried to make friends with Pablo and Juan, two of the Bolivian students in his class, to get them to join the “bad kids.” Since Juan and Pablo declined, Augusto began to make cruel comments about the way they dressed and the fact that the two were always together, insinuating that Pablo and Juan were “more than friends.”

On top of that, the Brazilian girls in the class liked the two Bolivians, which made August jealous, as he was no longer the most

popular boy with the girls. This stoked his anger to the point that he started a fight with Juan, in which he ended up getting hurt. His friends from the “bad kids,” indignant, then beat up Juan, along with Pablo, who was trying to protect his friend. The girls were disgusted by the situation and began to ignore Augusto and his clique, making the climate among the students even more hostile. When Otávio received his son’s report card with low grades and asked him about his poor performance in class, Augusto argued that he was being tormented by the Bolivians, who caused fights and made a commotion in class.

Faced with the intense showdown between Otávio and the Portuguese teacher, the principal knew she had to end the meeting.

Giovana then declared that she had wasted her time coming to a meeting in which nothing had been decided.

Samara responded, “I understand your frustration and I’m frustrated too, but I suggest that everyone write their perspective on the issue and how to deal with the situation. I promise to read all your e-mails and then give you my decision. This meeting has now ended.”

The participants left. Some were unsatisfied with the principal’s decision, others felt what she had done was the best solution, as the discussion was going nowhere. With feelings of sadness and powerlessness, Samara went back to her office even more worried about the situation.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What causes poor academic performance? How can poor performance be improved in the classroom?
2. Are teachers prepared to identify situations in which students are being bullied? What projects can be carried out in a classroom to deal with this type of situation?
3. Considering the affirmation by Paulo Freire (1987, p. 79) that “no one educates anyone, no one educates themselves, men educate each other, mediatized by the world,” in what ways can multicultural environments provide new ways of learning and knowledge to students and teachers? What is the role of the teacher guiding the learning process in these environments?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the problems you can identify with the way the meeting was conducted? Could the principal have conducted things differently?
2. How can one create a welcoming environment for students with backgrounds and lives that are so different from those of their classmates?
3. How can one deal with the pedagogical problems that teachers have with teaching and evaluating students with learning difficulties?
4. How can the cultural and linguistic differences of foreign students be managed in the classroom to maximize their learning?

Between Borders: Xenophobia at a School in Roraima

CASE

In Roraima, on the border with Venezuela, there is a public high school attended by 967 students between the ages of 15 and 17 years old. On the ground floor of the building are located the administration offices, the school counselors' rooms, and the teacher's room, as well as the cafeteria; on the first floor there are eighteen classrooms. Most of the students come from low-income families and their parents, in large part, are day laborers or informal employees, working as house cleaners, street vendors, or masons. Lately, the school had been receiving a larger and larger number of students who come from the neighboring country. The Venezuelan political and social crisis caused many highly-qualified professionals to immigrate and accept lower salaries, increasing competition for jobs in the area and, therefore, unemployment. This also caused students to change habits at school: those who used to buy their own lunch now accepted the meals offered by the Secretary of Education at school. So many changes in the daily routine of the school had shown themselves to be a great challenge to the community, who needed to face a new reality.

Paulo, a 42-year-old teacher, was from São Paulo, but moved to Roraima 15 years before. Like his colleagues, he had decided to live there because it was a quieter place that offered better working conditions. Despite his 20-year experience in the field, he always sought to innovate and get the students interested in geography. He was a very laid-back person in general, but found himself very worried about the situation in Roraima, though he believed that soon, with the end of the crisis in Venezuela, the mass migration

would turn out to be a positive thing and relations between the countries, which were before limited to business and tourism, would enter the realm of true cultural exchange.

A NEW REALITY

In the not-so-distant past, due to the increase in the value of the Brazilian currency in relation to the Venezuelan currency, the Bolívar, Brazilians used to often cross the border to fill up their cars' tanks, shop, and take vacations on the Caribbean beaches. Now, the flow had inverted: Venezuelans were coming to the cities of Roraima, but with the intention of escaping the hunger and misery in their country. The previous year, Paulo had developed an exchange program for the 3rd-year students so that they could have the opportunity for practical application of the content they learned regarding globalization, including multilateral trade agreements, such as Mercosur. To provide a more significant educational experience, the project included a trip to Venezuela to study the characteristics of its climate and vegetation, as well as the cultural differences and similarities between the countries.

Faced with the new social reality of his city, Paulo thought about ways to carry out a project to combat xenophobia that would involve the other teachers and reach a greater number of people, maybe even going beyond the walls of the school.

THE FIRST LESSON

After recess, at 9:30 AM on a Tuesday, the bell echoed throughout the school and Paulo awaited the 1st-year class to arrive for their first geography lesson of the year. Excited, he had planned out an entire presentation and prepared a lesson on geopolitics, more specifically, about the process of globalization. The idea was to have the students familiarize themselves with the content during the first week of classes.

The students finally arrived and sat at the desks, arranged in a semi-circle. Paulo introduced himself, welcomed them all, and listed the objectives of his discipline, telling them that he was ex-

cited to get to work. He then asked each student to briefly introduce themselves.

The teacher soon noticed a tense atmosphere in the classroom. He noted that a girl who said, with a Spanish accent, that her name was Paloma was very nervous and that her eyes were teary and swollen, as if she had been crying a great deal. As it was the first week of classes, Paulo believed that the students were still adapting to high school and would settle in soon. Trying to get them excited, he said, "You're going to love your classes here! We'll start covering the material today, as my goal is to help you get to know the world through geography," and using his multimedia projector began to give the presentation he had prepared.

However, when he began to speak about globalization and immigration throughout the world, he noticed that the students continued to look distracted. So, he tried to relate the subject to the local reality of the students' town in an attempt to get them interested in the lesson, "Have you been following the immigration of Venezuelans to Roraima?"

He barely finished asking the question, when Ana shouted, with visible anger in her eyes, "Yeah! They're coming here by the caravan just to take our jobs and do bad things! They're even taking our places at school!"

Carolina, who was sitting next to Ana, added, gesticulating and lips trembling, "It's true! They come here and have everything handed to them! When we went there, we were treated rudely! Now it's time for payback!"

Perplexed by what was happening, Paulo tried to appease the situation, "Let's be careful not to offend anyone. You're basing your claims on rumors. I'm sure you'll see things from another perspective as the year goes by. In fact, I want to start a project about xenophobia here at the school. Do you know what xenophobia is?"

Before anyone could answer his question, Paloma, the student who seemed to be crying before entering the classroom, began to say in a shaky voice and a mix of Portuguese and Spanish words, "We don't want to be here! I don't like it here and I don't like this school or the people either! They all laugh at me. Even the history teacher laughed at me and said that we only came here to fill our bellies!"

Paulo, startled, stood motionless for several seconds. In that moment, he forgot the conduct to which he always worked so hard to adhere, which required him not to speak ill of his colleagues or allow his student to do so during his classes. He tried to recompose himself and asked, frowning his brow, "But in what context did he say that?"

Paloma, upset, couldn't hold back her tears and didn't manage to say anymore. It was then that Maria, who was also from Venezuela and had dropped out of school the year before, but was now back, related, "It's like this, teacher: Yesterday we were in line for lunch. We were having a conversation in Spanish with one another. Then the history teacher walked past us and muttered, 'It's not enough for those people to come to our city and beg at the spotlights, now we have to tolerate them coming into our schools and eating Brazilian children's food?' On top of that, Paloma was verbally attacked by two other students, Carla and João. Between calling her names, they said they didn't want Venezuelans at their school and that..."

Before Maria could finish, Paulo, still shocked by what he had heard about his colleague, exclaimed in a grave voice, "Let's stop there! I don't want anyone discriminating against other people! No kind of prejudice or xenophobia will be allowed in this classroom nor in this school! With regards to what you've just told me, I'll go to the vice-principal, who will certainly take action regarding this question! Xenophobia is a crime and those involved will be punished!"

At the left end of the semicircle, Felipe raised his hand to speak. Paulo, fearing that the situation would escape from his control, told him he could speak as long as he didn't say anything to offend his classmates.

The then boy said, almost whispering, "Teacher, if you're going to send someone from our class to the vice-principal's office, you should report the history teacher too, since he was also involved."

Trying to remain calm, Paulo scratched his head and said, "We'll take care of that too, but... each case is different..." Finally, the bell rang. Paulo felt a certain relief, as he needed to gather his thoughts to be able to deal with that situation.

Paulo sat behind his desk and remained there, motionless for several minutes, feeling mentally tired and with his body aching from all the tension. He was trying to find a way out of that new situation, which went way beyond his hopes and desires for the students to fall in love with geography and learn how to respect others.

For a moment, he thought his project could resolve the issues that kept the students from peacefully coexisting. Then he recalled, however, that on that very day, in the teacher's room, he had heard several colleagues of his make xenophobic comments about Venezuelans after having read an article in the newspaper about conflicts at a refugee shelter in the city. He also remembered that, around a year earlier, those same people had expressed indignation at the viral image of a Syrian child who had died on the shores of a Turkish beach.

Paulo turned off the computer, unplugged the multimedia projector, packed his materials into his backpack, turned off the lights in the classroom, and closed the door. There was no one else left at the school: time had flown by without him noticing it. He continued down the hallway, firmly grasping the straps of his backpack, as if he needed something to hold onto to avoid losing his balance. His head throbbed and he couldn't feel his feet anymore. As he walked, he couldn't stop thinking about how he could resolve the situation. What should he do? How could he resolve that conflict?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How can a teacher develop a culture of mutual respect and spread it throughout the school community?
2. Can getting to know foreigners, their history, and their motivations for moving to another country contribute to the reduction of xenophobia at school?
3. How would you develop a project that encompasses the entire school community to solve or alleviate the problem of xenophobia?
4. How can the school community be convinced to accept the new students?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What would be the best way for Paulo to handle the situation?
2. Considering what happened, what actions should Paulo take?
3. From the point of view of ethics, after discussing the subject in the classroom and trying to understand what was happening with his students, did the teacher act in the correct manner or should he have sent those involved to the vice-principal's office?
4. As a teacher, would it be prudent for Paulo to confront everyone implicated in the situation alone or should he pass the information about what happened along to the school administration so that they would take appropriate action?
5. Should this issue be brought up by Paulo during the teacher's meeting? If yes, in what way should he present the situation without being unethical toward the colleague involved?
6. Could the history teacher and the others implicated in the problem change their perspective regarding the new students if the subject were debated within the school community?

Gender and Prejudice at Preschool

CASE

In a city of 15,000 inhabitants in the state of São Paulo, there were urban public schools that taught elementary through high school classes in morning and afternoon shifts, while, in the rural area surrounding the city, there was a full-time school. Several parents in the city, due to their low socioeconomic status and the need to work a great deal to provide for their families, enrolled their children in the rural school. These students took a school bus provided by the city government to the school, leaving home around 7:00 AM and going back around 4:00 PM for a commute that lasted 30 minutes each way. Elizabete, the school principal, didn't agree with these enrollments, as the classes at her school were multi-grade classes⁴ of approximately 25 students each. Nonetheless, she had to adhere to the orders of the Municipal Secretary of Education and, even against her wishes, open the doors of the rural school to a large number of students from the city.

On a cold and cloudy April morning, Elizabete, in her office, was using a small spoon to stir her coffee, which had already gone cold long before. The previous several days had been ones of great conflict for her.

4. Multi-grade classes are classes in which one teacher works with two or more groups at different grade levels in the same classroom simultaneously, thus teaching students of various ages and levels of knowledge at the same time.

A NEW STUDENT

Everything began with the arrival of a new student to preschool. The child of a family of modest income, Horácio lived in the city and was enrolled in the rural school full-time so that his parents could work. One day, Elizabete, in the principal's office, was surprised by a visit from Marta, one of the preschool teachers, who asked if they could talk. Always open to dialogue, Elizabete, who had assumed the role of principal only two months before, waved for Marta to come in and make herself comfortable. As soon as she sat down, the teacher began,

"Elizabete, you know that I've been teaching here for many years, but I live in the city. During the weekend, while I was shopping at the grocery store, I was approached by Roberta, Horácio's mother. She said that she wanted to know about our teaching methods and practices, because, since Horácio started coming to our school, almost three weeks ago, she's noticed something inappropriate about his behavior..."

Elizabete, who had no previous experience as a school administrator and was offered the principal position because of her excellent work as a teacher, interrupted her to ask, "What did she mean by 'something inappropriate'?"

"Roberta made it very clear that she thought the school had been influencing her son's sexuality. She said that, after being enrolled here, he has begun to act differently and do strange things like use her makeup and wear her shoes in secret, in addition to playing with his cousins' dolls. She stated in a low voice that she didn't want Horácio to participate in any rhythmic activities nor playing with the girls during playtime at recess. Having said that, she turned her back and left without even giving me a chance to speak.

The principal, puzzled, asked Marta about the student's behavior in the classroom, and the teacher responded, "This is what it's like in small towns. They always find a reason to criticize the school. Horácio has never given me any problems related to his behavior or learning. He's full of energy, participates and is very engaged. At first, he didn't take very well to the rules, but now he follows them. From the first day, he has shown more affinity

toward some of the girls in the classroom and always plays with dolls with them during playtime.”

“And you let him play with dolls?” asked the principal.

“Elizabeth, a lot of boys like to play with dolls, generally while pretending to be their father, uncle or doctor. All children like to playhouse, and the dolls help them imitate a domestic environment.

So, there are no games that are specifically for boys or girls during playtime. I let the students use their imaginations to play with whatever toy whatever way they want in the classroom. I never interfere with their choices.”

Elizabeth then thanked her for the information, telling her that she would take whatever actions necessary.

Two days later, after having observed Horácio during recesses, the principal decided to speak in person with several other professionals at the school that knew the student better. The first was the physical education teacher, who, upon being questioned about the boy’s behavior in class, responded, “Horácio is an incredibly gifted child. He is very engaged and loves my classes. I haven’t had any problems with his behavior. Why do you ask? Did something happen?”

Elizabeth only said no and went back to her office.

Repeatedly tapping the end of her pen against the sheet of paper that was sitting on her desk, she still didn’t understand what Horácio’s mother was talking about. Could it be due to prejudice? How should she act in such a situation? Was the school influencing the boy’s sexuality somehow? Horácio was only 5 years old and, according to his teacher, enjoyed his playtime without showing any signs of prejudice and had an immense capacity to explore his imagination.

When talking to the hall monitor Zezé, who watched over the students during intervals, she heard, “Ah, Horácio is a lovely little boy. He’s always hanging around with the girls. He doesn’t give me any problems! One or two times I’ve seen him put lipstick on some of the girls in his class while they were playing with makeup, but I’ve never had any issues with bad behavior or aggression come from him. Horácio is a good boy.”

Elizabete was surprised and asked what Zezé did when she saw him playing with makeup. The hall monitor scratched her head and, frowning her brow, responded, “Well, he wasn’t making a mess or anything. I didn’t do anything. Why? Should I have told him to stop?”

Even though the principal believed that it was only an unfounded issue the mom was inventing about the school, she explained the situation to the other staff members and employees at the institution and, advising them to stay alert, asked them to inform her of any chatter regarding the issue they may hear within the school community.

TIME GOES BY

Three days went by and nothing further related to the matter arose. Four days later the principal no longer felt any sign of the tightness that had built up in her chest. All she saw at the school was laughter, smiles, and happiness.

A week later, however, soon after the morning snack, Marta, holding Julia’s hand, walked into the principal’s office. In her other hand, she held a small red notebook, on which was attached a label that read “message book.” Julia was a preschool student and Horácio’s cousin, but didn’t live in the city. She was growing up in the rural area, where her parents, after much struggle and sacrifice, had been living for years at the mercy of the weather in a canvas tent after having successfully managed to claim a plot of land on a settlement.

Elizabete asked what was wrong with Julia and Marta, letting go of the girls’ tiny hand, responded that the problem was not with her. The teacher opened the red notebook to a certain page, and handed it to the principal. She did not sit down. She simply took the girl’s hand again and went back to their classroom.

Puzzled by Marta’s aloofness, she began to closely read what was written in it. Her heartbeat faster with every line her eyes read. Perplexed, she didn’t blame Julia or question the teacher. She just stared at those words, which were completely devoid of logical arguments and replete with judgment and prejudice:

Mrs. Martha,

I'm sending this note because, according to the stories that I've heard from Julia, Horácio's cousin, the conversation we had several days ago probably wasn't clear enough for you. I asked Julia about Horácio and she said that he is still playing dolls with the girls. This is my last warning: take my son out of all the classes that are changing his behavior. I don't want him playing with girls. This never happened at the other school, and he has started to learn to play with and like dolls and other girls' toys since he started to go there. If you insist on keeping him in those classes, I'll talk to my lawyer and sue the school. That's all I have to say. Starting today, you'll take my son out of those classes, or else...

Roberta

Certain that it was essential for the institution to maintain dialogue with the students' families about the importance of gender equality and a non-sexist approach to education, Elizabete took the initiative to call Roberta, as she knew that the mother wouldn't come to the school due to her work hours. She waited until the children's lunch hour, which started at 11:30 AM, and called the mother's cell phone, but she didn't pick up right away.

The principal was nervous. Her hands were in a cold sweat. She had worked there as a teacher for many years, but had never seen, until then, parents who acted like this one. As she thought about hanging up the phone, she heard Roberta say "Hello" on the other end of the line. Elizabete spoke simply and to the point, defending the school's methodology and explaining the materials, but all to no avail. Curtly and rudely, Roberta said that she was at work and that her note had already made her feelings about the matter clear. She asked Elizabete to excuse her, as she had to go back to work, and hung up the phone.

A MESSAGE FROM THE MOTHER

Elizabete didn't know how to react. The principal tried to understand where the mother was coming from and, immediately, various situations came to mind in which silence told terrible truths. Upon hanging up the phone, Roberta evoked a silence that

spoke of disinterest, judgment, and prejudice. Elizabete knew that games and play, as well as rhythmic activities, were fundamental resources to the children's development and education and that they should be guaranteed access to and inclusion in such activities as part of their rights as children. However, such resources, according to Roberta, were negatively influencing Horácio's sexuality. What was the role of the educator in such a situation? What about the principal? How should she conduct herself?

Having received the message that Roberta had sent by simply hanging up the phone, Elizabete became absorbed in her thoughts, which swirled around the following phrases: "Your choices have a 50% chance of being right, but also a 50% chance of being wrong. The choice is yours." The principal knew that hesitation could lead to disaster and, after a long moment of reflection, made a decision, believing that it was often better to make a mistake than make indecision a habit.

The following morning, though uncertain and insecure about the course of action she had chosen, especially because she had been the principal for such a short a time, Elizabete asked Marta not to let the student play with the girls during playtime. She also spoke with André, the teacher who taught the rhythmic activities, explaining the situation as it had taken place so far and directing him not to let the student participate in such activities. Elizabete didn't know Roberta, but preferred not to risk defying her. She told both professionals, "Let me make it very clear that we're not excluding Horácio from these activities. His mother doesn't want him participating in them. This is very different from exclusion, which is the result of difficulties with integrating a student. Everyone likes Horácio at this school and he is very engaged in the activities, but his mother doesn't want him to be. What can we do?"

Initially, the teachers adhered to the principal's request. However, after a long week at work, something unexpected happened.

A NEW DEVELOPMENT?

Marta, during the interval, sought out André and asked him what he thought about the principal's decision. The teacher said that he

agreed at first, but now realized that it had been the wrong thing to do.

“Imagine this scene, Marta: I put everyone in a circle in the sports court and explained what we would be doing. I looked in front of me and there was Horácio. His eyes shined with enthusiasm, excitement, and curiosity about the activity that I explained. We are currently working with a program called ‘Singing and Dancing,’ and the students are fascinated by the music and choreography.

“Then I told the boy that he couldn’t participate. Horácio, sitting on a bench in the sports court began to cry and throw a fit. Some of the students asked what he had done wrong and why he was being punished. Anyway, it was a disaster! I feel like I abandoned the boy. Now the parents get to dictate to us teachers how and what we teach?”

Marta then unloaded, “It has been almost the same for me. I’m not depriving Horácio of participating in playtime, as there are lots of toys available for the students to play with. I only told him that he couldn’t play with dolls anymore and that he had to play with the boys, but he just freaked out and wouldn’t stop crying. He was reluctant to do the activities I gave him, and wouldn’t put any effort into them. It seems like he’s trying to provoke me. Yesterday I called Elizabete to the classroom and showed her what he was doing. The other students see him crying and ask why he can’t play with the dolls. The girls keep asking to let him play with them, while Horácio sits there crying and crying. I already talked to him about his mother’s demands, but he doesn’t understand.”

Thus, after a long conversation comparing notes, the two teachers decided to talk to the principal. They found her in deep concentration in her office, typing something on her laptop. André broke the silence, asking to come in and saying they needed to speak with her. The teacher went straight to the point: “We don’t agree with the decision to keep Horácio from participating in our activities. He’s only a 5-year-old boy and needs to be respected by his educators. He wants to participate, wants to play and really wants to learn. He has a right to a well-rounded and quality education, just like all the other children here. We should work to ensure that he has access to the activities at this school and continues to learn here, rejecting any calls to exclude him.”

Marta added, “If his mother is unsatisfied, she can enroll Horácio in a school in the city, because here we have lesson plans to be followed that offer relevant content for the holistic development of our students. We’re serious professionals and we shouldn’t accept this. When Horácio is left out of these activities, he becomes a complete disruption to the class. Early Childhood Education allows for and encourages play. Playtime is a time for students to play freely, make discoveries, overcome challenges, and learn how to make choices and decisions so they can develop in a healthy and appropriate manner.”

André continued, “We do what is within our reach: give advice, converse, instruct. We’re practicing for a Mother’s Day dance recital, in which each student will wear a hat. Horácio chose a pink hat. So what? Felipe wanted a green one, Mateus a yellow one. Is his mom going to question the color of his hat too?”

Marta added, “I don’t know if you know our school charter well enough, but one of the articles makes it very clear that no student can be kept from participating in class activities or excluded from the school for any reason, even as a disciplinary measure.

Elizabete, her thoughts in turmoil, claimed once again that it was not the school that was excluding the boy, but his own mother, who insisted on threatening the administration if he continued to participate in rhythmic activities and play with dolls with the girls. Her arguments, however, didn’t convince the teachers.

SPEAKING WITH THE STUDENT

Elizabete knew that Early Childhood Education should provide multiple opportunities for every child to express themselves and learn how to respect the feelings, ideas, customs, and preferences of others. She also understood that an educator had to always listen to his or her students, giving importance to dialogue and respecting their opinions. So, she decided to speak with Horácio, asking him about his interest in the classes his mother didn’t want him taking part in, without telling him the reason why he wasn’t being allowed to participate.

After a short conversation with the student, she found that he was, in fact, very engaged and showed great interest in the activities. Faced with this fact, she concluded that depriving him of those classes would hinder his holistic development, including emotional development; after all, he was already upset about the situation and falling behind in his lessons.

In her office, the principal listened to the children laughing and conversing in the distance as they happily played on the school playground. She thought about all the possible measures she could take, but many of the things that had been said over the month wouldn't stop replaying in her mind:

"It's the student's right to participate."

"I'll sue the school."

"I won't exclude him from my classes."

"Why can't Horácio play with dolls?"

"His mom leaves the student here the entire day and still wants to dictate what he learns?"

"The school is encouraging my son to like things that are for girls,"

"That's what happens when you open the school to children from the city,"

"The students' mothers never come here, and when they do, it's to complain."

Elizabete thought, *Opening a school to the presence and active participation of the students' families in its daily routine is necessary, but difficult, because when they start to frequent the school, parents start observing what happens on the inside and questioning more, offering suggestions and making requests that can't always be fulfilled. And that's when individual differences emerge, as each mother and father must be attended to in their own way. Each family has their own history and different values, beliefs, and ways of seeing the world.*

So the principal, pressured by the boy's mother, who threatened to sue the school, the teachers, who refused to exclude the student, Horácio's friends, who insisted on knowing why the student wasn't participating in the classes, and the boy himself, who disrupted and hindered the classes when he wasn't allowed to participate in them, decided to set a meeting with everyone involved.

She spent many hours on the telephone, even postponing various obligations. The only thing she really cared about was resolving the dilemma involving Horácio. She only put the phone back on the hook when she found a day and time that everyone could agree on. She sighed deeply, relieved, when she thought that the problem would be solved in a week.

Time passed slowly. Elizabete grew impatient and worried for six days as the date of the meeting approached.

Finally, the day arrived. Everyone was present: Elizabete, Marta, André and Roberta. The meeting began at 6:30 AM. For one hour and a half, they discussed their opinions, establishing their points of view. The teacher insisted that they couldn't exclude the student from their classes, while the mother didn't want them encouraging him to engage in activities she felt were for girls, and Elizabeth continued to be indecisive in the face of the stalemate.

Roberta, highly agitated, stood up, making it very clear that the only reason she wasn't transferring her son was because she had to work all day. "Horácio will continue to go here. He's a good student. I just don't want to see him participating in those classes. I've listened to and respected everyone's opinion, I hope you respect mine. I'm his mother and I know what's best for my son. I'll be watching. If you insist on continuing to influence his sexuality by encouraging him to participate in those activities, I'll take my case to court," she finally said, as she opened the door and left.

Silence overtook the room. The only voices the three left there could hear were those of the children as they played, free of malice and prejudice, while they, the adults, waited for the bell to announce the return of classes after recess—voices that sounded very different from those that had refused to leave Elizabete's mind in peace for nearly two months.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Is it important in formal education to address issues regarding gender, race, and sexuality in the classroom? Why?
2. Is there ever a need for a teacher to interfere in their students' choice of toys during playtime and fun activities?
3. These days it's common to hear people say that a school, as an organization, should be open, thoughtful and flexible, and that it should be open and transparent when it comes to internal matters as well as open to the community in which it operates. To what extent should a school open itself up to democratic management?
4. Should education regarding gender be address only by a child's family or at school as well? Is it right for families to intervene in the school's activities regarding this subject?
5. How could one develop a project that addresses the subject of gender education in Early Childhood Education in a way that helps everyone understand that toys and games don't have gender?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you agree with the things Horácio's mother said? Should the rural school continue to accept the enrollment of students from the city? How would you react if you were in the principal's position after listening to Horácio's mother?
2. What suggestions would you give the principal to try and resolve the dilemma?
3. Do you agree with the teachers who stood firm in their position against excluding the student from their classes?

A Young Women's Club and Its Development at School

CASE

In a large metropolis in Brazil, there was a private school attended by approximately a thousand students at all grade levels, from the first year of elementary school to the last year of high school. It was renowned in the region for its quality and outstanding educational program, in which stood out the education of its faculty, the methodology that sought to involve the students, and the value given to diversity, respect, freedom, and collaboration, as well as the principles of citizenship and democracy. These elements were deeply embedded in every aspect of the school: the disciplinary measures, the proposals that emerged from interaction within the community, and the school's external aspects.

The school had a variety of staff and faculty connected to different aspects of the students' education, such as an advisor for each grade and each school level, aids and monitors for different subjects, psychologists, and assistant teachers that helped in the classrooms. In summary, it had an effective structure that was mobilized to provide the students with an education characterized by excellence and built through dialogue between different subjects, in the face of many demands and problems.

Thus, over the span of its nearly 80 years of commitment to education and its principles, it had faced many diverse situations. However, one was especially challenging.

GENDER ISSUES

Some female students created a club at the school inspired by the principles of the school or family members, the presence of the theme in the media, personal reflection, social factors, or a mixture of all these elements.

Composed exclusively of girls, the group began in a modest fashion, enlisting sympathizers to discuss matters relevant to the world of adolescent women—conversations about relationships, readings on adolescence and sexuality, presentations on how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and pregnancy, question and answer forums, small case studies... in short, a series of exchanges that the adults were accustomed to refer to as “girl talk.”

Little by little, however, the conversations and debates began to include a search for new references and discoveries regarding different kinds of relationships. It's probable that that was destined from the beginning, and the strengthening and growth of the club opened it up to new themes about men and women, femininity and masculinity, sexual desires and behaviors, sexual diversity, transsexuality, the social conditions of women, and so forth. Sharing common interests, giving names to things, getting to know themselves better, and perceiving themselves as sexual individuals was, without a doubt, important to every member and the group.

WIDER ENGAGEMENT

Over time, the members of the club began to express their opinions and positions outside the group, making their voices echo in other places, at other moments. They held open meetings, lectures, and discussions, even inviting teachers and staff members. Posters, images, photos, and texts covered the walls. Themes included gender, sexuality, violence against women, women around the world, among others.

All signs indicated the continued growth and strengthening of the group, of its meaning and potential, of an idea, a struggle. The club gained recognition, status. At the same time, however, the forces of resistance, strange looks, gossip, and loaded com-

ments promoting distortions of the truth, and open prejudice also grew. Therefore, there were those who felt recognized by the group, the space they'd created, and the force they'd become, but there were also those who were made uncomfortable or even felt threatened by it.

"Ah, Jorge hit Wilma? That doesn't surprise me... She keeps going on about equality between men and women, and got what was coming to her!"

"Do they need to show all that cleavage at school? Is it the place for that?"

"To each their own. I just don't want to have to work with them anymore; we always have to watch what we say around them or they jump all over us."

"I don't have anything against the way Carla and Selma are always attached at the hip. I think it's cool how discrete they are. Sometimes I even wonder if what they say about them is really true..."

A THIN LINE

Things continued between both the group and its allies and the resistance. More girls joined the club, while others maintained a distance (they didn't want to get involved or be associated with it) or put themselves in clear opposition to the group and their issues. All of this, however, formed a certain equilibrium and an imaginary line seemed to have been drawn between the members and those outside the group.

Carla and Selma had been friends for a long time, but the fact that they were always together, whispering and holding hands, and often set themselves apart from their classmates, added to the suspicions that there was more than a friendship between them. Of course, some made cruel or naive comments about them, while others said, "Let them be," not really wanting to put a name on what they saw in order to keep the "line" in place. Until one day a change occurred: the girls came to school holding hands and whispering to each other like always, but this time the whispers were interspersed by kisses.

The line had been crossed with a resounding stomp. It was explicit that the new development had shaken up the scene. The distance between talking about sexuality, gender, and different kinds of relationships and being faced with a real situation seemed so great that it was practically an abyss.

Within the community, everything happened very quickly. The matter, romanticized by some, demonized by others, invaded the classrooms, and went as far as the administration. Meetings between educators, administrators, and students were held. Concerns about the couple and their privacy, as well as care not to expose them and make sure they were respected, were by no means scarce. In a certain way, it was an unquestionable learning opportunity for everyone that had arisen without any planning or organizing but was made possible because of the values the school advocated, prompting deep reflection, discouraging judgment and lascivious speech, and sustaining its position with arguments based on a democratic line of thought. Therefore, despite the unexpectedness of the issue, everyone recognized the necessary and desirable power of openly discussing it in all its aspects. And everything seemed to point, not to an end to the issue, but rather to the educational need to outline the next steps. However, other forces emerged. The controversy also reached the parents, who came to the school looking for positions, asking for guilty parties to be named, and demanding punishments. Teachers, staff members, and administrators saw what a small chunk of ice was take off and grow into a giant snowball, rolling uncontrollably down the slope.

The situation became even more complex. The school had to deal with a number of different interested parties: Selma and Carla's parents, who, like the two girls, had been thrown in the middle of the storm; parents who wanted to permanently keep their children away from that situation, passing judgment and making demands that went from public execution to the expulsion of the couple; and parents who sought to put themselves in the girls' parents' shoes, and accepted that they were being made to deal with a situation that brought them outside their comfort zone.

What about you? How would you deal with this situation? What would you do? Could this happen at your school?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In what way should sexuality and gender issues be address at school?
2. What place do discussions about the construction of gender identities have in the classroom?
3. Do notions about what it is to be masculine or feminine and sexual orientation have a relation to discrimination and exclusion?
4. Are gender, sexuality, and gender identity ideological creations?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is your position regarding the case presented? Are there any limits that should have been imposed on the situation? Guilty parties to blame? How would you weigh all the variables?
2. What signs of prejudice and intolerance did you identify in this narrative?
3. If you were in the principal's shoes, how would you have resolved the issue?
4. Do you think that Carla and Selma's parents pulling them out of the school, after the uproar the young women's relationship brought about, would be a good way to bring it to a conclusion?
5. Can you think of anything that could be done in a situation of this magnitude to keep it from developing into the scandal described in the case?

PARTE IV

Equity

The Meaning of Zero on a Report Card: Who Failed?

CASE

It was a Friday, the last day of the first quarter. Sofia, the vice-principal, had to sign the report cards of every 1st-grade student, as they would be sent home to the parents that same day. As she went through the documents for each student, she analyzed the grades given by the classes' main teachers and the various specialized teachers that taught that year. It was then that she found a grade that caught her attention: a student named Nicolas had received a zero in the subject Body in Movement.

The pedagogical principals at the school where Sofia worked were very consistent, having been established over more than 40 years of the institution's history; the evaluation system was not rigid and was oriented toward monitoring the students' progress. The grading system was as follows: grade three indicated that the child had gone beyond the goals for the quarter, a two meant that the student had met the intended goals, a one indicated that the student required the teachers' help to meet the goals, while a zero meant that the student wouldn't be able to meet the goals, even with the teachers' help. Therefore, the zero on Nicolas' report card was a surprising grade.

When she arrived at school on Monday morning, Sofia found a note on her table. It was a copy of a message written by Nicolas' father on the report card itself, expressing his indignation at the grade given his son in a very strong, almost aggressive tone.

She had barely read the note when the school secretary knocked on her door to inform her that the boy's mother had called requesting the vice-principal to get back to her about her

“position regarding that grade.”

Sofia went to the school’s principal. She considered Antônio Carlos an example to be followed, as he was always there to support the vice-principals and help them consider the problems they faced. Listening to Sofia relate the situation, he showed surprise at the grade given by the Body in Movement class teacher and suggested that the vice-principal should speak with him to better understand what had taken place.

THE CONVERSATION WITH THE TEACHER

Marcos had been at the school for 16 years. He was an experienced schoolteacher (he had contributed to a didactic book about corporal expression teaching), as well as confident and extremely dedicated, and it was obvious that he loved and believed in what he did. On Tuesday, Sofia went to Marcos to talk about the situation.

“Look, Sofia, I couldn’t have given Nicolas any other grade, because he didn’t do anything in my class. In addition to refusing to participate in the activities, his attitude was very inappropriate. He would sit in a corner and make fun of his classmates. I told him multiple times that that was not the appropriate behavior in class and that he couldn’t keep acting like that... Then, last week, I asked Nicolas’ teacher not to let him leave the classroom for the Body in Movement class. Everyone went except for him. He stayed in his classroom for ten minutes, then we asked if he wanted to go and if he was going to participate in the class. And he went. From that moment, his attitude completely changed!”

“But Marcos, why didn’t you do that earlier?”

“I was trying to involve him in the activities in various other ways, because I didn’t want to resort to that... I warned him multiple times, but I didn’t want it to be that way. You know the children all love the Body in Movement class! I never had to do that before with anyone. During the 16 years I’ve been here, I think I have given a zero only two times. The children love the lessons, because the activities are always in the form of fun games and they are willing to participate. But he’s much better now; even more so after he got his report card! And, after all, isn’t the purpose of the

report card exactly to indicate to the families how the students are performing at school?”

Sofia thanked the teacher for his clarifications and went back to her office deep in thought. Marcos’ argument seemed coherent to her. After all, shouldn’t the report card also be a tool for learning? Nicolas was in fact very uninterested in the activities and lessons at the school, almost always oblivious of his own educational development. For the vice-principal, it was evident that this attitude was related to the fact that his parents also didn’t seem to give much importance to the boy’s school life; he often missed class to do things with his family. *It’s no coincidence that he’s so unmotivated!* she thought.

Later, that same day, Sofia met with Marta, Nicolas’ class teacher. His behavior had been the reason for various conversations between them, during which they had planned various strategies to get him involved in the lessons and activities. According to the teacher, on the day the report cards were handed in, she asked Nicolas if he knew what the zero on his card meant and related that he responded saying, “I messed around a lot, didn’t I? I know...”

“You see? I think the zero worked! Let’s see now if he becomes more aware of his behavior.”

On the way home, Sofia remembered the words of the two teachers and thought: *Should the grade reflect behavioral issues? Or should it only focus on the content of the body expression class? If the activities are in the form of games, shouldn’t the children have the right to choose not to participate? If they should involve themselves voluntarily, does it make sense to evaluate them?*

THE CONVERSATION WITH THE PRINCIPAL

On Wednesday, Sofia had to give a response to Nicolas’ parents, so she went once again to the principal, Antônio Carlos. She related her conversation with Marcos and her own personal thoughts on the matter. The principal suggested that she justify the grade to the parents by explaining that it was impossible to evaluate the student because he didn’t participate in the classes, just as the teacher had argued.

Antônio Carlos also suggested that she remove the zero and leave the grade for the Body in Movement class blank, but that bothered her. After all, either the grade was relevant or it wasn't; either the teacher was mistaken, and therefore should re-evaluate the student, or he was right and the grade should remain.

THE CONVERSATION WITH THE PARENTS

Still not knowing what position to take, Sofia decided to call the parents back. Looking at her phone, she hesitated, as she didn't know who she should call: the father, who wrote the note, or the mother, who called the school? She decided to call the mother, who had requested the callback.

"Hi, Sabrina! This is Sofia, vice-principal at Nicolas' school, returning your call."

"So, Sofia, did you see my husband's note?"

"Yes."

"Look, we think the grade that teacher gave him was ridiculous! He's the one that should get a zero. Doesn't he realize how much that can impact a little boy getting his first report card? It can be traumatic! Nicolas was really sad! He spent the whole weekend upset. What's the point of that?"

"I think it would be good for us to schedule a time to talk more about all this and about Nicolas' behavior at school. I spoke with the Body in Movement teacher. He explained to me that the lessons have a very playful character and he tried various ways to get Nicolas involved, but he refused. That's why he couldn't evaluate him."

A second voice joined the conversation, "Hi, Sofia, this is Mauro, Nicolas' father. I'm listening here on the speakerphone and I'd like to point out two things: Why weren't we told that the situation was like that? At no point, since the beginning of the year, were we called to the school to talk about his behavior so we could do something about it at home... The other thing is the following: how can a teacher not capture the interest of a 6-year-old boy? For me, it's clear that the grade is a punishment. That's not acceptable."

Mother and father both continued to expound their opinions, continuing to assert that they wouldn't accept the grade the teacher had given their son. After listening to them both, Sofia responded, "Well, I think this conversation really should continue in person, because the matter is too complex to speak about over the phone. Let's set a time to talk more about this? I think it's important for us to talk about Nicolas, beyond the matter of the grade."

"Yes, let's do that, then. That's fine. Schedule it with my wife and I'll try to go too, but my schedule is very complicated right now. Either way, we're very satisfied with the school, Nicolas loves it there. We just wanted to deal with the matter of that grade. If you can resolve that with the teacher, everything would be great."

The conversation ended with a date for the meeting set for the following week.

Thursday was a normal work day. Sofia reflected on the points made by the parents on the telephone the day before. Despite the indignant tone they used to express themselves, a point they made that was quite relevant echoed in her memory: if the teacher failed to engage the student and couldn't find strategies to help him reach the goals of the class, who gave the unsatisfactory performance, the teacher or the student? She remembered that when she was a teacher she had disliked grading her students, because it always made her question if any shortcomings had been due to her failure as a teacher.

Her thoughts were then interrupted by the secretary, "Sofia, Nicolas' mother called to cancel the meeting."

"What do you mean? Did she ask to reschedule? Suggest another time?"

"No, she said it wasn't necessary anymore, and if anything else came up, you would reschedule."

Alone in her office, the vice-principal asked herself if she should insist on having the meeting. How much did the parents' lack of involvement have a relation to the boys' attitude? Over the whole week, she had been (pre)occupied with his case. But in the end, who was the source of the problem?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Should grades reflect the participation or involvement of students or is it the teacher's responsibility to motivate and engage them?
2. Are grades a good way to assess a student's learning outcomes or does it represent a means of punishment?
3. Is the teacher responsible if the student learns or not? In other words, does the problem lie in learning or in teaching?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the purpose of evaluating a student?
2. What are grades for?
3. Are there other ways of assessing students' development?

Access Is Not Synonymous with Learning

CASE

Morganna was 50 years old and vice-principal of Antenor Vasconcelos School, in Ceará, since it had opened nine years before. It was a full-time school located in a part of the Northeastern *sertão* (bush lands) severely affected by drought, and was part of a pilot program from the state government.

According to the Ministry of Education (MEC), the institution's student body was made up of students with a low socioeconomic status, and the city where it was located rated low on the Human Development Index (HDI). The school was attended by 364 high school students from all grades, 70% of which were considered socially underprivileged, and were mostly the children of agricultural workers that practiced *sequeiro*⁵ agriculture in the region. Most of their parents never completed middle school and only 3% graduated from high school. In addition to the water crisis, the municipality suffered from a lack of jobs, a rise in illicit drug use, and an increase in urban crime rates. Faced with these adversities, some of the students who went to the school didn't see the value of studying.

As was her custom after an exhausting week of work, Morganna got in her car on Saturday night and drove to the city theater to attend a performance of the symphony orchestra. The streets were deserted, which meant she arrived ten minutes earlier than

5. *Sequeiro* agriculture is a form of cultivation without irrigation employed in semi-arid regions where the annual precipitation is less than 20 inches.

expected. Sitting in silence in the auditorium seat, she couldn't help but think about what had taken place the afternoon of the day before, during the management committee course correction meeting that was held every semester at the school. Twenty-two teachers were present and Morganna submitted a report that showed the percentage of students that had scored below the average pass grade in the most recent internal exams at the school.

Over the previous years, the school had improved its students' proficiency levels in the required subjects, according to the Basic Education Development Index (*Ideb*⁶), the largest external evaluation in the country, in addition to restructuring its internal evaluation system with the goal of guaranteeing quality education and an equitable learning process to the students. This success was credited to the work of that group of teachers. However, the pass rate of the first semester had dropped considerably at the school the previous year—it was now only 49%—and many subjects were classified as critical.

TEACHERS MEETING

All the teachers knew which issue would be the focus of the meeting, as, after the school board meeting at the end of each semester, there was a meeting to establish the goals for the coming semester.

As expected, Morganna opened the meeting with the following question, "What do you think about the high fail rate from the first semester?"

Jean, a Spanish teacher who had recently completed his master's degree, had taught at the school for eight years and was known for having strong, at times radical opinions about teaching methods. As a rule, he had an excellent grasp of his subject, but knew

6. *The Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica*, known as *Ideb*, was created in 2007 by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, known as *Inep*) and was formulated to measure the quality of national learning and establish goals for improving education. Source: <http://portal.mec.gov.br/conheca-o-ideb#:~:text=Ideb%20%C3%A9%20o%20C3%8Dndice%20de,para%20a%20melhoria%20do%20ensino>.

that he needed to improve his methodological repertoire to help his students better progress. At times he failed to meet the learning goals for his classes, though part of the students in his classes had shown progress in their proficiency levels. He said, “Those are good results. A 49% approval rate for a class of 45 students could be considered a miracle. We can’t teach those who don’t want to learn, those who have no prospects.”

His statement provoked an unpleasant silence in the room, which now had a tense atmosphere. The group of teachers knew that the vice-principal strove toward the goal of guaranteeing every student enrolled at the school a high-quality education regardless of their families’ socioeconomic status. However, the location of the school and other factors were often used to justify poor educational outcomes. The school’s mission was to offer quality education characterized by excellence, a theme that Morganna often reiterated, “A good teacher is an anchor for social change. When that happens, education fulfills its role of improving the future of young men and women and providing them with the opportunity to acquire the skills they need to develop their potential and improve their socioeconomic status.”

Those present at the course correction meeting believed in what Morganna said, though adversity continued to hinder their efforts to provide quality education with equity.

It was then that Edson, who has taught Portuguese to the 1st-year students for nine years, asked to speak. He had achieved the highest pass rate at the school in his classes: 58%. Addressing the group, he stated, “I think the students in the first year presented good results. These students come to our school lacking some of the basic knowledge and skills they should have acquired from elementary and middle school. Ten of these students are not suited for high school, but no disciplinary action was taken with them. If they don’t want to study and hold back the rest of the group, they should be transferred; it’s not fair for them to compromise the general outcomes of the entire class. Considering the way that they behave, they shouldn’t even be given the opportunity to make up for their failing grades.”

The opinion of the teacher made it clear that the school's mission of providing quality education with equity hadn't been taken to heart by the entire team, which bothered Morganna. The pedagogical work should always be an instrument to promote social change.

Roberta, who had been a teacher for 15 years and was granted tenure in 2014, recently returned to the school after finishing her doctorate. Feeling profoundly inspired, she asked to speak, "We are all here because we believe in the transformative power of education. Our motto is equity and educational success. Equity and quality are two of the school's foundational principals. We know the social conditions of these young people better than anyone and we are aware that to teach is to offer a powerful instrument for change. Our school is in the semiarid region of the Northeast, where most young people live daily with hunger and misery. We surely need to improve the pass rate of our students, re-evaluate the credit recovery process, and carry out an analysis of the methodologies we're using, as well as the learning processes of the students, so that we can reconstruct a practical and more effective pedagogical approach. The low pass rate should be a watershed for our institution. We urgently need to establish a culture of dialogue about the learning processes that take place in the classroom. If the students aren't learning, our methods need to be revised."

The first chords echoed through the auditorium, marking the beginning of the symphony orchestra's performance. Once again, the vice-principal's thoughts returned to the meeting and the words of the young math teacher known as Neto: "Our group is aware of the large problem our students are facing; a serious situation that needs to be resolved. It's very challenging for the faculty to offer a quality education to students that are not emotionally prepared and whose lack of interest and motivation certainly derives from a lack of encouragement from their families regarding the educational process. It is very stressful for the teacher, which emphasizes the need for the school to talk with us about the social-emotional skills we need. It should be said that we're part of the learning process and require support. Concern for the students and the curriculum shouldn't take precedence over the needs of the teachers."

Morganna then responded, “I agree with you. Socio-emotional skills have positive impacts on learning, holistic development, and the promotion of equity and cultural change. Nonetheless, our students from poor socioeconomic backgrounds can’t be left behind and our challenge is to face the reality of this community.

If our model isn’t working, let’s create an effective collective solution.”

In fact, Morganna had never thought about the personal effect of the school’s results-oriented policy on the teachers. She had never considered that the learning process is composed of both teachers and students, brought together by a subject to be studied, and that, for this reason, there needed to be a harmonious relationship between the two.

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

The group then heard a hoarse and timid voice arise from the back of the room. It was Aline, leader of 2nd-year class A, one of the classes that had presented one of the highest pass rates.

“We’re gathered here at the course correction meeting to evaluate the effectiveness of the school’s pedagogical practices. I recognized the efforts being made by the teachers, but we’re not leaning like we should be. The classes are all taught as though the students were all at the same level of knowledge when it’s clear that they are not. The credit recovery process at the school doesn’t work to help students recuperate their grades or acquire the knowledge they need to learn.”

The team of teachers was shocked and troubled by Aline’s statement on the pedagogical practices and lesson planning at the school. It was a sign that the students needed to be heard, that they wanted to be agents in their own learning process. The silence was total as all the teachers in the room sat and stared at one another.

Coming from the back of the room, a trembling, high-pitched voice asked to give a statement. It was Lucia, the philosophy teacher and a former student at the school, “Today we have a big problem we need to solve at this meeting. I agree with Aline that what has happened is not normal—we’re blaming poor performance

on the socioeconomic status of the students and using the lack of support from their families or lack of motivation to justify our practices' lack of success. We teach in an impersonal manner, grouping all the students in the classes together as if they were all at the same level of knowledge and skills, but we need to migrate to a model that prioritizes personalized education. I believe that our credit recovery model doesn't work because we don't have space for continuous recovery work in the schedules for the different subjects. All of this needs to be revised with a change to our methods. Otherwise, our desire for a school characterized by quality education and equity will be nothing more than a utopian one."

It was then that, Marta, a 60-year-old woman representing the parents of the 3rd-year students, asked permission to speak, "I recognize the great work being done at this school, made up of wonderful teachers and excellent administrators. That is why I believe that we will find a solution today for the credit recovery process at this institution, which has had such unsatisfactory results. I know that we need to support the teachers more, as I believe in the transformative power of education, which also has a role for the family to play. I can tell by the high percentage of students who are currently working to make up for falling behind in their classes that most of our children aren't learning. We need to engage in dialogue and find a solution that will ensure both quality and equity in the students' education."

At this Morganna responded, "The statements given by Aline, Lucia and Marta all point to the same cause. We are using the same methods for all our students, our recovery model is not working and, consequently, our students are not learning adequately. There's no arguing with the facts."

The symphony orchestra performance came to an end and Morganna went home, overcome by a sense of failure. She kept thinking about the course correction meeting.

The words of their experienced principal, Camila, revealed concern with the pedagogical management, "In my six years as principal, I've never experienced such a situation. It is surely one of the highest fail rates we've ever had. Our youth needs to be understood and feel empowered to exert their transformative potential.

“The concerns expressed by Aline demonstrate that the students want to participate more in how their education is managed and be involved in the discussions about the school’s problems. They also represent an opportunity for the students to exercise their agency and contribute to the search for solutions.

“We must understand that the educational process is like a circuit—if one of the parts stops working, it compromises the rest. If it’s not working, it’s not the moment to determine who’s at fault, but rather the time to find solutions. The course correction meeting is an opportunity for us to assess what has worked well at the school and to discover the main cause of the ineffectiveness of the credit recovery process. Our management circuit will be strengthened and the participation of everyone—parents, students, teachers, and administrators—is essential to the result-oriented management.

“We need to establish clear learning goals that meet our students’ needs, which means a revision of our methodologies and a renewal of dialogue, discussion, and, above all, our commitment. If they’re not learning like they should, it means that our methodological repertoire has failed at some point. We need to improve our assessment system, as it is clear that the credit recovery process is a weak point, and that worries me.”

ACCESS VS. EQUITY

Morganna was very worried because the learning process was a priority at her school. On the afternoon of the meeting, the vice-principal realized that, though it guaranteed access to education to the community’s youth, the institution was not offering everyone the opportunity to learn. These issues demanded attention and that the challenge to improve the quality of the students’ education and their learning pace be faced head on. The teachers’ training needed to be rethought. A continual increase in dialogue and discussion about the matter at the school was also required.

That moment of self-evaluation led Morganna to analyze her practices and inspired her to continue to struggle more and more for what she believed in.

THE STUDENT'S VOICE

The vice-principal's thoughts continued to be dominated by the problem at school and she couldn't sleep. She remembered a conversation she had with Mateus in her office before the meeting. He was a student from a poor socioeconomic background who was studying to recover credit in nine of the thirteen subjects he had studied during that semester. The student said to her:

"Mrs. Morganna, there's no way I'll be able to catch up. There's not enough time for me to make up for everything I am behind in, not to mention that it'd be too many tests for me to take in one day. My desire at this school is to pass, but the contents are very difficult for me to memorize. Couldn't the recovery time be split between the semesters, instead of only beginning at the end? I don't understand very well how things work at the school, but I think there's something wrong about that. As vice-principal, don't you think so too?"

During her daily duties at the school, the vice-principal hadn't stopped to think about what Mateus had said. Now, she was certain that there were many Mateus who had fallen behind due to the way the school was handling credit recovery, which led to an unfair situation for the students and did not provide the personalized education they needed.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLEXION

1. Do economic conditions impact the learning process? What should a school do to guarantee underprivileged students the conditions they need to learn?
2. How can a school guarantee excellence, quality and equity in the education it provides?
3. In the case of students who have severely fallen behind their grade level and don't show an interest in studying, what should be given priority: equity or quality?
4. Based on the principle of equity, what mechanisms can a school adopt to ensure the credit recovery system is effective?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Were the claims made by Jean, the Spanish teacher, in his statement correct?
2. How should a student falling behind in his or her classes be addressed, considering that the goal of the school is to provide quality education to everyone?
3. How could the vice-principal revise the teacher training process in a way that would reduce the fail rate of the students?
4. Is it possible to help students recover their learning outcomes at a school with the characteristics described in the case?
5. What measures should be taken to keep the economic conditions and parents limited education from influencing the success of their children at school?

Acknowledgments

This book is the result of the efforts of many individuals, in both North and South America. Inspired by a program led by the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (DRCLAS) at Harvard University to develop and publish case studies for school directors in Chile, this program seeks to increase knowledge of the case-method of instruction among a new audience: Brazilian teachers.

Ana Maria Diniz, president of the board at Instituto Península, a non-profit organization founded in 2010, and dedicated to transforming and empowering people through Education and Sports to create a strong civil society, became interested in the use of cases as a method of connecting theory and practice in the development of teachers, and her enthusiasm for the approach was what led to the genesis of this initiative.

Miguel Thompson, who directs Singularidades, a teacher education college with ties to Instituto Península, invited Professor Katherine K. Merseth from Harvard University to hold a workshop on the case-method of instruction for teachers. After this event, Singularidades organized a three-day workshop for a group of teachers and school administrators from throughout Brazil to help them learn how to turn their personal experiences into cases, and it was this very diverse and enthusiastic group that provided the cases for this book.

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Partners

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Fundação Santillana is dedicated to the production, compilation, and dissemination of information that will contribute to bringing education to high standards of quality and equity. Founded in 1979, the foundation operates in both Spanish-speaking Latin America and Brazil, where it arrived in 2008. The foundation conducts activities that benefit students, educators, and administrators at public and private institutions. It develops and disseminates reference materials for educational evaluations and policies, promotes and supports training courses, seminars and workshops for teachers and administrators, and collaborates and participates in award programs that recognize the dedication of education professionals. Through its partnerships with national and international organizations, it develops projects that promote reading, culture and good citizenship. It seeks to share innovative experiences and spread relevant information to the promotion of quality education provided with equity, which is an indispensable component to the work of strengthening fair, sustainable, and democratic societies.

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Editoria Moderna is a leader in the Brazilian publishing industry. It offers publications to the field of basic education that present comprehensive educational solutions and focus on the well-rounded development of students. It is part of Grupo Santillana, which operates in 22 countries. With the goal of contributing to the educational and cultural development of Brazil, Moderna constantly invests in research and technology. It is a pioneer in offering high-quality innovative content and platforms to public and private educational institutions. It also supports the training of teachers and administrators by conducting free courses, work-

shops, and seminars, apart from offering reference materials that foster meaningful reflections on public policy for the promotion of innovative education. It also contributes to social projects that contribute to education and culture, in partnership with Fundação Santillana and other entities in the sector.

INSTITUTO PENÍNSULA

Instituto Península is a social organization focused on improving the quality of Brazilian education. It was founded by Abílio Diniz's family, in 2010, based on the belief that the principal agents of transforming education are teachers. For this reason, it believes that the professional development of educators is fundamental and that, for any action directed at this audience to be successful, it must consider multiple dimensions of their work, such as the cognitive, social, emotional, and relational aspects, in addition to the wide range of contexts in which they work. To bring ideas to life, Instituto Península seeks to connect the best current pedagogical theories to the daily experience of educators.

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The David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (DRCLAS) at Harvard University works to increase knowledge of the cultures, economies, histories, environment and contemporary issues of Latin America; to foster cooperation and understanding among the peoples of the Americas; and to contribute to democracy, social progress, and sustainable development throughout the hemisphere. The Brazilian office was established in São Paulo in 2006 to support the faculty and students of Harvard conducting research, teaching and learning throughout the country. The joint efforts between the Brazilian office and the Brazilian Studies Program at Harvard University are creating new opportunities and resulting in a rich portfolio of research studies, student activities, and programs at the University and in Brazil.

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APOIO



Of the few certainties that exist in education, two are related to teachers and are unquestionable: no isolated factor impacts the success of a student at school more than a good teacher; and good teachers are not born, they're made.

Therefore, the more real situations they have to refer to, the greater their repertoire of teaching materials will be, and the more emotionally prepared they are in terms of self-awareness and interpersonal relationships, the greater their performance will be.

Written by school teachers and administrators throughout Brazil, this book presents real situations in the form of case studies. It is my hope that it serves as both an example and inspiration, leading to a virtuous cycle of quality education and the exchange of enriching experiences that will allow teachers to help students realize their full potential.

ANA MARIA DINIZ

President of the Board at Instituto Península

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