



Editorial Note

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EDITORIAL NOTE

BY MARIA JOSE BERMEO AND DIANA RODRÍGUEZ-GÓMEZ ¹

A PERPETUAL EMERGENCY

On April 1, 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Donald J. Trump, president of the United States, held a press conference to announce a drug indictment against Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro. With strategic reference to the pandemic—“We must not let drug cartels exploit the pandemic to threaten the lives of Americans” (White House 2020)—Trump launched a renewed offensive in the war on drugs. In the name of guarding against “narcoterrorism” and cocaine sales, the US deployed “naval destroyers, battleships, coastguards, and air force surveillance aircrafts” (White House 2020) in the Caribbean Sea, stationed a unit of advisors in Colombia, and thus ratified (once again) its influence over an important portion of South America. These recent counternarcotic maneuvers show that, after 50 years, the war on drugs remains alive and well.

The war on drugs as we know it today is a global conflict fueled by diverse interests to exert control over territory, populations, and markets. It takes form in the prohibitionist policy regime that has criminalized drug markets and escalated militarization over time. Militarized responses to drugs have long served as a means to achieve strategic objectives and empower states, causing extensive collateral damage in the process (Andreas 2019). Most visibly, the US has repeatedly employed antidrug rhetoric to legitimate its domestic and foreign policy, as conducted through law enforcement, military pressure, and international aid packages. Discursively framing the production, commercialization, and consumption of psychoactive substances as a serious threat to national security, US presidential administrations since the 1970s have constructed drug use as an emergency that must be defeated through, in Richard Nixon’s words, “an all-out offensive” (“President Nixon Declares” 2016). This has served to justify the declaration of war in a manner that extends far beyond the realm of the rhetorical, as made apparent by the deployment of troops, the expansion of arms spending, the militarization of police, bilateral oversight agreements, and invasion of sovereign states. This war, with its ongoing prohibition of certain substances, shapes the illicit (and highly lucrative) nature of international drug markets, which are today marked by heavily armed competition among drug-trafficking

¹ Maria Jose Bermeo and Diana Rodríguez-Gómez served as special guest editors for this issue of *Journal on Education in Emergencies* and contributed equally to its development and production.

organizations and violent confrontations between drug-trafficking organizations and state security forces, each with an accompanying range of human rights violations, including the loss of life and forced migration.

Fought with an impossible aim—to achieve a “drug-free world”—the war on drugs has no end in sight. It has evolved over time, moved across national borders, and shifted its shape to suit emerging geopolitical interests, all justified in the name of combating the ever-looming threat of drugs—a perpetual emergency.² This war will last as long as the rhetoric of the drug menace has currency. Along with it, the human and social costs of the war will continue to wreak havoc on communities across the globe.

THE PROLIFERATION OF EDUCATION CRISES

Across continents (UNODC 2020), the most unprotected bear the brunt of this perpetual emergency. Children and youth are harmed by extreme policing tactics, armed confrontations, and illicit drug markets. This has serious implications for education, as it contributes to a series of crises that are not often recognized as connected: attacks on schools and educators, the educational exclusion of marginalized communities, absenteeism, the school-to-prison pipeline, and diminished education quality, among others. To ensure access to quality education for all, the sources of these crises need to be identified and analyzed—a task that is often sidelined by the urgency of their effects.

The tendency to focus on the symptoms of crises rather than on their roots obscures the deeper issues—structural violence, imperialism, militarism—that warrant our attention. To borrow from Shabnam Piryaee (2018b, 2), who refers to the US context,

rather than acknowledging the foundational state of emergency that underpins the state’s institutions, the state rhetorically reinvents seemingly new crises—such as the war on drugs—to sustain the notion of an enemy warranting the state’s use

² We use the term “perpetual emergency” to refer to emergencies that are shaped and sustained over time through the recurrent discursive framing of a particular situation as an emergency. This framing rationalizes the use of emergency response measures while distracting attention from the structural issues that underlie the given situation. The term focuses our attention on how (and why) certain emergencies are sustained over time, calls for analysis of the effects of their perpetuation, and encourages reflection about how to bring an end to this perpetual cycle.

In framing this concept, we drew from studies that have examined perpetual states of emergency, understood as governments’ repeated declarations of states of emergency (see, e.g., Bishai 2020; Piryaee 2018a, 2018b; Stanford, 2017), and studies that have reflected on perpetual war, understood as ongoing, self-perpetuating states of war (see, e.g., Arvamudan 2009; Meiehenrich 2007).

of violence. This rhetorical emergency conceals the codified, fundamental state of violence that undergirds American institutions.

Similar commentary could be offered on the international sphere: rather than examining the logics and interests that drive the machinery of war, “tactical attention” (Crick 2012; Franke 2002) is continuously directed toward emergent threats such as drugs and terrorism in order to shape a state of perpetual emergency that justifies and expands warfare. The war on drugs is one such emergency, wherein states utilize the threat of drugs to justify and extend war, which serves military and geopolitical agendas and often is escalated by nonstate actors that also profit from it. The specific agendas served by this maneuver vary across time and location; in the case of the war on drugs, they are most often related to the control of markets and territory, to military or police expansion, or to the political gains of “tough-on-crime” policies and their utility in controlling certain social groups (see, e.g., Su 2020; Kenny and Holmes 2020; Mercille 2011). The rhetorical emergency becomes tangible as the war, with all its effects, drags on, unexamined. Education is both a tool utilized to perpetuate and sustain this war and a site of extensive collateral damage.

As scholars and practitioners of education, it is important that we acknowledge and examine the complex relationship such emergencies have with education; this includes examining their impact, as well as the ways education policy and practice contribute to their continuation. Education in emergencies (EiE) is a productive place from which to analyze the “multifaceted interactions” (Pherali 2019) between the war on drugs and education. The field’s ethical commitment to the right to education, its contributions to discussions on access to quality education in conflict-affected settings, and its innate disposition to examine international and transnational issues where actors interact across different levels of action opens the space to examining the forms of direct and indirect violence that the war on drugs exerts on educational communities.

While the field of EiE has engaged aspects of this transnational war by calling attention to attacks on education (O’Malley 2010), urban violence (Carapic, Phebo, and dos Ramos 2014), and armed conflict in settings affected by the illicit drug trade (Burde 2014; Novelli and Monks 2015), attention to the complex interplay between the war on drugs and education remains unexplored. The field has prioritized the analysis of armed conflict, along with other crises, and its consequences for educational processes, thereby making important contributions to understanding the interactions between violence and education (Burde et

al. 2017). Still, the critical contributions of EiE have not paid due attention to the effects the militarization of state action, organized crime, and drug-related violence have on education. This gap offers an opportunity to draw from the growing body of literature in the field to analyze the implications for education of the war on drugs. It also invites scholars to revisit foundational concepts, such as conflict, emergency, and crisis.

THE AIMS OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

In this special issue, we have gathered studies that examine the relationship between the war on drugs and education. By situating this analysis within the field of EiE, we take up the field's emphasis on understanding and addressing the effects complex emergencies have on education. We aim to shed light on the forms of violence this war generates in educational settings, and to analyze the actors, rationales, and processes that perpetuate it. This exercise entails questioning the geographic and temporal assumptions that often frame the scope of the field in order to examine the normalized violence that takes shape outside of acute crises.

The effects this war has had on education extend to each stage of the commodity chain from the fields to the cities, and to a multiplicity of actors from students to policymakers. To properly assess its reach, this breadth of effects calls for both micro- and macro-level analyses. The war also moves across borders, thus demanding consideration beyond national limits. Education policy and practice responding to the effects of this war have tended to further support the framing of drugs as a moral concern and a security issue, thus contributing to underlying rationales for the war on drugs. Furthermore, educational responses frequently concentrate on individual-level change, such as resisting peer pressure and pursuing abstinence, rather than on addressing the links between international drug policy, socioeconomic inequality, and education. By placing our focus on the war on drugs—rather than on drug use—as an object of study for the field of education, we emphasize the need for education research and practice to extend beyond analysis of individual behavior toward analyses that examine the broader social patterns and trajectories that shape how communities relate to these substances and the ways they have been employed to sustain and escalate violence.

With a critical analysis of how the drug war operates in relationship to education, EiE will be better prepared to respond to the dramatic effects of a military and police presence in and around schools, and to the ways the illicit drug trade and drug-trafficking organizations shape educational experiences. It also will

prepare readers to identify and disrupt the underlying processes that sustain this ongoing emergency.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO EIE EVIDENCE, THEORY, AND METHODS

The articles that compose this special issue contribute to this discussion, both individually and collectively. They offer diverse entry points through which to understand the repercussions for education of the war on drugs and, in so doing, shed light on the implications of studying perpetual emergencies in our field.

In “The Educational Nexus to the War on Drugs: A Systematic Review,” we (Diana Rodríguez-Gómez and Maria Jose Bermeo) reveal how such emergencies, despite their far-reaching effects, have evaded the attention of education scholarship. Through a systematic review, we describe the state of the art of research on the relationship between education and the war on drugs. Our content analysis of 420 articles reveals that academic attention given to drugs and education has generally ignored the insecurity and violence associated with drug prohibition and the militarization of drug-control efforts and has instead reproduced the “drugs as threat” discourse (Crick 2012) by focusing primarily on student drug use. With few exceptions, the education literature does not examine how drug-related confrontations and the illicit nature of the drug trade affect education communities. This crucial gap in the literature leaves education scholars and practitioners with limited tools for understanding how the war on drugs reshapes educational priorities.

Roozbeh Shirazi’s piece, “When Emergency Becomes Everyday Life: Revisiting a Central EiE Concept in the Context of the War on Drugs,” offers reflections that help to decipher this gap. Through a critical review of the concepts of crisis and emergency, Shirazi highlights the spatial and temporal assumptions that underpin EiE and limit the scope of action visible to the field. His point of departure is concern about how prevailing definitions of emergency constrain the dimensions of crisis, automatically linking it to a state of exception or a disruption from the norm. Insofar as the war on drugs is a long-term process that encompasses a multitude of crises across regions (gang violence, armed conflict, forced displacement, and mass incarceration, among others), Shirazi poses it as a productive object of study through which to rethink how EiE scholars and practitioners employ the terms “emergency” and “crisis.” Based on Janet Roitman’s work on the stakes of crisis, Shirazi contrasts two cultural artifacts: *Traffic*, the 2000 Hollywood film directed by Steven Soderbergh, and the 2002 song “Sellin’

D.O.P.E.” from the hip-hop duo dead prez. Through this reflection, he invites us to review how we produce and mobilize knowledge about crises in the field of EiE and the implications these decisions have on what the field chooses to prioritize—or not. Shirazi positions the EiE field as a site of possibility that could advance understanding of education crises and their resolution.

Both of these articles call for introspection regarding the theoretical frameworks that orient scholarship in EiE. They underscore the relevance of integrative frameworks that trace the linkages within and across crises and emergencies. In our article, we use the concept of assemblage to define the war on drugs, which enables us to trace the drivers and effects of conflict across diverse settings and to examine the role education plays in their persistence. Such analyses draw attention to the continuities that undergird emergencies and to the interactions that sustain them. These interactions cross the educational sphere in varied ways, including, for example, through the promotion of antidrug discourses in curricula, the replication of zero-tolerance measures at the school level, and collaborations between police and school actors.

While recognizing the connected forces that drive the war on drugs and link diverse sites and actors, the contributors to this special issue also show the value of situated analyses that examine the particularities of specific settings and time periods. Their analyses reveal local mechanisms and effects of the war on drugs across the commodity chain, from coca cultivation in southern Colombia and drug markets in Rio de Janeiro to patterns of drug involvement in Ciudad Juárez and Medellín. Each site carries specificities that are key to understanding the reach of the war on drugs and the limits of education’s responses to date.

For example, Claudia Rodriguez’s article, “The Effects of Aerial Spraying of Coca Crops on Child Labor, School Attendance, and Educational Lag in Colombia, 2008-2012,” draws our attention to rural areas and the collateral effects of forced eradication measures. By combining Colombia’s Quality of Life Survey and a database constructed from daily satellite images from NASA, Rodriguez examines the connections between the spraying of chemical herbicides on coca crops, child labor, and education. Through two-stage least-squares regression, a common procedure in econometrics, Rodriguez shows that the aerial spraying of glyphosate is associated with the increased likelihood that children between ages 12 and 17 will go to work, and the increased probability that a family’s older siblings will work instead of attending school. These effects on education are not taken into account in the calls for a resumption of aerial spraying, nor are measures taken to keep the

right to education from becoming collateral damage of this war. This highlights the failure to account for the educational losses that result from drug-policy decisions.

Through an ethnographic study conducted in Vila Cruzeiro, a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro, Sara Koenders draws our attention to urban settings and the effects of the dispute between state security forces and drug-trafficking organizations for control of territory. In “‘Pedagogy of Conversion’ in the Urban Margins: Pacification, Education, and the Struggle for Control in a Rio de Janeiro Favela,” Koenders describes the implementation of pacification initiatives from the vantage point of school administrators, teachers, and parents. She shows how the intensive law enforcement efforts combined with a military presence resulted not only in grave human rights violations in the community but also led to an increased presence of state security forces in schools. She describes in particular the increased participation of police in schools through the implementation of nonformal education activities, which, Koenders argues, constituted a “pedagogy of conversion” that sought to foster closer relations with the police and promote particular values and norms. In this way, schools in the favela constituted a terrain of competition for community allegiance between the state and the drug gangs. As Koenders notes, these efforts coexisted alongside violent and repressive policing, a lack of structural reform, and top-down approaches to community development, and thus made only limited gains in repairing state-society relations.

Rodriguez’s and Koenders’ studies underscore the need for serious research on the role the state plays in the war on drugs and the effects drug-control measures have on education. Their studies highlight how state-led interventions in the war on drugs—in these cases, fumigation and pacification, respectively—framed within the discourse of protecting the general populace from the insecurity that arises from illicit drug production and distribution, may propagate structural violence. In the Colombian case, the economic shocks produced by the fumigation policy pushed families to reconsider sending their children to school. In the Brazilian case, energy and resources were put into affirming the standing of the police in the community, rather than into efforts to improve education infrastructure and quality. These contributions affirm analyses carried out in other fields that highlighted the need to question the collateral damage caused by security policies (see, e.g., Collins 2014; Espenido 2018).

In their article, “‘If you don’t have an education, you are no one’: Understanding the School Experiences of Youth Involved in Drug-Related Crime in Ciudad Juárez and Medellín,” which offers a comparative analysis of the causes of youth involvement in the drug business, Cirenia Chavez Villegas and Elena Butti reflect

on education's response amid the war on drugs. They combine data from two separate studies, one that Butti conducted in Medellín, Colombia, and another that Chavez Villegas conducted in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, to analyze how youths' relationships with school administrators and teachers influence their involvement in drug trafficking. The voices of young men at the lowest ranks of the illicit drug trade convey, some even with nostalgia, the school experiences that drove them to leave formal education and opt into the drug business. The participants in these two studies emphasize that the treatment they received at school was a decisive factor in their leaving the education system; the administrators' and teachers' perceptions of these youth as unruly superseded their responsibility to ensure the students' retention. Chavez Villegas and Butti affirm that "pushout" is a more accurate term than "dropout" to describe these young men's abandonment of school, and they call attention to the school practices that limit the right to education for those on the margins of capitalism and legality. Their study underscores the need for responsiveness in education to counteract the influence the illicit drug market has on youths' life trajectories.

The work of Nancy A. Heitzeg, highlighted in the book review by Jennifer Otting, provides further evidence of how school practices intertwine with drug policy to shape youth trajectories. Heitzeg's 2016 book, *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Education, Discipline, and Racialized Double Standards*, exemplifies how zero-tolerance policies have contributed to disproportionately higher rates of suspension, expulsion, and school abandonment for youth of color in the US and ultimately contribute to increased rates of youth imprisonment. Heitzeg's work shows the disparities between the treatment of affluent White drug users, who are tracked into drug treatment programs, and the treatment of youth of color, who often are tracked through law enforcement into incarceration. As Otting observes, the school-to-prison pipeline is a manifestation of zero-tolerance drug policies and it reveals how the war on drugs shapes education crises through a variety of mechanisms. It also highlights the need for intersectional analyses that examine the disproportionate effects these crises have on communities of color in the US. Otting's and Chavez Villegas and Butti's pieces call attention to the ways schools reproduce the logics of the war on drugs when they adopt zero-tolerance policies into their curricular and disciplinary practices.

Offering an alternative approach to curricula, Theo Di Castri's field note, "Catalyst: Expanding Harm-Reduction Education and Youth Participation in the Context of the War on Drugs," highlights an education initiative that engages youth on the front lines of the war on drugs in the movement to reform drug policy. Based on the first iteration of a year-long, bilingual fellowship program, Di Castri discusses the Catalyst

team's and study participants' efforts to forge a transnational solidarity network to ensure that youth have a space in the growing drug-policy reform movement. To avoid the pitfalls of current drug policies, the same policies that have been justified in the name of young people, Di Castri calls for education that equips youth with "the ability to identify, analyze, and act to reduce not only the harm associated with individual drug use but also the wider social harm caused by current drug policies" (180). In the context of this special issue, this field note draws our attention to the potential of innovative curricular design and highlights the key role youth can play in transformative action when deep and collaborative thinking are made possible.

Offering an example from outside the war on drugs but within a context of ongoing emergency, Jo Kelcey's analysis of Janette Habashi's book, *Political Socialization of Youth: A Palestinian Case Study*, also draws attention to youths' political education. She focuses on the ways young people's civic engagement occurs outside, sometimes even in tension with, the school curriculum. Kelcey pinpoints Habashi's integrative approach, which situates young people's political development within an ecological framework and recognizes the multiple local and global forces that shape their experiences. By elucidating young people's political formation in settings of emergency, Habashi's theoretical and empirical insights help bring nuance to current understandings of youth political agency, and the possibilities they create to transform their conditions. These insights contribute to discussions of how to bring about social change amid complex emergencies.

Collectively, the articles in this issue show the intricacies of the relationship between the war on drugs and education. They also reveal the complexities of studying normalized emergencies. Our systematic review sheds light on the inherent challenges in tracing elusive topics across the interdisciplinary field of education. The qualitative studies by Chavez Villegas and Butti and by Koenders, which employ a mix of ethnographic, interview, and survey techniques, offer insights into the additional considerations needed when studying the illicit and carrying out research in insecure settings. Rodriguez and Shirazi highlight the need for creative entry points to reveal the effects of this war: Shirazi draws from an analysis of two cultural artifacts to examine the effects of narrative constructions, while Rodriguez inventively combines two datasets to identify the effects of glyphosate spraying on access to education. The articles selected for this special issue, which offer multiple perspectives on the war on drugs and its effects, expand the sources of data normally used in the field of EiE and illustrate the benefits of engaging a broad repertoire of methodological strategies to account for something as complex, widespread—and sometimes elusive—as the war on drugs.

Each of these articles also underlines the need for reflexive scholarship that critically examines the potential complicity of education research and advocacy in shaping perpetual emergencies. A field such as EiE, with its commitment to addressing the negative effects emergencies have on education, can inadvertently direct public attention to emergent threats and, hence, limit the attention given to the root problems embedded in the structures and institutions of the international system. By giving collective attention to the mechanisms that sustain the war on drugs, as well as its effects, this special issue reminds us to remain vigilant about our own roles, as scholars and practitioners, in shaping particular education policies and priorities.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Our hope is that this special issue will spur further debate and research on education policies and practices that address the effects of the war on drugs and counterbalance the underlying forces that keep it going. There are many avenues for further exploration: the effects armed confrontations and criminal governance have on schools and education actors; the process of recruiting youth into organized crime; the drug-related mechanisms of exclusion from education; intersectional analysis of the implications of this war for education; the design, implementation, and results of education's responses to this war; the relationship between education advocacy and drug policy; and the list goes on. Each article in this special issue also offers suggestions for the future of this research agenda. While we recognize that this issue features articles focused primarily on the Americas, the war on drugs extends to nearly all regions of the world, which provides significant ground for further research. Finally, through this work, we invite EiE scholars and practitioners to critically examine the propagation of perpetual emergencies, like the war on drugs and the war on terror, that are sustained with little regard for the education crises they engender. Further research and discussion are needed to examine the role education policy and practice play in sustaining and normalizing such emergencies.

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