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THE EDUCATIONAL NEXUS TO THE WAR ON DRUGS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

DIANA RODRÍGUEZ-GÓMEZ AND MARIA JOSE BERMEO

ABSTRACT

The war on drugs has had a heavy impact on educational settings, yet to date the fields of education in emergencies and comparative and international education have largely overlooked it. This systematic review of relevant empirical studies published between 1988 and 2018 across 20 subfields of education examines how academic scholarship has addressed the intersection of schooling and the war on drugs. Through a content analysis of 420 articles, we quantified the occurrence of terms related to the war on drugs, identified patterns and trends, and explored their underlying meaning. We found abundant academic literature on drugs and schools, particularly with regard to student drug use, but little research that examines the educational implications of the war on drugs. We draw from the concept of assemblage to frame the scope of this global conflict and conclude with a research agenda that incorporates discussions about the war on drugs in the education in emergencies field.

INTRODUCTION

Drug-related violence has had a heavy impact on educational settings.¹ Since the 1980s, the militarization of drug policies and ongoing confrontations between states and drug-trafficking organizations, coupled with the violent competition among criminal organizations for control of the illicit drug market, have had

1 In this article, we use the term “drugs” to refer to “psychoactive substances . . . that, for a variety of reasons since 1900, have been construed as health or societal dangers by modern states, medical authorities, and regulatory cultures and are now globally prohibited in production, use, and sale” (Gootenberg 2009, 13). This definition draws attention to the social construction of these substances as illegal and associated with criminal activity.

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large-scale human costs. This so-called war on drugs has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives (Keefer and Loayza 2010), led to sharp increases in incarceration rates (Alexander 2010; Chaparro and Pérez 2017; Drucker 2014), and forced tens of thousands to flee their homes (Atuesta Becerra 2014).² Widely recognized as a failed approach (Collins 2014; Gaviria et al. 2009; Rolles and Eastwood 2012), the war on drugs has created an environment of violence and insecurity that shapes the experiences of children and youth in countries across the world, who often are recruited by criminal networks and targeted as a market for illicit substances (Dowdney 2003; UNODC 2018). Children and youth also experience a wide range of human rights violations linked to drug-control efforts, including extrajudicial killings, denial of essential medicines and basic health services, separation from loved ones, and the collateral effects of aerial fumigation and forced eradication of illicit crops (Barrett 2011; Walsh, Sánchez-Garzoli, and Salinas-Abdala 2008). Moreover, their access to quality education is compromised by the presence of armed actors within and outside school premises, teacher turnover, and the effects of adversity on their ability to learn. Despite these harsh realities, the fields of comparative and international education and education in emergencies (EiE) have thus far largely overlooked the nexus between the war on drugs and education.

This may be due in part to the elusive nature of the war on drugs. Although its effects are abundantly clear through the body count, instability, and insecurity it generates, we seem to struggle to identify and define this war. It has been variously described as a “global social process” (Molano-Cruz 2017), a “body of legislation” (Bowen and Redmond 2016), a “war against people” (Paley 2014, 2015), and a “cartel-state conflict” (Lessing 2018), but these definitions do not explain how this war connects distant actors, institutions, and regulatory landscapes across the globe. In this article, we suggest that the concept of assemblage—understood as a shifting configuration of human and nonhuman actors that come together through productive relations to form a new whole (Latour 2005, 2013; Collier and Ong 2005)—better captures these complex associations and reveals the war on drugs to be an ongoing and widespread global conflict produced through the dynamic

² These numbers give an idea of the human cost of the war on drugs: in Mexico, from 2006 to 2018, it is estimated that 250,000 lives were lost and some 34,000 people were disappeared due to drug war-related violence (Human Rights Watch 2019a; Romero 2018); in the Philippines, some 12,000 drug suspects have been killed since Rodrigo Duterte declared war on drugs in 2016, including children either directly targeted or inadvertently shot by police (Human Rights Watch, 2018, 2019b); in the United States, it is estimated that some 2.7 million children have a parent incarcerated due to drug offenses, and peaks in overdose deaths have reached as high as 72,000 in one year (Drug Policy Alliance 2014; National Institute on Drug Abuse 2019). In monetary terms, estimates are that the United States has spent approximately US\$3.3 billion annually to incarcerate people charged with drug-related offenses, some US\$10 billion were dedicated to Plan Colombia and US\$1.6 billion to Plan Merida, while Mexico spent approximately MXN \$1.8 billion on security between 2006 and 2016 (Camhaji and Garcia 2016). Again, these figures are given just to offer an idea of the magnitude of the phenomenon. It is difficult to give a precise estimate of the total human and monetary costs of the war on drugs, in part due to how it moves and adapts across settings.

interplay of diverse actors and signifiers. Drawing from this concept, we define the war on drugs as the violent configuration of prohibitionist and militarized drug policies that mobilize the illicit and lucrative nature of the drug trade.

For this study, we asked, how does education research describe the intersection of schooling and the war on drugs? Drawing from a corpus of 420 peer-reviewed articles from 22 journals in a range of education fields, we analyzed how this body of research represents the relation between education and drugs, and the theoretical and methodological devices used to do so. We found significant academic work on the link between school-age populations and drug use but little on the relationship between the war on drugs and schooling. The literature offers fragmented portrayals of the drug trade and education systems, thereby reducing conflict, violence, and involvement in drug trafficking to individual actions rather than complex social phenomena. This narrow perspective limits understanding of how this ongoing conflict affects inclusive access to quality education for children and youth. We argue that education research, particularly in the field of EiE, needs to broaden the scope of analysis in order to reveal the complex ways the war on drugs intersects with education systems. We argue further that research itself may reproduce the logics that sustain this war, and therefore call for reflexive research practice.

After first discussing the educational implications of contemporary forms of violent conflict, with particular attention to the war on drugs, we highlight how the concept of assemblage can help to identify the range of actors, connections, and logics that sustain such conflicts and shape their interactions with education systems. We then describe the methodological design and limitations of our study. We proceed to a discussion of our key findings and suggest new avenues for research. We hope this analysis helps to create a critical and reflexive research agenda for this important topic.

EDUCATION IN CONFLICT

Born in a period of significant global transformation, the field of EiE has had to adapt to shifting forms of conflict and crisis. Taking shape in the late 20th century, EiE emerged as a field of practice and inquiry concerned with barriers to education in crisis-affected areas and the role of education in humanitarian response initiatives (Novelli 2010; Burde et al. 2017). Since then, EiE practitioners and scholars have played an active role in advocating for access to quality education for all in the midst of complex emergencies, while also generating critical research

on the diverse facets of the relationship between education and crises, particularly armed conflicts and natural disasters.

The relationship between education and violent conflict is a central concern for the field. Since the publication of Bush and Saltarelli's 2000 report, scholars and practitioners have readily acknowledged the multifaceted role of education in divided and violence-affected communities (e.g., Smith and Vaux 2003; Smith 2005; Davies 2004, 2005; Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008). Research has shown that, while education can play an important role in safeguarding young people in situations of crisis (e.g., Oh and Van der Stouwe 2008; Pherali 2011), it also can exacerbate drivers of conflict and be a site of manifold harms (e.g., Hromadžić 2008; Lall 2008; Poirier 2012; Novelli and Higgins 2018). Scholars recently have advocated for a systemic read of this relationship and an analysis of how education systems intersect with structural processes in conflict and postconflict settings (Lopes Cardozo and Shah 2016; Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2017). This includes examining how education may connect to the underlying rationales and interests that sustain national and international conflict situations (Novelli and Cardozo 2008; Novelli 2010).

Despite its important contributions, research in this field tends to assume a nationally and politically bound concept of interstate conflict and civil war and pays limited attention to how the evolution of warfare may reshape educational priorities. In other disciplines, a variety of terms have been used to describe current forms of armed conflict, such as "new wars," "privatized wars," "hybrid wars," "fourth-generation warfare," and "criminal insurgencies."³ While the extent to which these forms of violent conflict really are "new" remains a point of debate (Kalyvas 2001; Berdal 2003; Schuurman 2010), these discussions accentuate characteristics of contemporary warfare that merit our attention.

The current landscape of insecurity breaks down the temporal, spatial, and military boundaries of what we commonly understand as war. Contemporary forms of warfare often persist for extended periods. This unsettles the notion that armed conflict is an exceptional event that occurs for a limited time in a specific place, for which humanitarian intervention serves as a temporary stopgap (Fassin and Pandolfi 2010; Dijkzeul and Bergtora Sandvik 2019). Violent conflicts today involve a wide array of transnational violent actors who connect across borders, such as organized crime networks, gangs, extremist religious groups, private

³ For the purposes of this analysis, we prioritize attention to the points of commonality among these conflict types in order to identify general characteristics of contemporary violent conflict. For further discussion of these distinct terms, see Holsti (1996), Duffield (2001), Kaldor (2002, 2013), and Mitton (2018).

interest groups, multinational corporations, and security companies (Malet and Anderson 2017). This can make it difficult to distinguish between civilians and combatants, and to determine the limits of the conflict. The use of rhetorical devices to describe amorphous threats and dehumanize the enemy (e.g., “war on drugs,” “war on terror”) enables conflicts to move from one location to another and endure for long periods. Political and criminal categories of violence become blurred, as made evident in armed confrontations among criminal organizations (e.g., the intercartel battles that have ravaged Mexico in recent years) or between criminal organizations and the state, where criminal violence is often matched or even exceeded by the high-intensity violence of the countermeasures employed by police and other state security forces (Lessing 2018). Conflict scholars have called for attention to these various types of confrontations, emphasizing the need for new theoretical frameworks that are better able to describe the ambiguities and implications of evolving forms of warfare (see, e.g., Applebaum and Mawby 2018; Kalyvas 2015; Lessing 2018).

Studies of contemporary forms of violent conflict are better served by integrative analyses that pay attention to their interconnectedness. Earlier studies have proposed thinking about war and peace and the transition from humanitarian relief to development as a “continuum,” highlighting the lack of a clear distinction between phases (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Nordstrom 2004; Mendenhall 2014). Taking up the call for systemic analyses of the relationship between education and conflict, we emphasize the need for such analyses to transcend “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Schiller 2003; Novelli and Cardozo 2008) in order to trace connections across national borders, across time, and across the fine lines that divide private and public interests. We propose that the concept of assemblage (as described by Latour 2005, 2013; Collier and Ong 2005) offers a useful analytical tool for reading these types of conflicts, as we show in the case of the war on drugs.

THE WAR ON DRUGS AS AN ASSEMBLAGE

International drug regulation began in the early 20th century as a series of multilateral efforts to curb the supply and abuse of certain psychoactive substances. The emergent prohibitionist framework positioned the drug trade as illegal and criminalized drug users, producers, and vendors. Under this policy framework, organized crime networks gained control of the drug trade and, over time, drug policies became increasingly militarized. The combined effects of an illicit market and militarized repression have resulted in multifaceted insecurity in distant locations across the world.

The term “war on drugs” emerged in the popular lexicon in 1969 with Nixon’s infamous declaration; today it is frequently associated with US domestic and foreign drug policy (Paley 2014). While this war does encompass the US-led offensive on the drug supply chain, it also extends to the various ways other states have declared war on the drug trade, including declarations made by President Betancur in Colombia in 1984, President Calderón in Mexico in 2006, and President Duterte in the Philippines in 2016, and the subsequent intensification of violence between state and nonstate armed actors. An ongoing asymmetric conflict with varying levels of intensity, the war on drugs emerges and subsides in different locations. At times framed as an internal conflict, it is always shaped by dynamics that cross national borders.

As such, we propose thinking about the war on drugs as an assemblage—that is, as an entanglement of global forms with situated interactions (Trige-Andersen 2015). Although the idea of an assemblage originates with Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we draw from Latour (2005, 2013) and Collier and Ong (2005) to define an assemblage as a shifting configuration of human and nonhuman actors that come together through multiple determinations. This concept calls for relational analyses and attention to how particular forms of association between actors emerge. The war on drugs assemblage thus refers to the configuration of actors that constitute the global prohibitionist drug-policy framework and its opposition.

Conceptualizing the war on drugs as an assemblage draws our attention to the actors, linkages, and logics that give it form. This includes the human actors who are involved in the production, commercialization, consumption, and prohibition of illegal substances: the president who declares that drugs are a public enemy; the drug enforcement officer who coordinates a poppy eradication mission with local officials; the cartel members who celebrate the safe delivery of tons of marijuana; the single mother who swallows balloons filled with cocaine to move them through an airport; the child who helps his parents harvest coca leaves; the student who is stopped and frisked by the police outside school premises. It also includes nonhuman actors, such as policy documents, weapons, security devices, drug-related paraphernalia, and the drugs themselves. These heterogeneous actors meet in ever-shifting networks with great asymmetries of power and agency (Koyama 2015). These asymmetries and their implications become obvious when we compare the safety and reach of a high-ranking bureaucrat in Washington, DC, to that of an opium producer in southern Afghanistan.

Despite different purposes and locations within the assemblage (Collier and Ong 2005), these diverse actors are drawn together through common logics. These logics comprise the set of underlying values that coalesce the assemblage, such as the logic of prohibition, which insists on zero-tolerance policies and the eradication of drug use, thereby justifying the use of any means to combat supply. Another common logic in this assemblage is militarization, which orients decisionmaking about drug policy toward preparations for military conflict, including weapons gathering, military funding, and the use of military tactics. These logics are propagated through fear and the construction of a binary distinction between the “us” that must be protected and the “enemy” that must be controlled, if not annihilated. Other logics present in the assemblage include prevention, which pathologizes and individualizes drug consumption, thereby focusing attention on risk factors and correction measures, and harm reduction, which frames drug use as a solvable health problem, thereby erasing diverse cultural interpretations of substance use and sidelining the dynamics of an illegal economy (Fraser and Moore 2011).

By viewing the war on drugs as an assemblage, we open our field of vision to these underlying logics and their interconnected effects. This conception fractures the dichotomy between the micro and the macro, the local and the global; in Latour’s (2005) terms, it flattens the landscape and reveals the connections across locations through innumerable movements that are woven together “by the constant circulation of documents, stories, accounts, goods, and passions” (179). This conceptual lens encourages analysts to engage with how wars spread and persist, transcend boundaries, and link disparate actors.

THE NEXUS BETWEEN THE WAR ON DRUGS AND EDUCATION

In this paper, we use the term “schooling” to refer to the provision of formal education by an education system. We recognize education systems as complex arrangements of interconnecting parts that interact, cooperate, and compete to shape educational processes. This framing takes into account the diverse ideas, motives, intentions, levels of influence, and material resources that shape educational practice (Levinson, Sutton, and Winstead 2009). It also draws attention to the range of roles educational actors play, including students, educators, and parents, education bureaucrats, psychologists, social workers, and counselors, as well as the police, nonformal educators, and researchers, and the children and youth who are excluded from school. It also acknowledges the nonhuman actors

that constitute the education system, such as curricula, education policies, and material resources.

Metal detectors and drug-detection dogs in schools, a drug-education curriculum, a parent involved in a drug cartel, a family migrating to escape the effects of state repression—these multiple educational actors interact with the war on drugs assemblage in profound and varied ways. We use the term “nexus” to refer to these encounters and to the ways education systems are integrated into the war on drugs assemblage. To shed light on this nexus, we reviewed the education scholarship and examined how it describes the intersection of schooling and the war on drugs.

METHODS: ELUSIVE WAR, ELUSIVE LITERATURE

SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES

We began our literature review by carrying out a Boolean search in several academic databases (e.g., ERIC and JSTOR) using the search terms “education” and “drugs.” This initial search produced more than 30,000 results. Impressed, we began to read through the results and found that the majority had little to do with our research interest; most of the results were articles that only peripherally mentioned the search terms and did not have schooling or illicit drugs as their explicit object of study. For example, we found articles that examined physicians’ attitudes toward health education programs and analyses of the market for prescription and nonprescription drugs. We then narrowed our search terms to words related to formal education (“school” and “schooling”) and drug conflicts (“war on drugs” or “drug wars”), which dramatically reduced the results but excluded many pertinent studies. Terms related to the drug war varied widely, making it difficult to pinpoint the relevant literature. We decided that, to examine how and when the nexus of education and the war on drugs emerges in the academic literature, we needed a research design that would keep our search broad but not unwieldy. After further tests, we decided to search for the concurrent use of the terms “education,” “school,” and “drugs,” which enabled us to capture the widest range of studies. We then narrowed our search to a sample of journals that might offer a sense of the debate on the war on drugs across education research.⁴

⁴ We tested a range of related terms, such as “cartels,” “narcotrafficking,” names of specific substances (e.g., “cocaine”), and found that the term “drug” was common across articles.

To generate this sample, we ran a general search of social science and education databases, which identified key education subfields that might address the war on drugs. We selected 20 subfields and approached these journals as proxies of the key debates in each field.⁵ Using the SCIMAGO H-Index, a measure of journals' citation impact, we identified a top-ranking journal from each subfield. We also included two indexed journals that included the terms “drugs” and “education” in their titles: *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy* and the *Journal of Drug Education*. Finally, to learn more about how the general field of education discusses issues related to the war on drugs and education, we also included the *American Educational Research Journal*. Through this process of purposive sampling, we identified 22 journals that reflected the interdisciplinary nature of the field of education.

We used the following criteria to identify articles that addressed the intersection of the war on drugs and schooling, as mentioned in the title or abstract of the article:

- Direct mention of actors affiliated with formal education as the focus of the study, thus excluding nonformal education, except when it occurred within a school setting
- An explicit focus on primary or secondary education, including reference to out-of-school children, thus excluding higher education and vocational programs
- Direct mention of illicit drugs; this excluded pharmaceuticals, alcohol, cigarettes, or inhalants, except where they were studied along with illicit substances
- Empirical data, thus excluding theoretical papers and literature reviews

We also limited our search to a period of 30 years, from 1988 to 2018. This period captures the evolution of the war on drugs from the 1988 UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, which marked the international militarization of drug policy, to the recent drug-policy reform movement as manifested in the decriminalization of cannabis consumption in several countries. Finally, a parallel search across two university library databases,

⁵ The 20 subfields were anthropology of education, comparative education, criminology and criminal justice education, drug policy and education, economics of education, education and curriculum, international educational development, education policy, educational psychology, health education, history of education, human development, peace and human rights education, prevention science, rural education, social work and education, sociology of education, urban education, youth studies, and school violence.

one in the United States and another in Colombia, revealed that such databases have inconsistent holdings, which can produce source bias. To address this, we conducted all our searches through the official websites of the 22 journals selected.

With these criteria established, two researchers and four research assistants read through 4,485 titles and abstracts. To reduce individual bias, we developed a protocol for running searches and selecting articles. If doubts remained, the authors made a final decision. This selection process yielded 420 articles.

DATA ANALYSIS

Our data analysis entailed several steps. First, we used Mendeley and NVivo software to capture pertinent bibliographic data, such as publication date, author, title, and journal. We then designed and ran a deductive coding tree, which included 38 codes with their respective definitions and decision rules. To reduce individual bias at this stage, we prioritized descriptive codes that summarized data and did not require strong interpretative skills (Saldaña 2012). These codes captured (1) methodology, (2) education stakeholders, including human and nonhuman actors, (3) education level, (4) educational responses, (5) segment of the drug route, (6) use of the term “drug,” and (7) country of focus. We assessed the relevance of these codes with a pilot of 10 percent of the total sample (42 articles). This phase of coding enabled us to quantify the occurrence of terms related to the war on drugs and to segment the data for further analysis. We then carried out a second round of inductive coding and used exploratory techniques, such as keyword searches and data visualizations, to identify trends. We wrote descriptive and analytical memos to sharpen our analysis and note emergent findings.

LIMITATIONS

Our strategy of selecting one top journal as a proxy for the debates in each subfield limited the scope of the study. While this strategy did enable us to capture discussions across the field of education, we recognize that reviewing one journal does not ensure full coverage of the discussions in each subfield. Furthermore, given our use of the SCIMAGO H-Index to select our sample, our systematic review focused on peer-reviewed empirical papers included in top English-language journals by publishers located in the United States and the United Kingdom. It therefore prioritized English-language knowledge production over scholarship produced in other languages and in other parts of the world, including places where the war on drugs has done great damage. We also did not include the grey literature, as mapping the many think tanks, research institutes, and organizations that generate

knowledge related to the war on drugs and education would have demanded a different data-collection methodology. Although this review does not encompass the entire literature on the war on drugs and schooling, it is sufficient to provide a framework to start a conversation about these topics in the field of EiE.

FINDINGS

DECEPTIVE ABUNDANCE

At first there appeared to be abundant production of research on education and drugs. However, a closer look revealed a dearth of studies that examine the intersection of the war on drugs and schooling specifically.

As evidenced by the size of the final corpus, academic production on topics related to drugs and education has been abundant and consistent over time. In the journals and the 30-year timeframe (1988-2018) selected for the study, we found a total of 420 articles that refer to formal K-12 education and illicit drugs. This scholarly production was evenly distributed over time and at least seven articles were published per year, with each decade representing around one-third of the total sample.⁶ This shows sustained scholarly attention to the relationship between formal schooling and drugs.

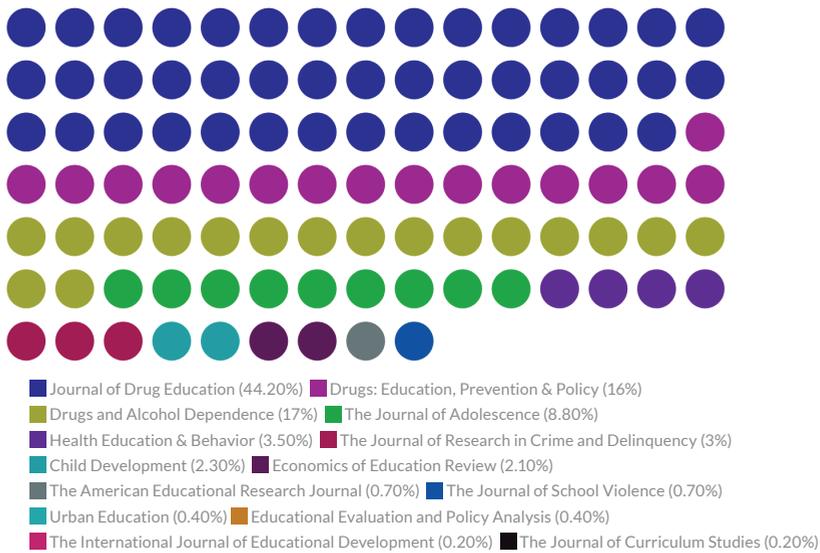
However, we found an uneven distribution of attention across education subfields.⁷ While it is unsurprising that most of the articles that fit our criteria appeared in the journals explicitly devoted to drugs, the limited attention to this topic in journals from other education subfields is noteworthy (see Figure 1). A significant majority (77.2%; N=324) came from the three drug-related journals in our sample. The remaining studies (22.3%; N=96) were dispersed across 11 journals in the areas of youth studies, health education, criminology, child development, school

6 The most recent decade showed increased attention to the legalization of specific substances. Of the seven studies that included the word “legalization” in the body of the article, one was published in 1997 and the remaining six were published between 2016 and 2018. This trend illustrates current concerns about how marijuana legalization might alter consumption patterns and challenge previous assumptions regarding criminalization.

7 It is important to note that, while the sample offers insights into the concerns of diverse subfields, it is not representative of the production in each subfield. Including a wider range of journals per subfield would address this limitation.

violence, urban education, and education policy studies.⁸ The *International Journal of Educational Development* and the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* represented a bare minimum (0.2%; N=1), with only one article each. The journals *Comparative Education*, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, *Educational Psychologist*, *History of Education*, *Journal of Peace Education*, *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *Journal of Social Work Education*, and *Sociology of Education* did not contain any articles that fit our criteria. Scholarship published in these journals neglected the intersection of the war on drugs and schooling altogether. This absence is alarming, especially when considering the frequent reference to the safety and protection of children and youth as a justification for the war on drugs.⁹

Figure 1: Distribution of Studies across Journals



Given that the majority of the corpus is in fields with strong quantitative research traditions, it is not surprising that 89.7 percent (N=377) of our sample relied on quantitative research methods. The remaining articles drew from qualitative (5.7%; N=24) and mixed methods (4.5%; N=19). Quantitative studies primarily drew from

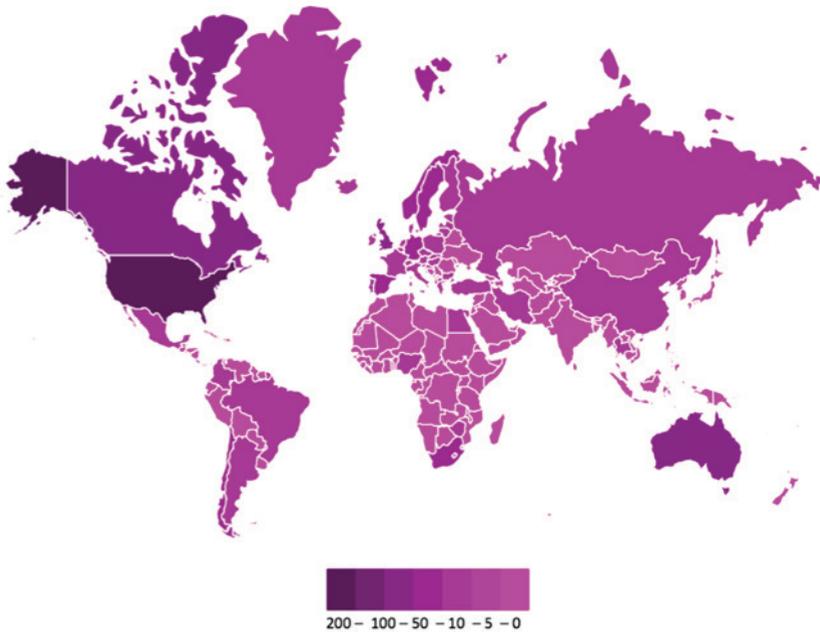
⁸ Specifically, 44.2 percent (N=186) of the articles were published in the *Journal of Drug Education*. This was followed by *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* with 17 percent (N=71), and *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy* with 16 percent (N=67). The remaining studies appeared in the *Journal of Adolescence* (8.8%; N=37), *Health Education & Behavior* (3.5%; N=15), *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* (3%; N=13), *Child Development* (2.3%; N=10), and *Economics of Education Review* (2.1%; N=9). *American Educational Research Journal* and *Journal of School Violence* both had 0.7 percent (N=3), and *Urban Education* and *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* both had 0.4 percent (N=2). *International Journal of Educational Development* and the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* each contained 0.2 percent (N=1).

⁹ See, for example, inaugural addresses of US presidents Nixon (1969), Ford (1974), Carter (1977), Reagan (1981), Bush (1989), and Trump (2017).

longitudinal datasets, cross-sectional studies, and surveys measuring the prevalence and risk of drug consumption among young people or the results of substance use prevention programs. Some of these sources were products of domestic drug policies, signalling the importance of examining how drug policy molds knowledge production.¹⁰ Of the 24 studies that used qualitative research methods, fewer than half (N=10) sought the perceptions and experiences of children, youth, and educators. Those that did relied on individual and group interviews, classroom observations, and chat analyses to grasp students' voices. Only one article relied on interviews with educators. The other sources of data used in qualitative studies included policy documents, curricula, and textbooks. The limited use of qualitative methods suggests that there is much to be learned about the perceptions and experience of educational actors in this area.

Out of the 420 articles, only 1.4 percent (N=6) are cross-national comparative studies; all target countries and cities located in the Global North. The remaining 98.6 percent (N=414) focus on nation-states or provinces within that unit of analysis. Almost three-quarters of the total sample (71.4%; N=296) target countries in the Americas, with a large proportion in the United States (63.2%; N=262). The remaining are distributed among Africa (2.8%; N=12), Asia (4%; N=18), Europe (18.5%; N=77), and Oceania (2.8%; N=12). A stark finding is the absence of countries historically engaged in heroin production, such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, Laos, and Pakistan. It is also worth noting the dearth of studies on emerging drug-trafficking transit nations, such as Benin, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nigeria (UNODC 2018; see Figure 2).

¹⁰ For example, of the studies situated in the United States (63.2% of the total corpus, N=262), 15.4 percent (N=65) used or referenced the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (N=37) or the Monitoring the Future Survey (N=28). These two surveys, created in the 1970s under the Nixon administration (McCoy and Block 1992), collect information about the forms and prevalence of drug use in the United States in order to inform policymaking. The fact that 15.4 percent of our corpus relies on these two surveys illustrates the deep connection between US domestic policy related to the war on drugs and the production of academic knowledge.

Figure 2: Geographic Distribution of Studies

Finally, we found that the sampled studies prioritized certain themes and sidelined others. As we discuss below, the great majority of studies (97.6%; N=410) focused on students and drug use. Of these, a significant proportion (46%; N=195) addressed the relationship between education and drugs only peripherally. Only eight articles explicitly referred to the war on drugs, drug wars, or militarization.

In sum, while we found consistent attention given to the topic of schooling and drugs in the education literature, it was unevenly distributed, drew predominantly from quantitative methodologies, and rarely analyzed the educational implications of the war on drugs. Having offered this broad characterization, we now turn to the themes and gaps we found in this body of literature.

PREOCCUPATION WITH STUDENT DRUG USE

As mentioned above, the topic of student drug use dominated the corpus, with 410 of the 420 articles selected addressing this issue. Within this pool of studies, we identified four general types: studies that examine how school factors impact student drug use; studies that address the effects of student drug use on education; studies that describe drug-use prevention strategies; and studies that analyze drug use and use schools as data-collection sites, but do not address the relationship

between schooling and drug use. Here, we discuss the first three trends, which are more closely related to EiE concerns.

A subset of the articles in our corpus (6.9%; N=29) explores how school factors affect student consumption of illicit substances, including absenteeism, retention, and exclusion; school engagement, educational aspirations, and academic achievement; peer effects; school climate and social context; and schooling type. The cumulative story offered by these studies is that schooling influences student drug use in diverse ways but what exacerbates or mitigates it varies from one setting to another, and that these factors interact with each other in multiple and shifting ways. For example, while scores on national tests in one setting intersected with peer effects to shape cannabis use (Gaete and Araya 2017), student drug use in another was shaped by the intersection of school disengagement and gender (Perra et al. 2012). This subset of studies depicts the nexus of schooling and the illicit drug trade by showing that students are consumers of illicit substances and that schooling plays a role in shaping their consumption patterns. Collectively, they caution against decontextualized and single-factor interpretations, underscoring that the influence of schooling on drug use is mediated by a range of individual, social, and environmental factors.

Another subset of articles (1.6%; N=7) examines the inverse relationship: how student drug use affects education. These studies look at how drug use influences academic performance, school attendance, retention, and educational aspirations. Several studies found correlations between student drug use and academic performance and highlight that these correlations are shaped by school, individual, and home factors. Other studies that found a positive correlation between student drug use and school dropout and absenteeism also show that this relationship is mediated by a range of other aspects. These studies indicate that dropout and absenteeism are multiply determined processes (Garnier, Stein, and Jacobs 1997). Although limited in number, these studies offer further insight into the reciprocal relationship between schooling and student drug consumption. They show that student drug use can have an effect on educational access and outcomes. They also underline the importance of context, emphasizing that substance use does not operate in isolation from the other variables that collectively shape educational experiences.

Finally, our study found a good deal of scholarly production on strategies aimed at reducing drug consumption (43.5%; N=183 of the studies in our corpus). A majority of these (32.6%; N=137) examine the design and effects of school-based drug-use prevention programs. Many of these programs share certain characteristics: they are designed with the explicit intention of reducing the onset and continuation of drug use; they focus on risk and protective factors; they occur in schools; and they target students. The programs used different approaches, including life-skills training, social-emotional learning, and fitness activities, among others.¹¹ While some programs were unique to specific schools, we found that more of the studies focus on universal models, including several commercially available brand-name programs, such as Drug Abuse Resistance and Education (D.A.R.E.), also known as keepin' it REAL, and All Stars Prevention. A limited subset of studies (2.6%; N=11) examines other types of educational responses, such as disciplinary practices, drug searches, harm-reduction strategies, drug education within core curricula, and drug-use treatment programs in school settings. These studies shed light on forms of educational response to student drug use that often are sidelined by the focus on universal prevention models.

These trends in the research offer important insights into the potential role education can play in safeguarding student health and wellbeing, and also call attention to the ways drug use can hamper educational access. Yet, they present a narrow framing of the educational nexus with the illicit drug trade, thereby limiting the ways we understand both young people and the role of education in relation to the war on drugs. This literature evidences a dominant paradigm of risk prevention (France and Utting 2005; Armstrong 2004) in discussions of schooling and student drug use. This analytical framework, which began to gain influence in the 1990s, focuses attention on the risk and protective factors that influence the onset, progression, and persistence of child and adolescent drug use. As critical scholars have noted elsewhere, this paradigm serves a normative function by structuring acceptable ways of thinking about drug use, its causes, and its possible solutions (Armstrong 2004; France and Utting 2005; Haines and Case 2008; Roumeliotis 2014). It assumes that the (potential) drug user is a rational actor who lacks self-control (Roumeliotis 2014) and thus requires training to enhance this ability or needs to be kept from opportunities to consume. The often repeated and largely static concept of risk constructs the child or adolescent as vulnerable and without agency, and thus in need of protection—that is, until

11 Detailed description of the range of programs is beyond the scope of this study. For recent systematic reviews on drug-prevention programming, see Cuijpers (2002, 2003), McBride (2003), and Faggiano and colleagues (2008).

trained to make “correct” decisions. With this universal and rational framing of the problem, this paradigm does not attend to the socially and historically situated nature of both drug use and prevention (Freeman 1999, 233), and it neglects the diverse cultural meanings and practices associated with specific substances across social settings. It also naturalizes dominant drug-policy positions by not questioning the base assumptions of how the issue is understood, spoken about, and addressed.

This approach thus acts as a form of ideological closure (Roumeliotis 2014), whereby the only thinkable solutions to the “problem of drug use” are zero-tolerance policies that favor restricting the supply and consumption of drugs, and prevention programs that prioritize the development of individual skills and the reduction of risk factors. The aim of reducing multiple forms of risk might appear to offer a pathway to systemic reforms, such as improved education quality and access, yet the approach largely favors universal and generic models, which takes resources away from locally designed initiatives and often neglects the insufficiency or failure of brand-name programs (Birkeland, Murphy-Graham, and Weiss 2005).¹² Ultimately, the logic of risk prevention also impedes attention to structural forces, as evidenced when education policies prioritize school-based prevention programs that focus on changing individual attitudes toward drugs, rather than strategies to address the broader conditions of poverty, discrimination, and marginalization that engender particular patterns of substance distribution and abuse. Finally, this perspective sidelines an array of educational actors and the dynamics of the drug trade, thereby neglecting educational responses that prioritize the psychosocial effects of exposure to violence and access to quality education amid violent conflict.

FRAGMENTED SYSTEMS, ABSENT WAR

Interested in how the research represents other aspects of the nexus of education with the war on drugs, we analyzed the actors and phases of the drug trade represented in the corpus of studies. Through this analysis, we identified a tendency to fragment both the education system and the war on drugs assemblage, which conceals how the two are interconnected and shifts attention away from the actors and actions that perpetuate this war.

¹² While some preventive policy focuses on more holistic approaches (see the Iceland model, for example, which promotes youth-focused policy), these did not appear in the pool of articles.

The corpus includes studies that attend to an extensive range of human actors, but the amount of attention each received was not equal. Students were the focus of 75 percent of the articles (N=368), teachers 10 percent (N=49), parents 3.2 percent (N=16), principals 3 percent (N=15), out-of-school children 2.2 percent (N=11), counselors 2.2 percent (N=11), policymakers 0.8 percent (N=4), social workers 0.8 percent (N=4), nonformal educators 0.6 percent (N=3), and community leaders 0.4 percent (N=2).¹³ Nonhuman actors were rarely the focus of a study; some studies addressed curricula, school policy, illicit substances, and school surveillance tools, such as metal detectors and drug tests, yet they were always addressed in relation to students. The numbers reveal that students were prioritized over any other education stakeholder (see Figure 3).

In contrast, state and nonstate armed actors were almost entirely disregarded. Only one article referenced drug-trafficking organizations (0.2%; N=1) and none focused on the military or police, which suggests little educational analysis of the criminalization and militarization inherent in the war on drugs. Contrast this with how drug policies have positioned state security forces relative to education during the period analyzed. For example, since founding of the D.A.R.E. program in the United States in 1983 (Becker, Agopian, and Yeh 1992), which is still operating in 54 countries (D.A.R.E. 2019), police and other law enforcement officers have had a presence in the classroom as educators. Increased school security efforts offer another example: since the 1990s, more school resource officers have been installed in classrooms across the United States, which has been followed by more drug-related charges being brought on school grounds (Na and Gottfredson 2013).¹⁴ The increased police presence in and around schools also has happened in other countries (see, e.g., Excelsior 2017; *El Universo* 2018). Nevertheless, while 22.1 percent (N=93) of the articles in our corpus mentioned the police, none included them as research participants or as the focus of a study.¹⁵ Furthermore, during this period, several countries across the Americas militarized their response to drug production and commercialization and positioned military personnel in and around schools. As militaries have taken on greater domestic security roles in the region, we have witnessed grave human rights abuses against principals, teachers, and students (Novelli 2010; McDermott 2018). Yet, in this body of literature,

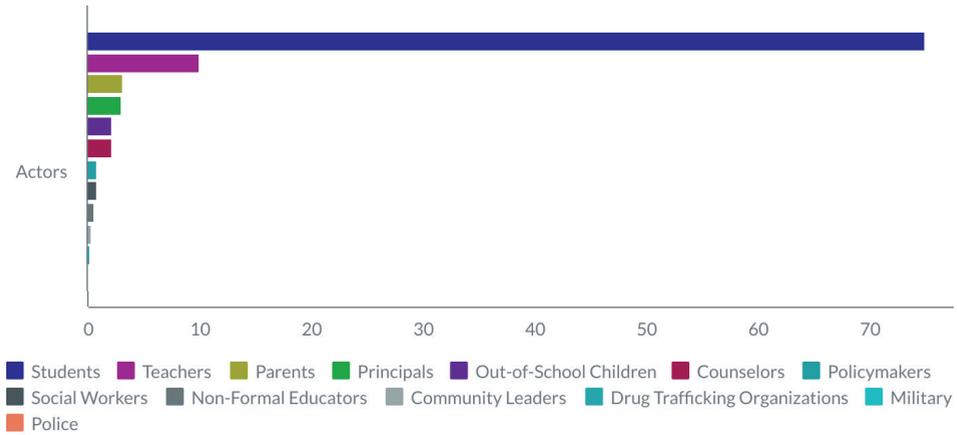
13 For this analysis, we coded the actors the studies positioned as research participants and units of analysis.

14 School resource officers are career law enforcement officers deployed by a police department to work in one or more schools.

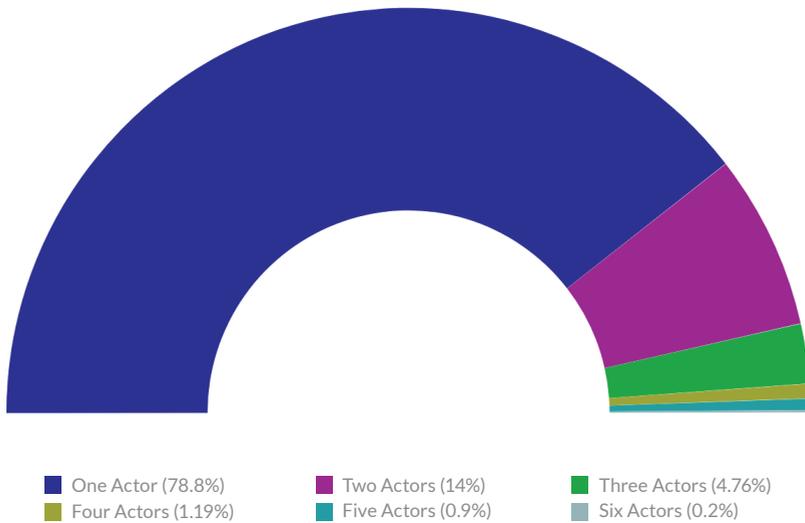
15 The education literature beyond our corpus has addressed the role of police in schools; see, for example, Na and Gottfredson (2013), Nolan (2011), Theriot (2009), and Brown (2006). However, there is limited attention to the connection with the war on drugs.

only one article (0.2%) referred to the role of the army in education during this period (Jarillo et al. 2016).

Figure 3: Actors as Areas of Focus

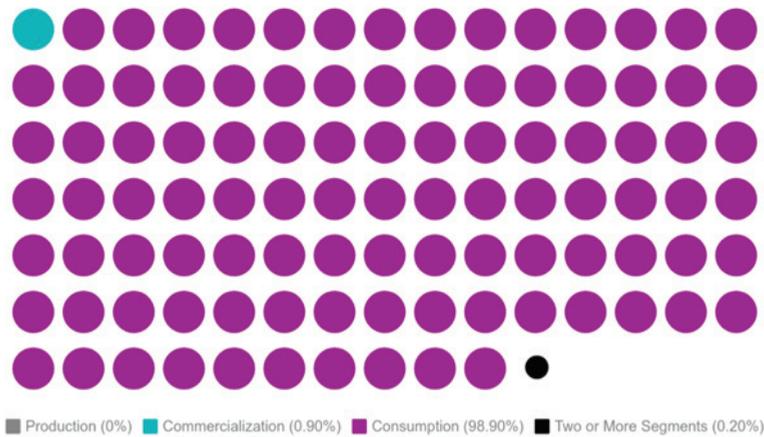


Along with identifying an overrepresentation of students and underrepresentation of other education actors, we found that studies tended to fragment the education system by treating interdependent education stakeholders as if they stood alone. Curious about how relationships between actors were represented, we counted how many stakeholders each study referenced; only 0.2 percent (N=1) discussed six education stakeholders; 0.9 percent (N=4) focused on five actors; 1.19 percent (N=5) included four actors; 4.76 percent (N=20) paid attention to three actors; 14 percent (N=59) incorporated two actors; and the vast majority of papers, 78.8 percent (N=331), focused on only one actor; of this group, 71.6 percent (N=301) targeted only students (see Figure 4). That most of the papers centered on one actor indicates a tendency to compartmentalize the education system and to separate actors that constantly encounter each other within the war on drugs assemblage.

Figure 4: Relationships between Actors

The inclination to isolate interdependent actors was also reflected in how the drug trade was conceived and studied. The drug market involves the cultivation, manufacture, distribution, promotion, sale, and consumption of illegal substances. Each of these nodes of interactions is met by varied state responses (e.g., forced crop eradication, neighborhood raids, confrontations with cartels, and incarceration) with their respective implications for conflict dynamics. For the purposes of this review, we captured three phases with codes for production, commercialization, and consumption, which we found are rarely considered in relationship to one another. Of the 420 articles in the corpus, only 0.4 percent (N=2) combined two or more segments of the supply chain (Wiesner and Capaldi 2003; Akee, Halliday, and Kwak 2014). The rest were distributed as follows: production (N=0), commercialization 0.9 percent (N=4), and consumption 98.5 percent (N=414). This distribution evidences a tendency to fragment the international drug supply chain that links distant geographical locations (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Segments of the Drug Supply Chain Studied



Methodological nationalist assumptions that prioritize the nation-state as the main reference or unit of analysis further this fragmentation (Wimmer and Schiller 2003; Novelli and Cardozo 2008). Viewed through this lens, we found that research questions and purposes tended to be constrained by the scope of a particular policy, the reach of a particular drug-prevention program, and the breadth of surveys, all framed within national boundaries. These methodological decisions limit the possibilities of a research agenda that investigates the transnational reach of the drug market or how policies and programs travel across borders.

One stark finding in our corpus was the nearly total lack of attention paid to the war on drugs as a violent conflict. To investigate this, we examined how and when the terms “war,” “violence,” and “conflict” were used in the literature. We found a tendency to associate violence with individual deviance and conflict with interpersonal dynamics, but almost no examination of how drug policy and trade relate to crises of insecurity, state instability, forced displacement, and high death tolls.

Of the 420 articles, we found only 1.9 percent (N=8) directly referenced the terms “war,” “war on drugs,” or “drug war.” In this small group, we identified two types of articles. The first type, only one article, examined the educational impact of the war on drugs: Jarillo and colleagues (2016) used school fixed-effects models to estimate the impact of “turf war exposure and persistence” on math test scores. Citing Robles et al. (Robles, Calderón, and Magaloni 2013), Jarillo et al. frame the violence in Mexico as “a result of structural changes in the drug trafficking business and government strategies to combat Drug Trafficking

Organizations” (137). The study provides evidence that this situation has negative effects on academic achievement, identifying “teacher turnover and tardiness, student and teacher absenteeism, and students frequently leaving school days early” as “channels linking the negative effects of drug-related turf war persistence on academic achievement” (136). This study, which shows the detrimental effects of drug-related violence on education quality and access, is an example of the kind of research needed to better understand the educational implications of the war on drugs.

The second type of article that used the terms “war,” “war on drugs,” or “drug war” mentioned them in a larger context. As exemplified in one quotation—“Considering the present societal context in which drug use is so widespread (the recent gains of the War on Drugs notwithstanding), it should not be surprising that academically successful student users exist” (Evans and Skager 1992, 354)—the papers in this second group tended to adopt zero-tolerance approaches without question, as such aligning themselves with the war-on-drugs policy framework.

In contrast to the limited number of references to war, the terms “conflict” and “violence” were prevalent. While the term “conflict” was referenced in 46.9 percent (N=197) of the total corpus, “violence” appeared in 29 percent (N=122). Violence and conflict were predominantly discussed as individual behaviors and disassociated from larger political or economic interests, such as “six categories of health-risk behaviors: *behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence*; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases; unhealthy dietary behaviors; and physical inactivity” (Brener and Wilson 2001, 332; our emphasis). Presented as disconnected from its political and social dimensions, violence is seen as part of a continuum of individual risk behaviors and deviance. Similarly, 77.1 percent (N=152) of the articles that mentioned conflict presented it as an interpersonal dynamic and linked it to substance use. Our analysis of how these studies discussed war, violence, and conflict shows that this corpus of education research disregards the social and political dimensions of the war on drugs. War is largely ignored, and violence and conflict are reduced to deviant individual and interpersonal behaviors.

As these analyses show, there is a tendency in the education research to treat drug-related violence as a matter of individual deviance, which renders the war on drugs invisible and assumes the logics of prohibition and militarization without question. Despite recognizing a wide range of education stakeholders and processes, the corpus concentrates its attention on students while giving

limited consideration to other education actors and almost none to armed actors. It also focuses on drug consumption and gives limited attention to the rest of the drug trade, which disregards the insecurity and violence produced by organized crime and repressive drug-policy interventions in other segments of the supply chain. As such, the literature largely neglects the human and nonhuman costs that have been linked to the prohibitionist drug-policy framework. The lack of attention to the violence and insecurity associated with the war on drugs leaves militarization and prohibition unquestioned. Why would we question them if we do not see their effects?

REASSEMBLING THE WAR ON DRUGS

The literature we reviewed described the nexus of education and the war on drugs in limited terms. It identified that student drug consumption can shape educational experiences and, in turn, that educational experiences can shape consumption. Accordingly, it described schools as sites where drug consumption can be prevented; namely, through targeted prevention programming. However, the literature offered little description of how education intersects with other segments of the drug supply chain (production and commercialization), with repressive and militarized drug-control measures, or with the insecurity and violence associated with these. This leaves a critical gap in the research. To understand how this conflict affects access to quality education, scholars must study how and when education systems intersect with the illicit drug trade and drug-control measures, and how these encounters shape educational experiences.

We argue that, by ignoring its adverse effects, education research functions as an intermediary of the war on drugs. Latour (2005) identifies two roles played by actors in an assemblage, intermediaries and mediators. While intermediaries “transport” meaning without changing it (such as a training program that replicates the assumption that zero-tolerance approaches achieve results), mediators “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry” (Latour 2005, 39). Government agents, UN officials, teachers, students, drug distributors, and academics all can act as mediators. We concur with Latour when he acknowledges that, by naming, interpreting, categorizing, invoking rules, and mobilizing resources, scholars also engineer assemblages. Our findings suggest that researchers have positioned themselves as intermediaries in this war by repeating and promoting the logics that sustain it.

New education research is needed to enable scholars to transition to the role of mediator and contribute analyses that prioritize peacebuilding. We emphasize the need for approaches that are relational, paying attention to how diverse actors and forms of violence interconnect; comparative, analyzing processes across multiple sites with historic consciousness; multidisciplinary, enabling discussion across disciplines in order to unsettle conceptual stagnation; critical, attending to the unequal distribution of effects and consequences and actively seeking out the ways given policies, concepts, and strategies serve particular interests; and reflexive, considering how research practices can perpetuate inequities and violence.

A research agenda that aims to examine the educational implications of this violent conflict would prioritize research questions that tackle the relationships between diverse actors, both inside and at the margins of the education system. Beyond being targets of drug-use prevention programs, what roles have children and young people played in this war? How do these roles shape the interactions among diverse education actors? What are the relationships between armed actors and school communities? How do we characterize these relationships beyond physical violence (armed attacks, forced recruitment, sexual violence)? How do human actors relate to nonhuman actors, such as metal detectors and specific substances? How do all of these relationships shape opportunities for access to quality education? Finally, what forms of relationship contribute to peacebuilding and the transformation of this conflict?

Analyses should move beyond methodological nationalism to trace how these relationships move across sites and connect seemingly distant points. Comparative education offers relevant methodological tools to do this, especially when comparison is understood as processual; that is, as attentive to cultural production and the “articulation and disarticulation of networks and actors over time and space, rejecting staid notions of culture or context” (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, 19), and continuous, engaging in ongoing exercises of comparing and contrasting phenomena and processes at multiple sites. Such research can produce situated analyses while also attending to how processes unfold and connect across different locations and extended periods of time.

We found that the research production in the literature reviewed was dominated by particular methodological approaches and frameworks, resulting in a homogenized depiction of the educational implications of the war on drugs. Future research on this topic would benefit from methodological diversity and cross-disciplinary conversations. How might an educational ethnography of a coca-growing community reframe the analysis of educational responses? What might critical

discourse analysis offer to drug-education debates? How could quantitative analyses shift attention to the educational impact of drug-control measures? Furthermore, engaging with diverse theoretical frameworks can expand understanding of the relationship between education and violent conflicts. For example, our use of assemblage enables us to explore a unified view of disparate actors and sites, thus permitting a broader read of the educational implications of this conflict.

Future research would also benefit from a deeper engagement with critical epistemologies to examine how power operates through the social relations shaped by this war. This would entail paying attention to the interests and actions of those who protect the stability of the war on drugs assemblage, while also examining the direct and indirect consequences of this war and their disproportionate distribution. How is violence related to the drug war experienced by students and teachers in both privileged and marginalized communities? How do these experiences of violence constrain action? Critical research would produce knowledge that denounces the current status quo and explores alternatives.

Finally, recognizing that researchers' contributions are constitutive of the phenomenon they analyze, we embrace the principle of "do no harm," not only in relation to research participants but also to our scholarly production. We are aware that researchers interested in conducting qualitative work on these issues might face serious challenges throughout the research process (Rodríguez-Gómez 2019; see also Goldsmith 2003; Hill 2004; Felbab-Brown 2014; Rodrigues 2014; Maglio and Pherali 2019; Mendenhall 2019). Once in the field, researchers and community members confront similar threats (Goldstein 2014). Changes in armed actors' strategic positions and war tactics create unpredictable risks for all. These risks turn the practical aspects of research into ethical dilemmas—from securing physical access to distant geographic locations to deciding what topics to broach, when to ask a sensitive question, and whom to speak with; and from framing how to introduce yourself to deciding if one should interview those suspected of criminal activity. Researchers also must assess how to position themselves in relation to criminality, especially as war on drugs logics criminalize a wide range of actors, such as coca, marijuana, and poppy growers (Interpol 2019). Limited access to funding sources outside the schemes that sustain the war on drugs, added to the lack of political support for research that does not conform to the "Just Say No" rule, are also important obstacles to be considered.¹⁶ Under these conditions, we are challenged to examine whether our own research reproduces the values and priorities that sustain this war. What assumptions are embedded

16 Important exceptions to consider are the Open Society Foundations and the Drug Policy Alliance.

in the framing of our research questions? How can the knowledge we produce be used in the war machinery? A reflexive engagement with these questions can ensure that research avoids reproducing unquestioned logics.

CONCLUSION

Concerned with the widespread harm caused by the war on drugs and its implications for education, this study sought to shed light on how education research produced in the last 30 years describes the relationship between education and this war.

We drew from analyses of contemporary forms of violent conflict and the concept of assemblage to guide our study. In defining the war on drugs as an assemblage, we do not pretend to add unnecessary theoretical pretentiousness to this conversation; on the contrary, we seek to provide tools that enable scholars and practitioners in the fields of comparative and international education and EiE to understand and explain longstanding forms of violence. Assemblage has the potential to shift our attention from merely identifying consequences—attacks, disappearances, kidnappings, targeted killings, threats—to critically examining the causes and drivers of conflict by tracing the shifting associations between human and nonhuman actors at the crossroads of violence. Assemblage gives us the capacity to avoid limiting “in advance the shape, size, heterogeneity and combination of associations” (Latour 2005, 11) and the opportunity to explain the particularities that inform context-based interventions. Seen through the lens of assemblage, the war on drugs is a persistent asymmetric conflict that emerges and subsides in different locations, with diverse levels of intensity guided by particular logics.

We discussed the range of actors involved in this war, the high level of insecurity it generates, and the educational implications it may produce. We used this conceptual framework to carry out a systematic review of the nexus of schooling and drugs, which involved reviewing academic production in a sample of 22 journals over a period of 30 years. We identified 420 articles, which we then analyzed to gain insights into the patterns and trends that emerge in the literature. We found a strong preoccupation with student drug use in the Global North and limited attention to other education actors and aspects of the drug trade. The education literature generally disregards the social and political insecurity and violence associated with the war on drugs, thereby obscuring the adverse effects of prohibition and militarization and how state and nonstate armed actors affect schooling. Put simply, in the education research reviewed, the war on drugs is a

war denied. Instead, the research repeats the logics of prevention and prohibition, thereby foreclosing debate on alternative drug-policy approaches.

Comparative and international education, and EiE in particular, are well positioned to address this gap in the literature, with certain caveats. Future research that aims to understand and describe education policy and practice in the midst of this war must remain reflexive. We, as researchers and practitioners dedicated to ensuring inclusive quality education in situations of crisis and conflict, must guard against reproducing the logics that sustain violent conflict. This entails conducting careful and critical research that does not uncritically reproduce the dominant discourses of the war on drugs. It also entails being accountable to those directly and adversely affected by this war. We hope this review takes a step in that direction.

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