

Attending School in a Violent Urban Area in Colombia

*A Comparative Study of Two Schools in
Los Mártires, Bogotá*

Ane Omland

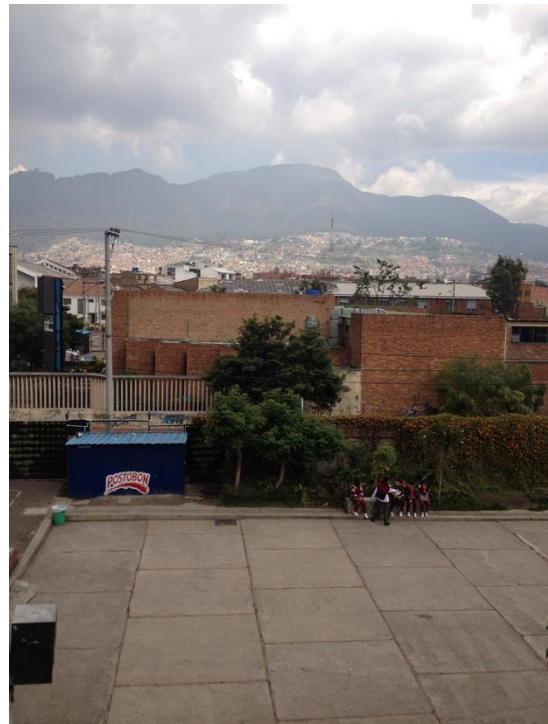


Master of Philosophy in Comparative and International Education
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Abstract

This thesis explores learning environments and school environments in two public schools in the neighborhood of Los Mártires, Bogotá, and uncovers how students in these schools cope with attending school in what is described as a violent urban area. According to the Municipality of Bogotá (2004)¹, the security issue is a critical topic in Los Mártires. Highly related to the security issue is the distribution and consumption of drugs, which constitutes one of the most complex phenomena in Los Mártires and one that has a considerable socioeconomic impact on the neighborhood (Municipality of Bogotá, 2010)².

The findings in this study build on nine weeks of field work in the two schools, with participant observation and semi-structured interviews as the two main research methods. A comparative case study design was applied during the research. Resilience theory has been employed in order to analyze the data material and to identify resilient characteristics among the students.

The main findings of this research indicate challenging learning environments, especially in the first school. The school environments in both schools were good in terms of peer relationships and extracurricular activities, but students in the first school gave more positive and enthusiastic descriptions of their school environment than students in the second school. School environment is a broader concept than learning environment. It includes aspects such as the areas around the schools, and initiatives from the Secretariat of Education in Bogotá. Background literature, as well as observations and interviews, showed that the area around the second school was perceived to be safer and calmer than the area encircling the first school, which had greater problems with insecurity and drug distribution.

Students' coping mechanisms relate directly to resilience. This research will show that many students possess several strategies in order to cope with a school reality that is heavily influenced by restlessness, unease, disturbances and noise inside the schools, and by drugs, violence, and other crimes from the surrounding neighborhood where the schools are located.

Key words: Learning environment, school environment, resilience, urban violence.

¹ This book is published in Spanish, and has been translated to English and paraphrased by the researcher

² This book is published in Spanish, and has been translated to English and paraphrased by the researcher

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Acronyms

NSD	Norwegian Center for Research Data
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SENA	Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje [National Learning Service]
SERT	Social Ecology of Resilience Theory
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization
UPZ	Unidades de Planeación Zonal [Units of Zonal Planning]
ZOE	Zona de Orientación Escolar [School Orientation Zone]

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1 Introduction

This study focuses on uncovering students' coping mechanisms within a school environment that is affected by a neighborhood exposed to violence, drugs, and other crimes. Moreover, this thesis investigates students' experiences with their learning environments and their school environments.

1.1 Backdrop and Rationale

There are several reasons for studying students in a neighborhood of Colombia's capital. Colombia as a country is interesting because of its history, culture and its prevailing challenges, such as being the country with the longest-lasting internal conflict in the world since the mid-1940s. Colombia is an upper-middle income country, and the fourth biggest economy in Latin America. However, Colombia has the world's most unequal income distributions (Bonilla, 2015), as well as a long-lasting history of violence (Skidmore, Smith & Green, 2014). Crime and violence are challenges in several Latin American countries, but Colombia is among the most violent countries in the region (Bull, 2015)³. In Colombia, 75 percent of the population lives in urban areas (UNESCO, 2016) such as the capital Bogotá. Within Colombia, Bogotá is not considered to be the most violent city, but the city's violence rate is disturbingly high compared to other big cities in the world (Duque, Klevens & Ramirez, 2003).

Colombia was one of the first Latin American countries to decentralize the education system in order to deal with inequitable spending across regions. While the Ministry of Education is responsible for developing policy and objectives, as well as monitoring the education system, it is the municipalities' responsibility to manage and plan the use of resources as well as being responsible for educational outcomes (UNESCO, 2016). In Bogotá, this responsibility falls under *Secretaría de Educación del Distrito* – Secretariat of Education of the District, from now on referred to as Secretariat of Education.

Colombia has an eleven-year school system of elementary and secondary education (Immerstein, 2015). Both schools where field work was conducted are combined elementary and secondary schools, with students from the 1st to the 11th grade. An overview of Colombia's

³ This book is published in Norwegian, and has been translated into English and paraphrased by the researcher

primary and secondary education system is found in Appendix 1. In Bogotá, there are 1846 schools, out of which 395 are public (Secretariat of Education, 2018)⁴. There are thus many privately owned schools in Colombia. In private schools, tuition fees are generally high, and these schools normally offer a higher quality of education than public schools do, both in terms of curriculum and pedagogy. This essentially means that high-quality education is only available to upper-income families, which eventually reinforces the social inequalities that characterize Colombia (de Carvalho, Looi, Saad & Sinatra, 2014). Thus, parents with lower incomes are left with no other choice than to register their children at public schools, as is the situation for the families of the students who participated in this research. The parent who was interviewed in this study expressed that she wished for her children to attend other schools, but said that this was impossible due to financial constraints.

The neighborhood of Los Mártires faces many challenges, such as violence, drug sales, weapon carrying, theft, prostitution, and homelessness. Many schools in this area have been affected by these issues (Municipality of Bogotá, 2015)⁵, like the two schools in this study (Mejía, 2007)⁶.

This research draws on data gathered during a nine weeks long multi-cited field work in two public schools, which were used as cases. The main research methods were participant observation and semi-structured interviews, out of which thick descriptions emerged. These descriptions have been used in the background chapter, as well as in findings and discussion. Several important aspects of students' school realities and coping strategies were uncovered, and it was interesting to find that two public schools in the same neighborhood differed to a great extent in areas such as learning environments, the level of insecurity in the areas around the schools, and students' relationships with teachers.

The existing literature on the concepts of learning environment, school environment, urban violence, and resilience deals with different aspects of these concepts than what is the focus of my study. From the literature review in chapter 3, it appears to be a gap in the existing literature. These concepts are rarely studied together, and the literature that deals with school environment and urban violence focuses either on the violence within schools, or the violence on the street, without highlighting the impacts violent urban areas have on schools and students. However, it is admitted that my literature review might not be exhaustive, and that there may exist other

⁴ This is a website in Spanish. The relevant information has been translated to English by the researcher

⁵ This document was published in Spanish, and has been translated to English and paraphrased by the researcher

⁶ This book was published in Spanish, and has been translated to English and paraphrased by the researcher

studies with a similar focus as this one. Nevertheless, this thesis presents a comparative study between two specific schools, which have never been studied in this way before. Such comparison is interesting and important because it will uncover aspects of different school realities for students in two schools in the same neighborhood of Bogotá. Firstly, one of the schools is located in a more difficult area of Los Mártires than the other school. Secondly, when it comes to learning environment and school environment, data shows both similarities and differences between two schools that are located so close that there is a walking distance between them.

1.2 Research Questions

In order to achieve the overall purpose of understanding students' coping mechanisms within their learning environments and school environments, the following main research questions were designed to guide this study:

1. How do the learning environments and school environments affect students in two public schools in Los Mártires?
2. How do students in the two schools demonstrate resilience within these contexts?

The first research question aims at uncovering the contexts within which the schools are located, including the neighborhood around the schools and the environments within each school. Special attention has been paid to factors that influence students in their daily school lives, both external influences and impacts from within the schools, encompassing influence from peers, teachers, and other school staff. The second research question has been posed in order to examine how students cope with the influences uncovered in the first research question. The background literature provided in chapter 2 reveals numerous challenges for students in public schools in Los Mártires. I therefore found it interesting to explore resilience theory in order to uncover what strategies students apply in the face of challenging school situations, as well as recognizing what is described in the theory as resilient qualities within individuals.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is important, as it may contribute to new knowledge about students' coping mechanisms within a violent urban area of Bogotá. Moreover, the findings will uncover how

the areas that surround the schools affect the learning environments and school environments. The main contribution of this research to the existing literature on the concepts of learning environment, school environment, urban violence, and resilience is that violence, drugs, and other crimes in the neighborhood certainly affects schools located in such areas, but it does not necessarily have to lead to violence within the schools. As the findings will uncover, the environment within both schools was perceived as good by most students, and observations showed a low presence of violence within both schools. This deviates from conclusions in other studies concerning learning environment and school environment, as shown in chapter 3.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The students are the focus of this study, and it is their opinions and experiences that will be highlighted throughout the thesis. Additionally, a few teacher interviews were also conducted, as well as the school counselor at one of the schools, and one parent. Moreover, some employees at the Secretariat of Education in Bogotá were interviewed. The interviews with school staff, parent, and Secretariat employees are, however, aimed at supplementing the student interviews, and have been mostly included to back up observations at the schools and data gathered in student interviews.

This thesis does not aim to discuss policies implemented in schools in the neighborhood of Los Mártires, nor at analyzing the school system in Bogotá or Colombia. This research rather focuses on challenges in one specific area of Bogotá and shows how students demonstrate resilience within this context. Being a fully qualitative study, this thesis focuses on providing thick descriptions of the school contexts, and at uncovering students' experiences. Limitations with a qualitative study such as this one will be further addressed in chapter 5.6.

The choice fell upon comparing two public schools because several differences between these schools were uncovered during my first visits to the schools. Comparing public and private schools in Bogotá could have made for a highly interesting study, but with a different research focus than the current one. Students in private schools have completely different conditions and experience a different school reality than students in Colombian public schools do, as explained by de Carvalho et al. (2014). Moreover, for further studies, and for a more extensive research project than this one, it would be interesting to include more schools, students, school staff, and parents in the sample. This study focuses solely on learning environments, school environments

and resilience among students within two public schools in the neighborhood of Los Mártires. The two schools will from now on be referred to as *School A* and *School B*.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured as follows: After this introduction, chapter 2 elaborates on the background that has been touched upon in this chapter, in order to place the participants of the study into context (this context being Colombia, its capital Bogotá, and the neighborhood of Los Mártires). The background chapter starts answering the first research question by describing the areas around the two schools. Chapter 3 is the literature review and covers literature that deals with the concepts of learning environment, school environment, urban violence, and resilience. Chapter 4 lays out the theoretical framework that is used in this thesis, resilience theory, and explains how resilience theory will be used in the analysis of the findings. Chapter 5 covers the methods and methodology used throughout this research, which among other aspects includes the qualitative methods used, explanation of the case study method, as well as explanations about participants, interviews and the coding process that took place after the data was collected. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 are directed towards answering the research questions. Chapter 6 presents the main findings of this study, without discussing or analyzing these findings, as the analysis and discussion are covered in chapter 7. Chapter 8 provides the conclusion for this study.

2 Contextual Background

This chapter provides further background information about Colombia and Bogotá, as well as a contextualization of Los Mártires and the two schools. The chapter starts out with a brief introduction to Colombia, before describing the educational situation in Bogotá and the neighborhood of Los Mártires. Furthermore, what challenges Bogotá in general and Los Mártires in particular struggle with will be explained.



Figure 3 Map of Colombia. Source: www.globaltrade.net/map/Colombia.html

Colombia is located at the north-western part of the South American continent, as shown on Figure 3. The capital Bogotá is situated in the middle of the country, and with close to eight million inhabitants, it is the biggest city in Colombia (Municipality of Bogotá, 2017). Observations during field work confirmed that Bogotá is a vibrant and busy city with a lot of people, especially in the city center. This poses several challenges, like providing public transportation for all the inhabitants, and especially regarding the security issue. Field observations showed that Bogotá is a city where one always needs to be alert and careful at the same time in order to avoid crimes like robberies and pickpocketing. Regarding challenges like violence and crimes in an urban area, the phenomena that are presented in this thesis are not unique for Los Mártires as a neighborhood, nor for Bogotá as a city. Numerous other cities in the world struggle with similar challenges, as is described by Pfanner (2010), Moser (2004), and Winton (2004), among others (see chapter 3.2 for further elaboration on urban violence).

2.1 Education in Colombia

As stated in the introduction chapter, there is a substantial difference between private schools and public schools in Colombia (de Carvalho, Looi, Saad, & Sinatra, 2014). Moreover, there are different kinds of public schools, among these the district schools. Public district schools are those schools that the Secretariat of Education is completely in charge of managing, and they are commonly known as public schools (Bromberg, 2016⁷). Both schools where this research was conducted are public district schools, but for simplicity they are referred to only as public schools throughout this thesis.

According to the OECD (2015), education in Colombia is improving. The enrolment has increased at all levels, and at the primary school level the enrolment is at 90 % (UNESCO, 2014). However, many students drop out after the age of 15, and only about half of 17 to 19-year-old secondary graduates continue to tertiary level studies (OECD, 2015). The OECD (2015) asserts that promoting social inclusion at school can help to address inequalities and low performance among the students. The literate Colombian population aged 15 years and above was about 94 % in 2011 (UNESCO, 2014). In spite of these improvements, challenges like achieving quality and equity persist in the Colombian education system. These challenges impede the delivery of quality education and reduction of vulnerability for disadvantaged populations (Bonilla, 2015). Such populations include students located in urban areas that are heavily exposed to violence, crime and social insecurity, as is the case for Los Mártires.

2.2 Bogotá

Bogotá is divided into 20 different *localidades* – localities, as shown on Figure 4 in chapter 2.4. Each locality is again divided into UPZs (*Unidades de Planeación Zonal* – Units of Zonal Planning), and within the UPZs there are even smaller areas – *barrios* (Orozco, 2014), which in English translates to neighborhoods. However, the localities in Bogotá correspond to what in other big cities are known as *neighborhoods*, and throughout this thesis Los Mártires is therefore referred to as a neighborhood and not a locality.

⁷ This is a chapter in the book *Clima escolar y victimización en Bogotá 2015 [School climate and victimization in Bogotá 2015]*, which is written in Spanish. The text has been translated into English and paraphrased by the researcher. The same goes for the book chapters by Salazar, Sebá and Borero, and Ávila, in the same book, which are referred to throughout the section called *Education in Bogotá*

In a survey carried out by Bogotá Cómo Vamos [How Are We Doing in Bogotá]⁸ (2015), 59 % of the people of Bogotá reported feeling unsafe in their city, and 20 % said that they had been victims of crime, most frequently robberies. The insecurity issue in Bogotá is strongly related to homelessness. The two main reasons for living on the street are difficulties with the family network and drug consumption. Almost all homeless people affirmed that they were consuming some kind of drug (Bogotá Cómo Vamos, 2016). Employment and unemployment rates in Bogotá for selected age groups are presented in Table 1. Most people in Bogotá get jobs through family members, friends or acquaintances (Moreno, 2017).

Table 1 Employment rates Bogotá (Municipality of Bogotá, 2016). Table compiled by the researcher.

Age	Employment rate people with technic formation/university degree	Employment rate people without higher education	Unemployment rate
25-64	85 %	75.9 %	
14-28			16.8 %

2.3 Education in Bogotá

The primary and secondary school system in Bogotá serves approximately 1.5 million school children in about 2200 schools. Of these, about 900 000 students are enrolled in public schools (Salazar, 2016). Table 2 presents statistics concerning education in Bogotá. The table shows years of schooling, percentage of people who holds an educational title or diploma, and the percentage of people who holds a university degree for selected age groups.

Table 2 Education Bogotá (Municipality of Bogotá, 2016). Table developed by the researcher.

Age	Years of Schooling (average)	Educational title/diploma	University degree
18-24	11.5		
24-34			19 %
25-64		63 %	

2.3.1 EI SENA

El SENA (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje [National Learning Service]) is a Secretariat of Education program which one of the students in School B explained this way: “It is like a university. They call it the university of the poor because it is free. One becomes a technician,

⁸ Bogotá Cómo Vamos is an initiative which follows and monitors the changes in the life quality for the citizens of Bogotá (source: <http://www.bogotacomovamos.org/acerca/>).

not a professional, and you can work in something”. The municipality of Bogotá (2017) asserts that El SENA is the institution that has the highest admission number among the students in Bogotá. Moreover, El SENA is a key factor in the supply of higher education in Bogotá, mainly in programs at the technological level. According to the OECD (2015), El SENA accounts for more than half of the enrolment in technical programs. The OECD (2015) further states that too little is known about El SENA’s teaching quality and graduates’ performances in the labor market, and that they are still absent from most national education databases.

2.3.2 School Environment in Bogotá

Cajiao (2017) describes challenges such as lack of motivation, laziness, aggressive behavior, and authority issues among public school students in Bogotá. He claims that these challenges are mostly results of conflicts in the families, as well as social or personal conflicts that the students are not able to sort out because they do not know who to turn to and who to ask for help. Many students in public schools live without their mother or father (Sebá & Borero, 2016). Cajiao (2017) states that most teachers do their best to help students, but that the majority of the teachers have neither the time nor the professional training to carry out a successful follow-up. It is also difficult for the teachers to be authority figures within the schools and confidants for the students at the same time.

The Secretariat of Education in Bogotá has conducted several surveys in order to uncover different aspects of the school environment. In 2015, the survey analyzed school environment, abuse between peers in school settings, gangs, drugs, and school surroundings. Some of the results for students in public schools are presented in Tables 3, 4 and 5. In general, the results of the 2015 survey revealed that the school environment is highly related to the school surroundings (Sebá & Borero, 2016).

Drugs

Almost 40 % of students in public schools reported that drugs were being sold close to their school. Sebá and Borero (2016) claim that this has more to do with the school surroundings than the schools themselves, and state that public schools are located in more difficult areas than private schools. There is a negative relationship between drug sales in the school surroundings and the socioeconomic conditions – the better these conditions, the less the drug sales. Moreover, in poor areas, drugs are being sold on the street, whereas in the more

prosperous areas they are distributed in private homes. The survey also uncovered that the difficulties that students experience at home can influence their behavior at school. Moreover, it was found that the sensations of security and insecurity have a strong association with the school environment (Sebá & Borero, 2016). Ávila (2016) states that sale and consumption of drugs is a problem with a substantial impact on the academic and recreational life of students in Bogotá. He asserts that the sale of drugs close to the school is detrimental to the security in these areas, and that parks in such areas have been used for drug sales. Results from the survey also showed a close correlation between drugs being sold close to the schools and drugs being sold inside schools. Almost 30 % of the students in public schools reported that drugs were being sold at their school, and 36% of these students answered that they had seen someone in their class consuming drugs while they were at school (Ávila, 2016).

School Surroundings

Areas around public parks in Bogotá have a high insecurity level (Ávila, 2016). Many of the public schools in Bogotá are located in complex areas like the city center, where School A and School B are located. Table 3 presents student answers on questions related to safety in the school surroundings.

Table 3 Safety in the school surroundings (Ávila, 2016). Table compiled by the researcher.

Question/ Statement	Do you know of fights between students at your school and students at other schools?	Do you belong to/ have you belonged to a gang?	Have you been robbed on your way to/from school?	Do you feel safe when walking close to your school?	Do you consider the parks close to your school as safe?
Percentage of students answering <i>yes</i>	40 %	18 %	16 %	45 %	
Percentage of students answering <i>no</i>				41 % ⁹	58 %

Learning Environment

Table 4 presents answers students in public schools gave to questions about bullying and violence in the classroom.

⁹ In addition to this, 14 % of the students in public schools said that they did not walk around their schools

Table 4 Bullying and violence in the classroom (Bromberg, 2016). Table compiled by the researcher.

Question	No bullying	Not severe and repeated bullying	Extreme bullying	Frequent violence	Teachers offend students in class
Percentage of students answering affirmatively to the statement	6 %	22 %	15 %	14 %	35 %

Another question in the survey was related to whether students felt that school prepared them well for further studies. 76 % of the students answered yes to this question, 21 % said no, and 4 % said they would not go on to tertiary level studies (Bromberg, 2016). Table 5 presents student answers on questions about safety and wellbeing at school. As will become clear in the next section, most of the challenges that were uncovered in the survey are to a great extent found in schools in Los Mártires.

Table 5 Safety and wellbeing at school (Bromberg, 2016 & Salazar, 2016). Table elaborated by the researcher.

Question/ statement	Do you feel safe at school?	Have you been robbed at school this year?	Last week, no one in my class insulted me or made me feel bad	Last month, no one in school bothered me with proposals, comments, gestures, sounds or insinuations of sexual nature
Percentage of students answering yes/affirmatively	70 %		68 %	71 %
Percentage of students answering no	30 %	41 %		

2.4 Los Mártires

Figure 4 shows a map of 19 of the 20 the neighborhoods in Bogotá. The last neighborhood borders only with Usme and is therefore located outside this map. The red arrow on the map indicates where Los Mártires is located, in the city center. Los Mártires is a densely populated neighborhood, with a bit more than 97 000 inhabitants (Municipality of Bogotá, 2010). Los Mártires is a low-middle-income level area (Bogotá Chamber of Commerce, 2009). This means that it is not among the poorest neighborhoods of Bogotá, but the income level is considered fairly low compared to many other neighborhoods.

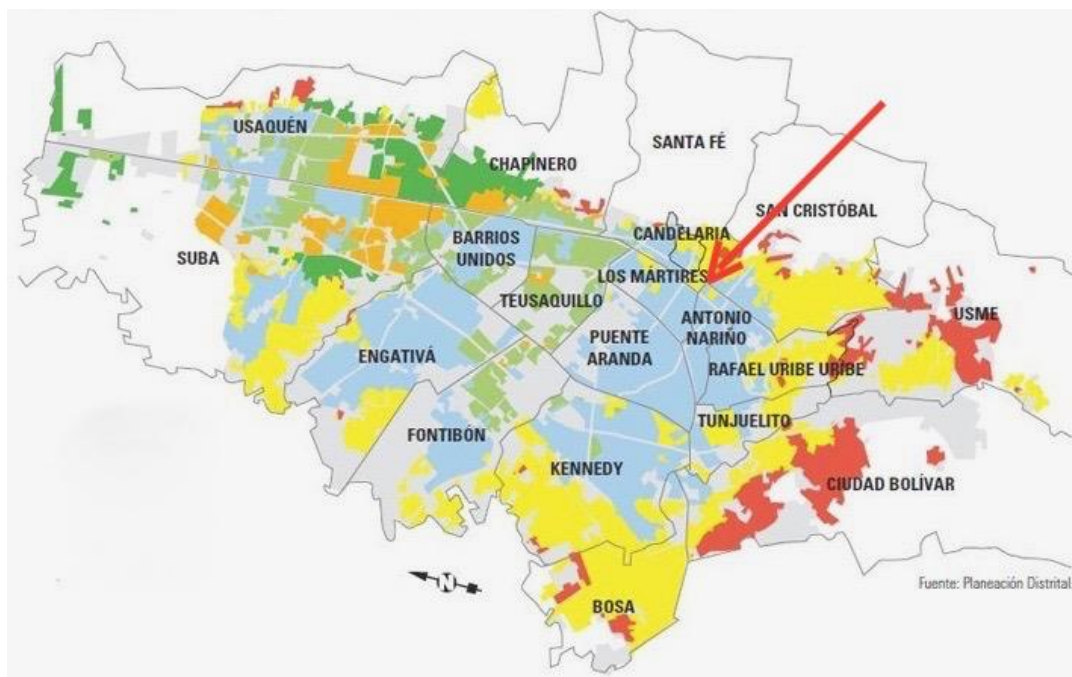


Figure 4 Neighborhoods of Bogotá. Source: <http://www.barriosdebogota.com/estos-son-los-149-sitios-mas-peligrosos-de-bogota-71399/#axzz5AUNXaCsA>.

Los Mártires has the second highest death rate by homicides in the city, which is highly elevated compared to the average in Bogotá. Moreover, Los Mártires has the third highest rate of deaths as a result of traffic accidents in relation to the other neighborhoods in the city. Regarding crimes, theft against people is the most common, followed by theft of vehicles and in commercial establishments.

Los Mártires has many microenterprises, and the commercial activity is very important for the neighborhood (Bogotá Chamber of Commerce, 2006). Observations in the area confirmed these descriptions. Stores in all shapes and sizes and street vendors surrounded the first school, while the second school was mostly surrounded by auto repair shops. Although many warehouses are in use, several other warehouses and buildings were abandoned. These spaces have been used by thieves and homeless people, creating room for low quality commerce, drugs, and a great number of stolen goods. Parts of Los Mártires are also known as a zone for sexual commerce, and phenomena such as domestic and sexual violence, drug consumption, and delinquency are well-known problems in the area. Moreover, the area formerly known as *the Bronx* had many homeless people and drug-addicts living there, creating a high sense of insecurity for the citizens because of drug and weapon sales (Municipality of Bogotá, 2010). Los Mártires is one of the three neighborhoods in Bogotá with the most homeless people (Bogotá Cómo Vamos,

2016). The Municipality of Bogotá (2010) asserts that Los Mártires exemplifies the social and economic problems of Bogotá. The displacement of homeless people is mentioned as a problem with large consequences, because this population has brought with it uncleanliness, sexual commerce, overcrowding, and proliferation of residences. These homeless people find the economic resources they need in the neighborhood, in legal or illegal ways, which also fosters drug dealing.

Some factors connected with the consumption of drugs amongst young people in Los Mártires are a low academic level, a lack of goals, negative self-image, low tolerance of stress, little assertiveness, peer influence, impulsivity, and easy access to the drugs. From the meanings and explanations that the young people themselves have built around these behaviors, such motivations are associated with absence or deficiency of dialogue and communication, the feeling of loneliness, emotional ruptures, and a low academic performance (Municipality of Bogotá, 2010).

The physical surroundings of Los Mártires are described as unhealthy, due to incorrect use of the public space, presence of homeless people, consumption of drugs, and inadequate handling of solid waste, which generates a decrease in the quality of life for the residents of the territory, who are being deprived of the right to enjoy a healthy environment (Municipality of Bogotá, 2010). The Municipality of Bogotá (2010) also mentions environmental problems, like noise and environmental contamination, inadequate managing of garbage, deterioration of parks, and a bad state of the roads. As a result of the expansion of establishments such as bars and discos, there has also been an unfortunate increase in the consumption of alcohol and drugs among young people.

Furthermore, Los Mártires struggles with malnutrition (Municipality of Bogotá, 2010), which several teachers in School A described as the reality for many of their students. Many kids and young people also have part-time jobs (Municipality of Bogotá, 2010), something that also came up in conversations with students in both schools. Several students reported having jobs after the school hours, as well as during weekends.

2.4.1 The Bronx

An area formerly known as the Bronx is located only a few streets away from School A, and in-between School A and School B. As an employee at the Secretariat of Education explained,

the Bronx was a place consisting of two blocks, shaped like the letter L, which had been invaded by homeless people and drug dealers. The area was a lawless place, where the police would not enter. This created a feeling of insecurity which destroyed the entire surroundings in this neighborhood. However, in 2016, the police and the army decided to conduct an intervention in the Bronx, surrounding the sector with hundreds of police officers, and managed to shut down the activities that were going on there. Nevertheless, this area had a large influence on the schools in the neighborhood, because of fights, drugs and the insecurity that this area generated. Students were potential customers for the drug dealers, and since the Bronx was a place that never slept, it was open when the students were going to school in the morning, and when they were leaving in the afternoons. After the intervention in the Bronx, the drug business got decentralized throughout Bogotá, and many of the hot spots for selling drugs are now located close to schools, which is the case for both schools where this research was carried out. This might be one of the reasons for the high frequency of drug sales in the school environments in these schools (Ávila, 2016).

2.5 Education in Los Mártires

In Los Mártires, there are 39 schools, of which 30 are private and nine are public schools (Secretariat of Education, 2018). It is estimated that almost 11 500 students attend public schools (Secretariat of Education, 2017). Out of these nine public schools, this research was carried out in two schools that are located quite close to each other. The quality of education in Los Mártires is lower than Bogotá in general, and more than 25 % of the students in the area left school because of insecurity in the school environment (Municipality of Bogotá, 2017). The population of Los Mártires has an average of 8.9 years of education (Bogotá Chamber of Commerce, 2006), and only 30 % of the adult population in this neighborhood has received some kind of technological or professional education (Municipality of Bogotá, 2010). Young people are not exempt from the problems in the neighborhood, and the Secretariat of Education wants to provide the large number of children and young people who attend school in Los Mártires with access to education. However, the average number of school years completed shows that these goals are not yet reached (Municipality of Bogotá, 2010¹⁰).

¹⁰ There is no newer data than 2010 regarding these facts. I have looked for newer data both online, on different academic search engines, and at the main library in Bogotá, but this was the newest source I could find on the topic.

2.5.1 ZOE

In public schools in Los Mártires, there is a wide array of educational programs initiated by the Secretariat of Education. Teachers in School A expressed that many of these programs have not been properly implemented in their school. During the time field work was conducted, the program that emerged as the most present and important in both schools, was ZOE – *Zona de Orientación Escolar [School Orientation Zone]*. According to the Secretariat of Education (2018), this program was started in order to improve coexistence at schools and to ensure protective school environments. One of the informants at the Secretariat of Education explained that ZOE is a space where the students receive guidance in different situations that occur at school. ZOE was initiated by the Secretariat of Education in public schools in Los Mártires as a measure to prevent drug use. The first part of the work ZOE did was a process that mapped out what challenges existed in each school. The second part of the project, which was being carried out at the time that field work was conducted, consists of training a group of students that will later on guide their peers. One of the participants in the focus group explained that the idea behind this was that students in general trust their friends a lot, and that therefore some students would be trained in order to support their schoolmates. Furthermore, it was highlighted that School A is in “everyone’s” sight, because of the different problems at the school and the influence from the Bronx and the intervention that followed. The focus group participants agreed that the people who did the greatest job in this school were the teachers. One of the Secretariat employees expressed: “The teachers in School A, I take my hat off to them in every single sense for the job they are doing”.

2.6 School A and School B

During observations at School A and School B, as well as in conversations with principals, school staff, and students I found that in School A, students attended school from 6:30AM to 3:15PM, and that they were not allowed to leave school during this time. School B had both morning sessions (6:15AM to 12:00PM) and afternoon sessions (12:30PM to 6:15PM), and about half of the school’s students attended school in the morning, and the other half in the afternoons. School A used to have a similar arrangement, but due to a decline in students at this school, the school now has only one session.

Along with violence, drugs emerged as a major issue inside and outside both schools. At School A, the principal reported that several students did drugs at school, even at a primary school age, and students said that many of their peers hid in certain spaces at school to consume various drugs. At School B, several students and teachers said that during breaks, some students go to the nearby park to do drugs. The counselor at School B explained that the school has had cases of students doing drugs even inside the classroom. The drug issue seemed equally present at both schools, but when it comes to the school surroundings it was less visible around School B due to fewer homeless people on the streets. One of the teachers at School A explained that some parents use their kids for selling drugs at school. Moreover, one of the Secretariat of Education employees that was interviewed said that in School A, drug consumption is excessive.

From time to time at School A, there were several police officers present in the school patio. When asked about this, students said that they were at school sometimes, but they did not know what they were doing there. Teachers explained that due to the dangerous area, continuing robberies of teachers and students, the principal asked for this police presence. Because the parks that are located close to both schools are not safe (Municipality of Bogotá, 2010), there are very few places in the neighborhood that can be used for recreational activities and for playing. Several students and teachers said that this was one of the reasons why the schools were important for the students because it is one of the very few places they can safely play and unfold themselves.

2.6.1 School A

In 2017, 755 students were enrolled in School A, and 58 teachers were employed at the school (Secretariat of Education, 2017). Figure 5 is a picture taken from the square across the school, and shows the main entrance, as well as one of the streets outside of the school. As the picture shows, there is a church in the middle of the school, which was used for service.

Figure 6 shows the school yard at School A. Here, football matches would take place several times a week, as will be presented in chapters 6.2. and 7.1. Several students expressed concerns about the state of the school building. They said that it was in a deteriorating condition, and that in the case of an earthquake, they feared it would collapse completely. Moreover, observations at school revealed water damages in the roof, garbage lying around, holes in the floor in several classrooms, and poorly equipped classrooms.



Figure 5 Picture outside the main entrance of School A. Picture taken by the researcher.



Figure 6 Picture of the school yard at School A. Picture taken by the researcher.

During the time spent at the two schools, it became clear that School A had a bad reputation among people outside of the school. This also emerged as a topic during interviews with students. One of the students at this school expressed that the school had a bad reputation,

because people were saying that there were many *ñeros*¹¹ there, and that people bring knives and drugs into school. The same student reported that people on the outside were saying that parents should not send their kids to School A, and that the rumors were that instead of preparing students for the future, the school is turning them into *ñeros*. However, this student also highlighted the fact that people who have never been to the school cannot really know what the school is like. One indicator of School A's bad reputation can be the decreasing number of students attending the school. One of the teachers at School A said that the school is struggling to sustain the number of students, and that in his 12 years at the school, the number of students has decreased dramatically. Also at School B students had heard rumors about School A, and they said that they did not understand why I had spent time at that school, since they had heard that the school was very bad due to the school location and problems like drug consumption, robberies and gangs at school.

2.6.2 School B

In 2017, 1480 students were enrolled at School B, and 82 teachers were employed at the school (Secretariat of Education, 2017). According to the Municipality of Bogotá (2010), the area where this school is located has a population in increasing poverty. It is also highlighted that in this and other schools in the sector, there are poor conditions in basic sanitation and a general deterioration of the environment (Municipality of Bogotá, 2010). The streets that surround School B are calmer and quieter than those that surround School A. Instead of all the commerce, there are many auto repair shops, and it is also a more residential zone. However, the drug problem is also highly present in this area. The school counselor at School B explained that after the intervention in The Bronx, the indigent people and the homeless people had to leave, and began to spread around all of Bogotá, but especially in the neighborhood of Los Mártires. He explained that the park close to the school is now a known spot for buying and selling drugs. A teacher in the same school said that it is easy for the students to buy drugs, even through the school gates, and also inside school. Despite this, several students in School B said that they did not see any bad things about attending school in this area.

¹¹ “Ñero” is a word that was frequently used by students in both schools, referring to both homeless people and drug vendors. An employee at the Secretariat of Education explained that “The word *ñero* describes a person who is not necessarily a homeless person. It’s a person who wears bad clothes, who does drugs, maybe they are part of a small gang. It is like a gangster from the lower classes.”

Figures 7 and 8 show pictures of the school-yard in School B. On Figure 7, the main entrance is seen to the right in the picture (the gate), and the street in front of the school is seen, which is calmer than the street in front of School A.



Figures 7 and 8 School-yard and surroundings School B. Pictures taken by the researcher.

The picture to the right shows a part of the school building that was decorated by a wall painting in 2016 as part of an artistic-pedagogic program. This program is part of a project for public schools in Bogotá from the Secretariat of Education named “Citizen participation for reunion, reconciliation and peace¹²”. One of the goals of this project is to improve the school environments, and the artistic-pedagogic interventions were used as a strategy to improve the physical environment, but also as an exercise that empowers the educational community through a reencounter with its surrounding environment (Secretariat of Education, 2017). Furthermore, on the picture to the right some of the classrooms are shown, which are located at different levels. When it rains heavily in Bogotá (which it often does), the rain created a lot of noise from the outside. Moreover, my observations at School B showed that water would leak

¹² This document was published in Spanish. The relevant parts of the document have been translated to English and paraphrased by the researcher.

into the classrooms located on the first floor and large parts of the classroom floor would get covered with water.

2.7 Closing Remarks

From my observations in the schools and within the classrooms, the teaching situations in School A and School B proved to be somewhat different. In general, School A was characterized by more chaos and noise, and as it has been pointed towards earlier in this chapter, observations confirmed that the surrounding area around School B was calmer and safer than the area around School A. I will return to these issues in chapters 6 and 7 when I present the findings of this study and then discuss them.

As this chapter has presented, several challenges persist for students who attend education in Colombia in general, and for students who attend public schools in Los Mártires in particular. In order to take a closer look at the main concepts used throughout this thesis, the following chapter entails a literature review which will explain the concepts learning environment, school environment, urban violence and resilience.

3 Literature Review

As mentioned in the previous chapters, education in Colombia faces many challenges, some of which the Secretariat of Education seeks to improve through programs like ZOE. Attending school in a violent urban area such as Los Mártires poses several challenges for the students (Municipality of Bogotá, 2015). To explain some of these challenges the concepts learning environment, school environment, urban violence (with a specific focus on Latin America), and resilience, will be covered in this chapter. Abualrub, Karseth and Stensaker (2013) assert that definitions of concepts provide information about perceptions and hints to where core beliefs and norms can be found. Through reviewing the literature in this chapter, the concepts of *learning environment*, *school environment*, *urban violence* and *resilience* will be defined, and the core aspects of these concepts will be presented.

The search for literature on the concepts were conducted through the databases of Oria, ERIC (Ovid), Sociological Abstracts, Science Direct, and Google Scholar. The key words used in the search were resilience, learning environment, school environment, urban violence, and Bogotá + education. Because this study deals with a school located in a violent urban area, the focus was to find articles that discussed similar issues, and thus most articles that relate mostly to school violence (violence inside the schools) were left out of this literature review. Moreover, including all articles that somehow relate to my main concepts would be too much to cover for the scope of this literature review. While reading the relevant articles, I specifically looked for contents relating to learning environment, school environment, resilience, and coping mechanisms, and how these concepts may influence students and their school experiences.

3.1 Learning Environment and School Environment

In their literature review, Abualrub et al. (2013) present various definitions of learning environment. In general, the term relates to different conditions and factors that can create and improve a stimulating learning experience. The concept, is, however, slightly more complex, as it is interpreted differently by various researchers. By some, learning environment is considered to be the physical spaces where learning activities take place, while others see it mainly as the set of supportive information technology and online learning conditions. Yet others view it as the sum of teaching and learning activities and approaches (Abualrub et al., 2013). Abualrub et al. (2013) argue that the concept is used in a pragmatic way, as a concept

intended to fit specific research agendas. However, all these definitions understand learning environment as being very close to the learner, and emphasize individual factors such as motivation, learning approaches, expectations, and values. Abualrub et al. (2013) sum up by identifying three different lenses on learning environments, depending on the empirical focus of the conducted research. These lenses are (1) learning environment as a pedagogical setting, (2) learning environment as an organizational responsibility, and (3) learning environment as a networking activity. For the purpose of this study, the first lens provides the most appropriate way to look at learning environments, as it is a student-focused study. The pedagogical/teaching-learning perspective views learning environment as directly related to the teaching and learning process. This includes the relationship between teacher and students, the relationships amongst students, students' learning approaches and motivation, supportive learning technologies, how the curriculum is developed, the teaching and learning climate and students' perceptions of it, as well as the potential link between learning environment and learning outcomes (Abualrub et al., 2013).

According to Johnson, Burke and Gielen (2012), the school environment consists of both the social and physical environment at a school. Moreover, according to Moore (2012), the different layers within a school contribute to the school environment. Such layers include the classroom, the school, the neighborhood and the city where the school is located, the school system, the state, and the national government. The literature I found that deals with school environment is largely concerned with this concept in relation to school violence. Johnson, Burke and Gielen (2010) found that among other aspects, students' own actions and the environment outside the school were the most important characteristics for the initiation and increased severity of violence within schools. The school environment has also proved important for preventing dropout, delinquency, drug and alcohol use, and violence. Johnson et al.'s (2010) study also showed that common values and behaviors in the surrounding neighborhood can be brought into school and become a source of violence. In another article, Johnson et al. (2012) map out the school social and physical environment's influence on school violence. They explain that studies asking the youth about the role of the environment in neighborhood violence have shown that capturing the youths' perspectives can improve conceptual density and ensure validity. It was identified how urban students perceive the school environment's contribution to violence, and six common topics were identified through which the school environment influences violence; student behavior, norms of behavior, relationships with school staff, learning environment, school safety, and neighborhood environment. Another interesting

finding was that students did not differentiate between violence that occurred in the community and violence that occurred at school. Johnson et al. (2012) also argue that violence prevention activities tend to focus only on violence that happens in the school, and they emphasize the need for an approach taking the community into account when trying to understand school violence.

Hernandez and Seem (2004) explain that school climate is central to the educational mission of a school, and that it consists of the related factors of attitude, feeling, and behavior of individuals within the school system. The school climate is viewed as involving four key relationships; a student to him or herself, a student to his/her peers, a student to his/her parents and community, and a student to his/her school workers, including teachers, administrators, and other staff. The climate in a school can have a significant positive effect on the feeling of safety within the school community (Hernandez & Seem, 2004). Wekke and Sahlan (2014) point out the need to enhance school culture and the surrounding areas in order to support teaching and learning. Drawing on a research conducted in Indonesia, they identified how high schools in an area created their neighborhood to maintain the learning process. Their study focused on the efforts for the enhancement of religious education, and the study has been included in this literature review because the way the religious education was implemented can serve as an example of how programs like ZOE can be implemented to create and strengthen a positive school environment. What was found as important for the success of the implementation was commitment from principals, students, parents, and teachers. Their research showed how schools can expand opportunities by creating good environments and stimulate advancement among the students. Furthermore, Wolska-Długosz (2015) describes the importance that has been put on developing students' creativity. Her article focuses on the ways in which educators and parents can motivate children to be creative and problem-solving. One of the barriers Wolska-Długosz (2015) mentions as elements in the school environment that can prohibit creativity is conditions of the physical school environment, but she underlines that this is not an unbeatable obstacle.

The school environment is undoubtedly important for students' wellbeing, and as it has been explained here it can also be influential in preventing school violence. Moreover, after reviewing the literature on the concept, it is logical to conclude that a good school environment can be a positive factor for enhancing students' resilience, a concept that will be explained in chapter 3.3. The concepts *learning environment* and *school environment* have several common

features, as shown in Figure 9. Some factors of the two concepts are overlapping, while others are specific to each concept. A further elaboration of this figure is found in chapter 7.1.

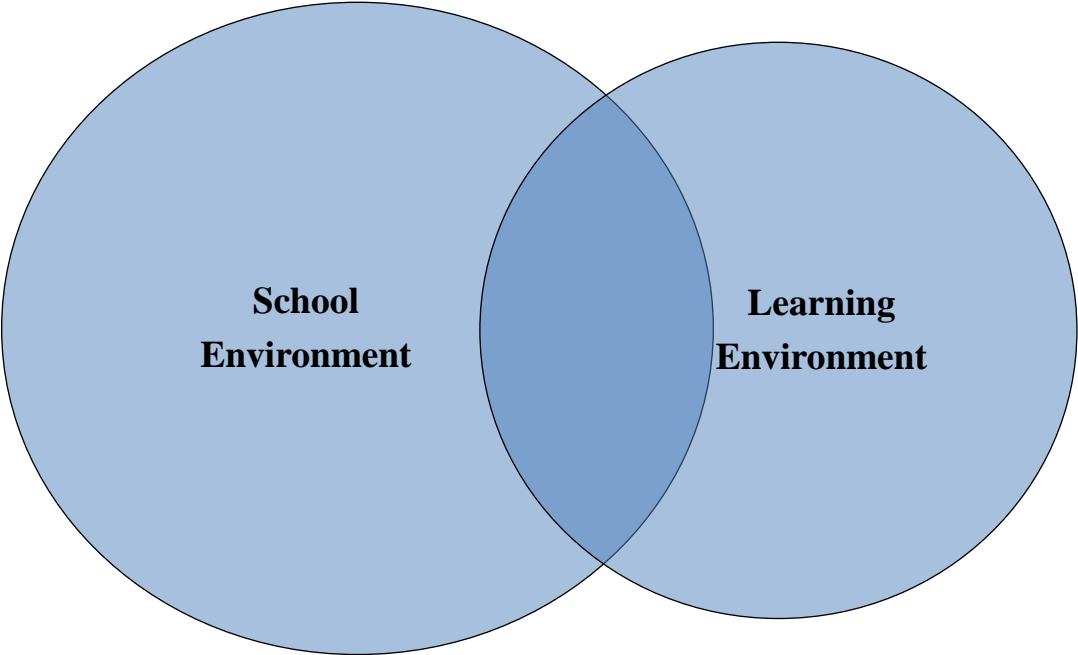


Figure 9 School Environment and Learning Environment. Figure elaborated by the researcher.

As shown in the figure, school environment is a broader concept than learning environment. The school environment encompasses factors both within school and outside of the school, while the learning environment is found within the school and is very close to the learner. The school environment also includes factors like the school system and programs initiated by the Secretariat of Education. Both school environment and learning environment are defined partly as the physical space where learning takes place (the school), and both concepts have to do with relationships, such as relationships between peers and between students and the school staff. The learning environment is more teaching and learning oriented, and the curriculum forms part of the learning environment. The overlapping area on Figure 9 is where the two concepts coincide, and particular attention will be paid to this area when it comes to defining how students demonstrate resilience within their school contexts.

3.2 Urban Violence

The concept of urban violence is also widely covered in the literature. In 1950, less than 30 % of the world’s population lived in cities, while today more than 50 % do. In Latin America,

almost 75 % of the population lives in cities (Koonings & Kruijt, 2007). Although cities can be places filled with prosperity and diversity, Pfanner (2010) explains that many of them also face challenges like pollution, overcrowding, poverty, crime, and violence. He describes the brutal reality that many vulnerable citizens experience: “As the world grows increasingly urban, violence in many cities is reaching unprecedented levels, and is making daily life in some places almost like living in a war zone” (p. 309). He also explains that violence often goes along with high levels of poverty, discrimination, economic disparity, social inequality and drug abuse and/or trafficking. Moser (2004) describes how violence is a critical problem in urban areas, and that it leads to fear and insecurity. She underlines that the phenomenon of violence is not static, but that it changes quickly and dramatically, and that it is contextually bound: “It cannot be assumed that violence is manifested and experienced in the same way in different cities, even within the same national context” (Moser, 2004, p. 6). Moreover, within cities, disparities in violence levels are based on neighborhood income levels, with severe violence generally located in lower-income areas. Poverty and inequality are explained to be overlapping conditions that make some people resort to crime and violence. Consequences of urban violence include a dramatic impact on people’s well-being in terms of livelihood security, and the functioning of local social institutions like schools.

Moncada (2016) states that urban violence is an emerging challenge to development and democracy in Latin America, which is the most violent region in the world. He specifically analyzes the intricate politics of urban violence in Colombia’s second largest city, Medellín, where the local government managed to decrease the violence significantly. Moncada (2016), however, urges policy makers and international donors to be careful with exporting what he calls the Medellín miracle elsewhere, as complex configurations of political, economic, and criminal actors with individual and shared interests were reasons behind the success.

Sanchez (2006) describes three types of urban violence: (1) structural violence that is inherent in the existing social inequalities in Latin America, (2) radical violence, and (3) criminal violence. The latter takes the form of youth gangs, criminal mafias, and drug cartels. Sanchez (2006) explains how in the largest cities of Latin America, disorder and violence have become parts of the daily life. She furthermore describes how inequalities of wealth and income are expressed socially in the institutional structure of the city, and spatially by the fragmentation of neighborhoods along lines of class, race, and ethnicity, which has led to increasingly violent phenomena. Sanchez (2006) argues that people are not violent because they are poor, but that

they come to rely on violence as a basic tool for survival. Violence is thus seen as a product of structural inequalities, a social phenomenon where multiple actors use violence under similar social circumstances and in mutually reinforcing ways, not as isolated individuals. Sanchez (2006) describes the complex reality of violence in Latin America, without going into what consequences this can have for schools located in violent urban areas.

Winton (2004) is another author who asserts that urban violence has reached exceptionally high levels in many cities in the global south, and that the urban poor are the principal victims of violence. In her literature review, she focuses on the reasons for urban violence and how it plays out in different contexts, without mentioning the effect it may have on students that attend schools in these areas. Moser and Mcilwaine (2005) describe the complexity of everyday violence in poor urban areas, and develop a framework for explaining the holistic nature of violence and to provide methodological tools to facilitate violence-reduction interventions. Carrión (2008)¹³ argues that violence has become one of the most important topics in Latin American cities the last 20 years, and analyzes violence by focusing on its causes and different forms, the city as a scenario for violence, the effects of violence on the city, and public space as a scenario for crime.

3.3 Resilience

Resilience, which has been studied for about 50 years (Goldstein, Brooks & DeVries, 2013), is connected to the adversity that many people face all over the world. Such adversities include, among others, poverty, violence, experiences of trauma, and children at risk of negative developmental outcomes. The ways in which children are affected by the different types of adversities, however, vary, and this is connected to the level of resilience that one possesses (Theron & Theron, 2014). Resilience is defined as the process of bouncing back to a normal or above-normal state after exposure to violence (Kim, 2015), or, more generally, as the ability to bounce back in the face of adversity or negative experiences (Prince-Embury & Saklofske, 2013). There are several definitions of resilience that have in common a number of features relating to human strengths, some type of disruption and growth, adaptive coping, and positive outcomes following exposure to adversity (Prince-Embury, 2013). Luthar et al. (2000) describe resilience as “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaption within the context of

¹³ This article is published in Spanish, and has been translated into English and paraphrased by the researcher

significant adversity” (p. 543). Personal characteristics within resilient people include intellectual ability, easy temperament, autonomy, self-reliance, sociability, effective coping strategies, and communication skills. Prince-Embury (2013) furthermore explains that environmental protective factors outside the immediate family include positive school experiences, good peer relations, and positive relationships with other adults.

Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Higgitt and Target (1994) describe resilience as the normal development that occurs under difficult conditions. Bolling (2014) discusses the different types of resilience that other authors have described and scrutinized. He argues that the political constitution and socio-cultural embeddedness of systems, system boundaries and stressors must be acknowledged. Bolling (2014) posits that social and psychological resilience are important extensions of the resilience thinking, and states that the resilience concept must incorporate ideas of adaption, learning and self-organization in addition to the general ability to resist disturbance. Social resilience is seen as a quality of social units to withstand or adapt to a wide range of stressors. Psychological resilience reflects the ability to maintain a stable equilibrium. Earlier definitions of resilience resembled concepts like “coping strategy” and “adaptive capacity”, and to these Bolling (2014) adds “risk management” and “buffering”.

Kiswarday (2012) locates two critical conditions within the concept of resilience: (1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity and (2) achievement of positive adaption despite major assaults on the developmental process. Risk and protective factors operate across settings and at different levels in differing environments, giving the responsibility for development of resilience to the community (encompassing the school system). Resilience is seen as an interactive and accumulating process of developing different skills, abilities, knowledge and insights that people need for successful adaption or to overcome adversities and face challenges. In order to build resilience, one needs inner personal strength, social and interpersonal skills, and external supports and resources (Kiswarday, 2012).

Goldstein et al. (2013) state that a child who is capable of developing a resilient mindset will be able to deal more effectively with stress and pressure, cope with the challenges of everyday life, bounce back from disappointments and adversity, develop clear and realistic goals, solve problems, relate comfortably with others, and treat people with respect. These authors define resilience as a child’s achievement of positive developmental outcomes and avoidance of maladaptive outcomes under adverse conditions. Smith, Epstein, Ortiz, Christopher and Tooley (2013) state that “The idea of a person being able to bounce back and recover strength, spirits,

or humor after adversity, misfortune, or a stressful event is the gist of this idea of resilience in a human context” (p. 167).

Resilient students face fears and seek to solve problems. They demonstrate optimism, become positive role models, and exhibit flexibility (Kim, 2015). Furthermore:

Resilient children are adaptable, flexible, effective problem solvers, have a strong sense of self-esteem, show independence in their thoughts and actions, have insight, show a high tolerance to distress, have a strong sense of the future and the ability to look at things from alternative viewpoints (Kim, 2015, p. 196).

The importance of establishing a cooperation system between individuals, families, schools, communities and the government is underlined. Kim’s (2015) study showed that a community-based art program helped to heal the students, and that the healing process was strongly related to creative education, because the use of art and creative production promotes mental health. Art is thus seen as a creative endeavor that is a gateway to the response of resilience.

Ungar (2004) explains that the ecological approach to the study of resilience is the dominant one. He argues for the use of another approach - the constructionist interpretation. According to Ungar (2004), this approach reflects a postmodern understanding of resilience that better accounts for cultural and contextual differences in how resilience is expressed by individuals, families, and communities. The constructionist approach defines resilience as an outcome of negotiations between individuals and their environments for the resources to define themselves as healthy and among conditions that collectively are seen as adverse. Ungar (2004) also advocates for the use of qualitative methods while studying resilience. However, nine years later, Ungar (2013) describes resilience as a quality of the environment and a capacity to facilitate growth, constituting a social ecological understanding of resilience. In this article the author does not mention the constructionist approach, which suggests that he has moved away from this interpretation. Ungar (2013) states that resilience is the capacity of both individuals and their environments to interact in ways that optimize developmental processes. He explains that research has shown that in situations of adversity, resilience can be observed when individuals engage in behaviors that help them find the resources they need to flourish. However, these processes only occur when the individual’s social ecology provides resources in culturally meaningful ways. Ungar (2013) moreover urges researchers to situate themselves at some point in the individual versus environmental interactional process when dealing with resilience, but underlines that the individual and the environment always influence one another.

He furthermore states that in many cases more focused interventions that match the needs of vulnerable groups to the resources that are provided are needed. Ungar (2013) concludes by stating that processes associated with resilience protect against traumatic effects associated with acute and chronic stressors, but that the mechanisms are contextually and culturally dependent, as well as complex.

As it has become clear from this literature review, there is no single definition of resilience, and there are many conceptualizations of the phenomenon. As Ungar (2013) says: “[...] it is unlikely we will ever identify a single measure of resilience that is appropriate across all contexts and at all levels of exposure to trauma” (p. 263). It is important to keep the context and local culture in mind when investigating resilience. Nevertheless, most authors agree that the main characteristics of the resilience concept revolve around the ability to bounce back after experiencing adversity. The variations in definitions and use of the concept of resilience have been critiqued for lacking consensus, but Luthar et al. (2000) argue that some variability in methods is essential to expand the understanding of any scientific construct. Their literature review on resilience revealed a lot of common factors across multiple studies that used different measurement strategies. Themes that appeared across the studies were the importance of close relations to supportive adults, effective schools, and connections with competent adults in the wider community.

3.4 Summary of the Concepts

Table 6 summarizes the main issues within each of the concepts that have been explained in this chapter. As the table shows, some recurring issues appear throughout the different concepts, notably violence/fear/insecurity and community/neighborhood. Urban violence has an effect on many of the other issues and impacts peoples’ well-being and the school safety. The neighborhood/community is mentioned in three of the four concepts and is highly important throughout this thesis, as values and behaviors in the neighborhood can have a significant impact on schools. Regarding learning environment and school environment, studies have shown that a good learning environment and a good school environment is important for preventing dropouts and violence. Finally, when it comes to resilience, resilient students are likely to be better learners and thus also contribute to a better school environment. Resilient people have learnt to cope with adversities and are thus less likely to be distracted by past or present adversities than people who are not resilient. Moreover, resilient people are known to

be intelligent, self-reliant, and have good communication skills – all characteristics that make them good learners and good students.

Table 6 Summary of concepts. Table compiled by the researcher.

Concept	<i>Learning Environment</i>	<i>School Environment</i>	<i>Urban Violence</i>	<i>Resilience</i>
Main issues	Is very close to the learner, and includes factors that create a stimulating learning experience.	The social and physical environment at school. This environment is important for preventing dropout, delinquency, drug and alcohol use, and violence. The school climate consists of attitude, feeling, and behavior of individuals within the school system.	A problem leading to fear and insecurity. It is contextually bound – even within cities, based on neighborhood income levels.	How to deal with and “bounce back” from adversities like violence.
	Individual factors like motivation, learning approaches, expectations, and values are emphasized.	It is important to enhance the school culture and the surrounding areas in order to support teaching and learning. Neighborhood values and behaviors can influence the school.	Consequences: Impact on people’s well-being (livelihood security and the functioning of institutions like schools).	Characteristics of resilient people: Growth, adaptive coping, intellect, self-reliance, sociability, communication skills.
	The pedagogical/ teaching-learning perspective chosen for this study.	Topics through which school environment influences violence: Student behavior, norms of behavior, relationships with school staff, learning environment, school safety, and neighborhood environment.	In large cities in Latin America, disorder and violence have become parts of the daily life.	It is important to establish a cooperation system between individuals, families, schools, communities, and the government.

In the analysis of the findings, Abualrub et al.’s (2013) definitions will be used when discussing learning environment. The school environment in the two schools will mainly be discussed against Johnson et al. (2012), Johnson et al. (2010), Hernandez and Seem (2004), and Wekke and Sahlan (2014). Moreover, Moser (2004) and Sanchez (2006) will be drawn on to discuss urban violence. Definitions of resilience as explained by Kim (2015) and Prince-Embury (2013) will be used to discuss resilience among the students, as well as the resilience theory that will be presented in chapter 4.

3.5 Closing Remarks

As has become evident from this literature review, many studies have been done on the topics of violence and school environment in general, and the same is true for the concept of resilience. When it comes to school environment and violence, most of the studies I found focus on the effects of a good school environment in decreasing violence within the school. Thus, it is highly probable that there exists a research gap in the literature when it comes to the effect urban violence has on students in schools that are located in challenging urban areas. However, it must be admitted that this literature review is not necessarily exhaustive, and that studies with a similar focus as the present one might exist. Nevertheless, after a thorough process of searching for and reviewing the literature that deals with the four mentioned concepts, it appears like these concepts have not been studied with the same focus as this thesis does.

Moreover, based on this literature review, urban violence has often been studied with a focus on homeless people, and not by looking at the impact violence in an area can have on students. In the two schools where this research was conducted, the main challenge was not violence within the schools, but the fact that the schools are located in a highly congested area influenced by violence, crime, drugs and homelessness (Municipality of Bogotá, 2015). The current study may thus cover a knowledge gap. Furthermore, not many studies have combined the four concepts of urban violence, learning environment, school environment and resilience, thus indicating another gap in the literature when it comes to these concepts seen together.

With this as a backdrop, this study aims to look into the experiences of students in two selected schools in the neighborhood of Los Mártires, located in the center of Bogotá. This research may contribute to new knowledge on how students cope with attending school in a violent urban area. In addition to what has been introduced in this literature review, resilience theory will be used in the discussion of the findings, and is presented in the following chapter.

4 Theoretical Framework

In this study, resilience is mentioned both as a concept in the literature review, and as a theory in the present chapter. As a theoretical framework, resilience theory has several different definitions. Some of these will be presented here, as well as the history of resilience theory, before a summary of resilience theory is presented, and an explanation of how resilience theory will be used as a framework in the analysis of the findings in this study.

As presented in the literature review, resilience is a widely studied concept without no single definition. Authors, however, agree on some common features of the concept, and that it revolves around ways of “bouncing back” after adversities or disruptions. Greene, Galambos and Lee (2004) describe resilience as having the capacity to overcome pain and to transform after adversity or disruptions. Furthermore, they see resilience as a person-environment concept. Kiswarday (2012), using a slightly different formulation, states that to be resilient is to achieve positive adaption after exposure to threats or adversities.

Resilience as a concept and as a theory has been used in a range of different disciplines, such as psychology, anthropology, physics, and sociology. As a theory, however, it has been mostly used in psychology, and it has not often been used within the education field (Richardson, 2002). This is interesting in itself, and the present study is contributing to the use of resilience theory within educational science. Moreover, taking into account the research questions and purpose of this study, resilience theory provides a highly suitable theoretical lens that will guide the analysis. Focusing on students that attend school in a violent urban area, it is interesting to look into how students cope with going to school in this neighborhood.

4.1 History of Resilience Theory

MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) describe resilience as the stability of a system against interference and see it as a systemic property. They explain how the concept has migrated from the natural sciences to the social sciences and argue that it is conservative when applied to the social sphere. MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) focus on communities, systems and policy in their article (thus not individuals), and they provide a review of the history of resilience. As a concept, resilience has roots in physics and mathematics, where it refers to a system’s or material’s capacity to recover its shape after a displacement or disturbance. Resilience also has

roots in ecology, where it is described as the capacity of an ecosystem to absorb shocks and maintain functioning. Later on, the concept of resilience has been applied to a number of objects from the built environment to individuals, social systems and communities. This has produced a range of different definitions of resilience, in various disciplines such as physics, ecology, psychology and geography. Ecological resilience refers to external disturbances and shocks that result in a system transforming through the emergence of new structures and behaviors. This understanding of resilience is complex and open-ended, and thus more suitable for the study of social phenomena characterized by ongoing adaptation and learning. The ecologically rooted concept of resilience has emerged in public policy fields like national security, public health and urban planning, and resilience is seen as the latest in a long line of naturalistic metaphors that are applied to cities and regions (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2012). Finally, MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) argue that “Resilience is fundamentally about how best to maintain the functioning of an existing system in the face of externally derived disturbance” (p. 258).

Davidson (2010) explains that ecologists adapted the concept of resilience from the mathematical sciences, where it was originally used to describe dynamic systems. Ecosystem resilience is described as the ability to absorb disturbance without causing system changes. A deficit in resilience increases the probability that a regime has to adapt or transform into a new regime. The vitality of a given system is defined in terms of evolutionary change. The migration of resilience from the natural to the social sciences is quite uncontested. Regarding the current definition of resilience theory, however, no single definition exists. Accordingly, several different definitions were presented in chapter 3.3, and some common features of the concept were uncovered. Several of these characteristics are relevant for the present study, and a few more definitions follow below.

4.2 Definitions of Resilience

Different definitions of resilience were presented in chapter 3.3, and it was stated that in general, resilience in human beings entails “bouncing back” after experiencing adversities like violence. Moreover, Richardson (2002) argues that the concept of resilience has emerged as an area of inquiry that explores personal and interpersonal gifts and strengths. These gifts and strengths can be assessed to grow through adversity. Resilience inquiry emerged from identification of characteristics of survivors living in high-risk situations, and Richardson (2002) describes three waves of resilience inquiry; (1) resilient qualities, (2) resiliency process, and (3) innate

resilience. The first wave entails resilient qualities of individuals, similar to those that have been described earlier, like intellectuality, easy temperament, autonomy, self-reliance, sociability and effective coping strategies. Richardson's (2002) second wave defines resiliency as the process of coping with adversity, change, or opportunity in a way that results in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of resilient qualities or protective factors. Richardson's (2002) second wave is further explained in the resilience model below. The third wave as developed by Richardson (2002) lead to the concept of resilience and describes motivational forces within individuals and groups (Richardson, 2002). This wave will also be further uncovered below.

4.2.1 Resilience in Social Systems

Within the Social Ecology of Resilience Theory (SERT), it is asserted that children adjust well to challenging life-circumstances when they have the support of their social ecologies (that is, their social networks). These social ecologies are believed to be more crucial to children's positive outcomes in the face of risk than individual factors are. Research has shown that a supportive extended family, positive schooling experiences, and community-based mentors can help children adjust well to adversity. Education services that support resilience are characterized by teacher-community connections, ordinary and extraordinary teacher actions, and student responsiveness. Theron and Theron (2014) conclude, in accordance with much of the resilience literature, that education services are facilitative of resilience processes, and state that "[...] the resilience-supporting value of education services lay in teachers, community members, and students actively collaborating to facilitate students' positive adjustment in respectful and resourceful ways" (Theron & Theron, 2014, p. 304).

Davidson (2010) presents a way to apply the conceptual lens of resilience to social systems, adapted from the use of resilience in ecological systems. He asserts that the application of the resilience framework to social systems requires an improved articulation of the multiple relationships between complexity and disturbance in a less deterministic manner than what is the case in ecological systems. Davidson (2010) argues that this must be done in order to specify the conditions that favor the likelihood for resilience, adaption, or transformation. Furthermore, social systems are unique because they are complex, and because of the responses of individual organisms to those levels of complexity. These responses are not defined only by structural variables, but also by agency (Davidson, 2010). What is particular for the social systems

compared to ecological systems is thus that human beings possess agency, and Davidson (2010) claims that this is our greatest asset. People act consciously, both individually and collectively, and Davidson (2010) identifies five different manifestations of human agency that relate to crisis response. Examples of these manifestations include that human agency is distributed unequally, humans possess and exercise imagination, and humans can anticipate. The latter example – anticipation - makes human beings capable of recognizing risks, which is an important characteristic to possess in order to gain resilience.

Downes (2017) agrees with Davidson (2010) in that resilience rests on assumptions of agency. He describes agency as the active experience of each individual when faced with causal influences by environmental and/or genetic factors. He furthermore asserts that resilience assumes a framework of personal agency that is characterized as a choice between alternatives. This mode of agency is, however, limited according to Downes (2017), and he argues that a plurality of understandings of agency is needed for resilience. Downes (2017) claims that resilience is seen as the capacity to make better choices among alternatives in the environment.

Downes (2017) also highlights the significance of peer pressure in relation to resilience. He illustrates with examples from studies of drug addicts and people who have been victims of human trafficking, and asserts that “Resilience requires experiential resources to resist group thinking and the capacity to emotionally distinguish as a dimension of capacity for identity” (Downes, 2017, p. 113). Davidson (2010) provides some critique of the development of resilience theory, but recognizes that it can be used as a useful compass for research;

[...] the resilience framework directs our attention to information flows and cycles of change, exploring how our current institutions and connecting structures are likely to respond to disturbance, and how we can prepare for those outcomes (Davidson, 2010, p. 1146).

4.2.2 The Resilience Model

Richardson (2002) describes resilience as the motivational force within all human beings that drives us to pursue wisdom, self-actualization, and altruism and to be in harmony with a spiritual source of strength. He presents the following resilience model.

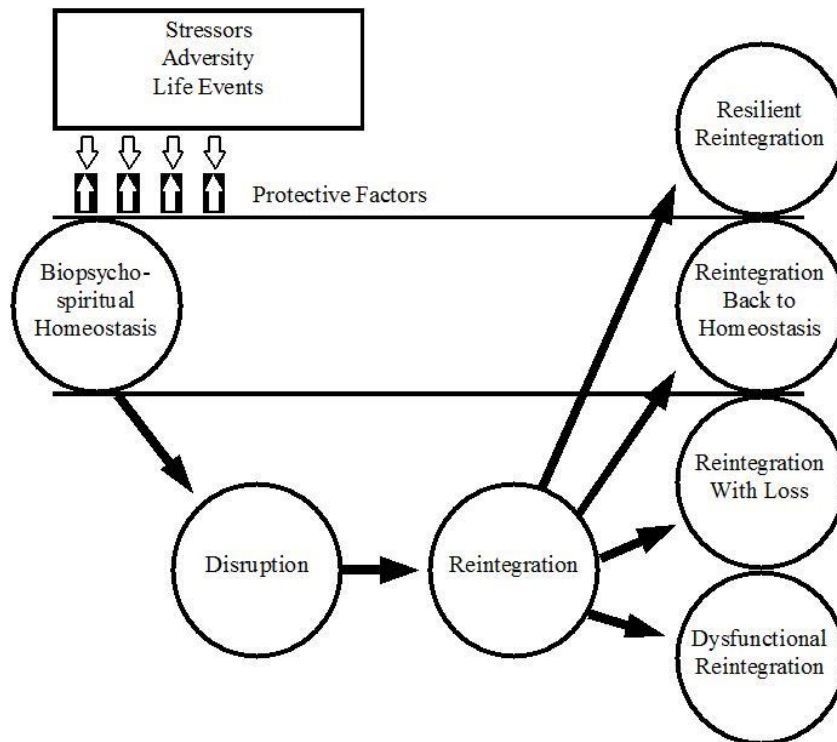


Figure 10 The Resiliency Model (Richardson, 2002, p. 311)

Richardson's (2002) model shows how people, through disruptions or reacting to life events, can choose consciously or unconsciously the outcomes of these disruptions. *Biopsychospiritual homeostatis* is used to describe the adapted state of mind, body and spirit that a person holds. It is a point in time when a person has adapted physically, mentally, and spiritually to a set of good or bad circumstances. This state is continuously faced with internal and external life prompts, stressors, adversity, opportunities, and other types of change and challenges. In order to cope with these challenges, human beings cultivate resilient qualities so that most events become routine and thus less likely to be disruptive. The interaction between the life prompts and protective factors determines whether disruptions will occur, and resilient qualities are shown in the model as upward arrows dealing with the life prompt and maintaining homeostasis. Furthermore, *disruptions* mean that an individual's world paradigm is changed and can result in perceived negative or positive outcomes. Reactive disruptions can be exemplified by losing a job or being exposed to an accident. According to Richardson (2002), almost all disruptions have a potential for growth. With the passing of time and adaptation, the reintegration process starts, after the question "What am I going to do?" emerges consciously or subconsciously. As seen in the figure, a person can reintegrate resiliently, return to biopsychospiritual homeostasis, reintegrate with loss, or reintegrate in a dysfunctional way. *Resilient reintegration* refers to the coping process that results in insight, growth, knowledge,

self-understanding, and increased strength of resilient qualities after disruptions. *Reintegration back to homeostasis* means to heal and simply move past a disruption without growth. *Reintegration with loss* entails giving up some motivation, hope, or drive as a result of the dealing with life prompts. The last form of reintegration is termed *dysfunctional reintegration*, and occurs when people resort to substances, destructive behaviors, or other destructive means to deal with life prompts (Richardson, 2002). Richardson's (2002) third wave lead to the concept of resilience, which describes the motivational forces that human beings possess. In order to grow, resilient reintegration requires increased energy. According to resilience theory as described by Richardson (2002), the source of this energy is innate resilience. Richardson (2002) argues that everyone holds a force within that drives us to seek self-actualization, altruism, wisdom, and harmony with a spiritual source of strength. As Richardson (2002) describes it, this force is resilience.

4.2.3 The Ecological Perspective

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecology of human development suggests that human development is characterized by a progressive accommodation throughout the life span, between the human being and the changing environments in which we live and grow. This is further elaborated in Bronfenbrenner's (1977) systems theory, which is divided into different levels; microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, as shown on Figure 11. The figure shows the different system levels, starting with the microsystem, which is defined as "the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514). Furthermore, a setting is defined as "a place with particular physical features in which the participants engage in particular activities in particular roles [...] for particular periods of time" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514). For this study, the most important part of the individuals' (the students') setting is the school, as indicated on the figure. Moreover, the roles the students have are students and sons/daughters. The next level is the mesosystem, which is the system in which the relations between the settings take place, and it is thus a system of microsystems. The mesosystem consists of the interrelations among major settings containing the individual at a point in his/her life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For the students in this study, their mesosystem includes interactions between peers, school staff, and their families. Furthermore, the exosystem can be both informal and formal. It is the extension of the mesosystem, and embraces other specific social structures that do not themselves contain the individual, but influence or encompass the immediate setting of a person, and in this way

affect, delimit, or determine what happens there (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In this research, the most important aspects of the exosystem are the neighborhood, the Secretariat of Education, and students' informal social networks. The last level on Figure 11 is the macrosystem, which represents the overarching institutional and ideological patterns in a society. As Bronfenbrenner (1977) explains, a school classroom in a given society looks and functions much like another, which he explains is a result of these societal patterns. The patterns can be economic, social, educational, legal, and political, and there are both explicit and implicit macrosystems. As we see from Figure 11, such patterns entail laws, regulation, rules and norms, to mention some. The different topics that are placed into the figure are the ones that are important for students in this study.

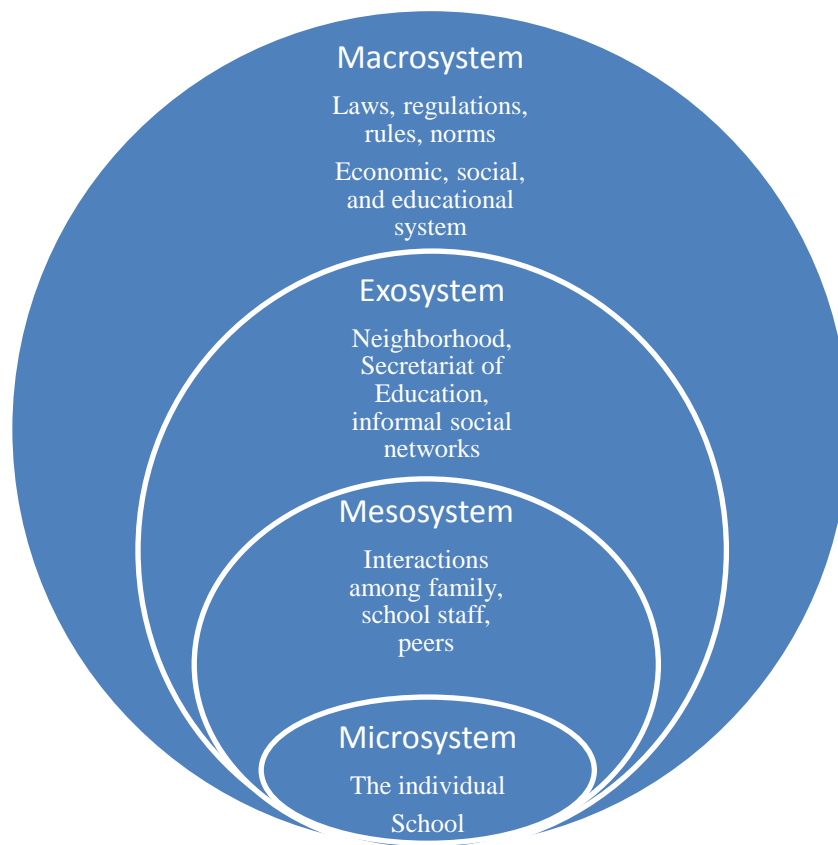


Figure 11 Bronfenbrenner's (1977) systems theory. Figure compiled by the researcher.

Winfield (1991) conducted a literature review describing young African-American youth at risk, in order to develop a conceptual framework for resilience. Many of the young people he describes lived in big urban cities where poverty and unemployment rates are high, drugs and violent crimes are common, and high stress affects home and school environments. Winfield (1991) describes the positive coping skills of poor children and their families, and states that learning and development can best be understood within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological

perspective. Within this perspective, the focus is on institutions like schools and community, where learning and development occur, rather than focusing only on the individual. Winfield (1991) studied protective mechanisms that people employ, and how these mechanisms developed in the individuals or in groups of individuals that were faced with risk conditions within their environment. As an example, Winfield (1991) describes an imaginary student who decides to stay in school although he/she sees few job opportunities, receives little support or incentives, and experiences negative peer pressure. According to Winfield (1991), this imaginary student possesses individual resilience during a critical transition to adulthood.

Everson (2015) uses Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework for human development in her doctoral dissertation and applies five systems that break down individuals' relationships within their communities and their place in society. Everson (2015) examines the concept of resilience at a university by examining how students are affected by and cope with the urban university environment. Resilience is seen here as a key protective factor to deal with potentially adverse conditions, she seeks to understand how resilience contributes to students' coping ability in urban university areas and how the environment helps students develop resilience (Everson, 2015). Drawing on Bronfenbrenner (1979), Everson (2015) explains how more compatible environments lead to greater likelihood of positive interaction and smoother student development, and that environments surrounded by challenges like crime can hinder positive development. Within the ecological systems theory, development is determined by interactions between individuals and the environment. Everson's (2015) understanding of resilience is that it is a process of, or capacity for, or the outcome of, successful adaptation in spite of challenging and threatening circumstances.

In her study, Everson (2015) found that the environment at the educational institution supported and promoted student resilience. The university students would develop resilience in the urban environment when they felt safe, supported, and had a social network. Everson (2015) explains that strategies to minimize the potential negative effects of the surrounding communities' crime rates have been implemented at many urban universities in the United States. As examples of initiatives from a university to meet adversity, violence and tragedies, Everson (2015) mentions installing alarms, an early notification system, and a card swipe entry system. It remained unclear, however, according to Everson (2015), how efficient these measures were in enhancing the students' feeling of safety at campus. Although Everson (2015) conducted her research on university students, her findings and conceptualizations are highly relevant for this study.

Firstly, both universities and schools are learning institutions that a lot of young people attend regularly. Secondly, since Everson conducted her research at a university located in an urban area, her conclusions are even more relevant for the present study, as the schools where this research was conducted are located in the city center of Bogotá.

4.3 Resilience in Schools

So far, different definitions of resilience as a concept and resilience theory in general have been described, with one example from resilience at a university and some references to schools. Moreover, schools can be seen as social systems and thus fall under the ecological perspective of resilience. In the following, a few more definitions of resilience will be presented, with a particular focus on resilience in relation to schools.

Kiswarday (2012) asserts that the second most powerful source for developing resilience in children and youth is the school. Schools and teachers have a powerful role that can tip the scales from risk to resilience, and the resilience framework can contribute to learning efficacy. The teacher should not be just an instructor, but also a confident and positive model for personal identification. Moreover, the teacher should provide caring support for students by listening to them, demonstrating kindness, respect, and compassion throughout the entire educational process (Kiswarday, 2012).

Greene et al. (2004) explain how theorists have realized that people can be resilient, meaning that they often possess the capacity to overcome pain and transform themselves. These authors conducted a literature review to synthesize theoretical assumptions related to resilience and carried out qualitative interviews to find out what people thought contributed to enhanced resilience. Greene et al. (2004) point out that after conducting their literature review it became evident that in schools, nurturing and supportive teachers can teach the students resilience and play an important role in helping the students develop into competent, caring adults. They further explain that resilience theory is a person-environment concept and locate three sub-categories of resilience: (1) factors related to internal resilience characteristics, (2) circumstances related to external resilience characteristics, and (3) strategies that are related to enhancing resilience. Internal resilience characteristics entail attitude, intelligence, problem-solving skills, sense of mastery, survival instinct, and spirituality/religion. External resilience characteristics are those affected by multilevel attachments involving families, schools, and

communities, and resilience is seen as an ecological process. Greene et al. (2004) provide the following example for when circumstances related to external resilience characteristics can come into play: in Mozambique after the civil war, mothers could walk for days in order to be reunited with their children, thus exhibiting high levels of resilience. For the third sub-category of resilience, Greene et al. (2004) explain that strategies related to enhancing resilience refer to the strategies that professionals can implement to enhance people's resilience, and they state that students can learn successful coping skills from good teachers.

4.4 Closing Remarks

As presented in this chapter, resilience theory has emerged from its original use in the natural sciences and been adapted to the social sciences. There is no single definition of resilience, but the combined contents of the theory provide a suitable framework for analyzing students' coping mechanisms within a challenging school environment.

In order to guide the analysis, Bronfenbrenner's (1977) systems theory has been used as a backdrop for understanding how students accommodate themselves in their school situations. The different levels of systems presented in Figure 11 constitute the society within which students are located, and the different levels have been used to discuss how resilience occur and what factors influence students within their environments. In this study, resilience is understood as Everson (2015) describes it – a process of, capacity for, or outcome of, successful adaption in spite of challenging and threatening circumstances. Challenging and threatening circumstances for students in this study encompass the school surroundings with high levels of insecurity, insecurity within the schools, and problems within the families. When identifying resilient characteristics in the participants of this study, characteristics such as inner personal strength, social skills, attitude, intelligence, problem-solving skills, survival instinct, easy temperament, autonomy, self-reliance, and effective coping strategies were looked for (Greene et al., 2004; Kiswarday, 2012; Prince-Embury, 2013). In addition to the authors already mentioned here, the most important theorists from this chapter that will be used in the discussion are Davidson (2010), Greene et al. (2004), Theron and Theron (2014) and Richardson (2002).

The next chapter elaborates on the methods that have been used throughout this research – from choosing research sites and participants, to gathering data in the field, and to the coding of the data that was gathered.

5 Methodology

With resilience theory as a backdrop, this study is based on nine weeks of field work in Bogotá, conducted in September, October and November of 2017. This chapter presents how the research was conducted, the methods used, and reflects on some challenges for and limitations of this research.

5.1 Research Methods

In this study, documents have been used as sources of data, particularly in chapter 2, which contains many references to official data from the Municipality of Bogotá and the Secretariat of Education. Bryman (2016) asserts that there is a difference between personal documents and official documents, and the abovementioned documents are official. Throughout this research, documents (books and articles used in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5) have also been used for contextualization, background information and for explaining previous literature and the theory and methods used. These documents have, however, not been objects to analysis, as the data collected during field work constitute the most important information for this research. This data has been thoroughly gathered, transcribed, translated, coded, and analyzed in order to answer the research questions.

The findings presented in chapter 6 are the results of participant observations in the two schools, as well as interviews with students, teachers, a school counselor, one parent, and employees at the Secretariat of Education in Bogotá. I conducted an overt research, meaning that in all my interactions with participants, I started by presenting myself and my research project, and I was open about what I was researching. After field work, I had extensive field notes and 24 interviews that were translated from Spanish to English and then transcribed. The main research methods were thus participant observation and semi-structured interviews, and this study is a fully qualitative one. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study because they allow the researcher to form general questions, but they leave the interviewer with a scope for freedom regarding asking further questions and follow up when the participants mention interesting and/or significant ideas (Bryman, 2016). In this way, the researcher has some initial control over themes and questions, while at the same time allowing for other themes to emerge during interviews. Moreover, participant observation was chosen because I wanted to spend as much time as possible with the students in the schools, observing their behavior, listening to

conversations and asking questions – all traits of participant observation as described by Bryman (2016). A participant observer participates in a group's core activities, but never as a full member (Bryman, 2016), which was exactly the role I had at both schools. The observation guide used during field work is found in Appendix 2.

I was in contact with an employee at the Secretariat of Education before arriving in Bogotá. This person helped to set up meetings with the principals, and he helped with arranging interviews with the employees at the Secretariat of Education. Thus, it was easy to gain access to the schools. During my first week in Bogotá, I had meetings with the principals at School A and School B. I presented myself and the research project, and we talked about schedules and what I could do to help out at school during field work. In both schools it was decided that in the English classes I would help teachers and students as much as possible, and in the other classes I were to help out with practicalities or whatever the teachers needed. During the hours I spent at the schools (my schedules were 8:20AM to 3:15PM at School A, and 10:00AM to 4:00PM at School B), I joined the students in the classrooms in order to observe the learning situations, classroom environment, and to help students and teachers when needed. In some classes, teachers wanted me to give a presentation of myself, the research project and Norway, and the students got to ask me questions. However, I was mainly a participant observer, talking to the students and the teachers, observing classroom dynamics, learning environments, buildings, and the surrounding areas. The two schools have been anonymized and named School A and School B.

5.1.1 Research Strategy

In social research, there is a difference between quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative research is deductive, meaning that it tests a theory, while qualitative research is inductive – with the observations and findings as a starting point for analysis. Quantitative research takes its epistemological orientation from the natural science model, often positivism, while qualitative research has an interpretivist orientation, meaning that the subject matter of the social sciences (people and institutions) is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences. This position seeks to understand the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants. Finally, quantitative studies have the ontological orientation known as objectivism (social phenomena have an existence independently of social actors), while qualitative studies holds the constructionist orientation (social phenomena are

outcomes of the interactions between individuals) (Bryman, 2016). For this study, a qualitative research strategy was considered to be the most appropriate method, as I focused on students and the influence from their environments. Qualitative research has developed different traditions over the years, and critics have noted that qualitative studies should acknowledge the variety of forms that this research strategy can assume. It is therefore important to be consistent about which of the different orientations of qualitative research one uses (Bryman, 2016). As I will describe in the next section, this research design took the form of a comparative case study with micro-ethnographic methods in order to gain thick descriptions about students, schools, and the surrounding areas.

Before going to Bogotá, I familiarized myself with literature concerning the neighborhood of Los Mártires, as well as several Secretariat of Education initiatives in the area. During this process one specific program from the Secretariat of Education appeared as particularly important. Therefore, I originally wanted to analyze what students and teachers thought of this program, and what differences were seen at school after the implementation of this program. However, after a few days at School A, I realized that neither students nor teachers knew about this program, which was confirmed in interviews. Students and teachers' answers regarding this program differed between not having heard about it and confusing it with other programs. Because of this, one of my initial research questions had to be changed, and the study purpose was altered. To compensate for this, I needed to change my approach. Because my original idea proved difficult to follow through, I wanted to get as much information as possible about the students, teachers and schools, and I therefore opened up my observation scheme and my interview questions, to get as much data as possible. This resulted in me paying a lot of attention to everything that was going on at the school, and to extensive field notes. After a while, however, I realized that information about learning environments, school environments, and students' resilience constituted more than enough data that I could later process and analyze, and therefore the scope was again reduced to focus on these concepts.

Comparative Case Study Design

In a comparative study, there are many options as to what can be compared. Examples of this include comparing gender, school levels, private and public schools, urban and rural schools, or even comparing school systems in different cities or countries (Bryman, 2016). When I first came to Bogotá, my initial idea was to conduct a comparative research within one school,

because field work had a limited amount of time. However, after having visited both schools, I realized that it would be interesting to compare the two schools to each other, and I decided to split the field work in two. This proved to be a good decision, and even though this meant that I spent a bit more than four weeks at each school, I managed to get extensive and in-depth information about the students and their surroundings. As Bryman (2016) explains it, the comparative design studies two contrasting cases using more or less identical methods: “It embodies the logic of comparison, in that it implies that we can understand social phenomena better when they are compared in relation to two or more meaningfully contrasting cases or situations” (Bryman, 2016, pp. 64-65). This is what was carried out throughout this research, as I would constantly compare observations and interviews in School B to the observations and interviews in School A. The comparative dimension of this study aims at uncovering similarities and differences that exist in these two schools in terms of experiences with and views on learning environment, school environment, and the surrounding areas. I also sought to uncover how students in the different schools cope with attending schools that are located in a violent urban area, and how they construct the concept of learning.

Because students were my main informants, I did not wish to interview and observe primary school students, as I needed a certain level of reflection and understanding of some concepts among my participants. I chose to observe and interview students from 7th, 8th and 10th grade, which in the cases of School A and School B meant students between 12 and 18 years old. Moreover, one student in 11th grade in School B was interviewed. The reasons for not including 9th grade students in the sample are twofold. Firstly, I wished to get as much solid information about my participants as possible, and therefore decided that three different grades in each school was enough. Secondly, it was a logistical issue. In order to fill my daily schedules with classes in the schools, I had to look at the timetables for each grade, and put together my own timetable that fit within the hours spent at the schools. As a result of this, I ended up in 7th, 8th, and 10th grade in both schools.

The case study is the preferred method when the research questions are *how* or *why* questions, when the researcher has little or no control over behavioral events, and when the focus of study is a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Before coming to the first school, I suspected that I would have little or no control over what happened during the school-days, and on the first day I was proven right. The chaotic situation I was met with on this day (teachers arriving late to classes, noisy classrooms, students arguing over things that had nothing to do with the

academic content of the classes– to mention some examples) made it clear to me that I had to be adaptable and adjust myself to the situation. Furthermore, the case study method allows researchers to absorb the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. Techniques used involve direct observation of the events that are being studied and interviews with persons involved in these events (Yin, 2014). This made the case study design a perfect fit for my field work. A case study tends to use qualitative methods, such as participant observation and unstructured interviewing, and a basic case study entails a detailed and intensive analysis of a single case (Bryman, 2016). This suits this research well because I aimed at providing thick descriptions from observations in both schools, which were used as two comparative cases. Bryman (2016) states that case studies can, for example, be studies of a single community, a single school, a single organization, or a single event. Moreover, the term *case* is often associated with a location, such as a school, and the emphasis in a case study is to intensively examine the setting. This is what was done throughout this research, and the two schools were taken as separate cases, constituting a multiple-case study design. According to Bryman (2016), a multiple-case study is when a comparative design is applied in a qualitative research strategy. A case study is distinguished by the researcher's concern with revealing unique features of the case, which is known as an idiographic approach. The typical form of a qualitative case study research design is the intensive study by ethnography or qualitative interviewing of a case (Bryman, 2016). As presented below, micro-ethnographies were conducted in both cases throughout this study, and extensive semi-structured interviews were carried out with 27 participants, as will be described in chapter 5.2.

Micro Ethnographies

As Bryman (2016) describes it, ethnography and participant observation are closely linked. Both methods require the researcher to immerse him/herself in a group for an extended period of time, while observing behavior of members of a setting. This is done by listening to conversations, asking questions, and interviewing informants on issues that are not directly amenable to observation or that the ethnographer is unclear about. The aim is to develop an understanding of the culture of the group and people's behavior within that culture. For this master thesis, limitations in time made it impossible to conduct a full-scale ethnography, but instead, ethnographic methods were used during field work in both schools. Bryman (2016) calls this method micro ethnographic, which focuses on a particular aspect of a topic. In my case, I did not aim at understanding the entire school dynamics and everything that was going

on at the schools and their surroundings, but I rather focused on observing the learning environments, the school environments, relationships between students, relationships between students and school staff, and students' coping mechanisms and resilient qualities. I went to the schools almost every day for several weeks, and spent a significant amount of time getting to know students and teachers. I conducted participant observation in different classroom settings, as well as during breaks, at lunch time, and in the teachers' rooms. Although my field work lasted for only nine weeks, I was able to do participant observation because students and teachers took me in and allowed me to be part of their daily lives and routines at school. My other source of data are the interviews I conducted with students, teachers, a school counselor, one parent, and employees at the Secretariat of Education.

Field Notes

Extensive field notes were taken each day at both schools. According to Bryman (2016), ethnographers have to take notes based on their observations because of the frailties of human memory. He furthermore states that field notes should be detailed summaries of events and behavior, as well as the researcher's initial reflections on them. Bryman (2016) urges researchers to write down notes as quickly as possible after seeing or hearing something interesting, and furthermore suggests that full field notes should be written up at the latest at the end of the day. In the field, I always had a notebook with me, which I used to take notes most of the time. However, this small book provoked curiosity among the students, who wanted to know what I was writing and asked to see it. Because of this, I decided to not always take out the book, and would sometimes rather find a quiet moment to myself during the school day where I would sit down and write what I had observed. At the end of each day, I always typed up the field notes on my computer.

5.2 Sample

In qualitative research, purposive sampling is most commonly used, which places the investigator's research questions at the heart of the sampling considerations. Purposive sampling is a non-probability way of sampling, meaning that the researcher does not seek to sample the participants randomly. The goal is, rather, to sample participants in a strategic way, in order to sample people who are relevant to the study's research questions (Bryman, 2016). For these reasons, purposive sampling suited this study well. Students and school staff were

sampled after some time in the field, so that I already knew them, had talked to them, and was quite sure that they had useful information to share concerning my research topic. Furthermore, Bryman (2016) recommends the researcher to sample with a good deal of variety. The sample for this study is shown in chapter 5.2.1 - *Sample Size*, where Table 7 shows how the sample varies in gender, age, and school grade. This was done in order to assure variety. It was easier to conduct interviews in School A, as it was difficult to find free, closed spaces where interviews could be carried out at School B. This resulted in more interviews at School A than at School B.

There are two levels of sampling; sampling of the contexts and sampling of the participants (Bryman, 2016). In this study, the contexts are the two field schools, which were chosen by typical case sampling, meaning that they exemplify a dimension of interest (Bryman, 2016). The formal participants of this study are students, teachers, one school counselor, one parent, and employees at the Secretariat of Education. Moreover, other students and teachers at both schools were informal participants, and are thus not included in the sample in Tables 7 and 8.

For the participants, a maximum variation sampling was used (Bryman 2016), as I sampled in order to ensure as wide a variation as possible within my dimension of interest. I knew that I wanted to observe and speak to students in their last years of school, as already described. The students that were interviewed were chosen because they had already mentioned some of the research topics, and some of them because teachers and key informants would suggest them. The school staff that I interviewed were the ones who showed interest in talking about my project, the parent that was interviewed was the only parent who wanted to participate in the study. The Secretariat of Education employees that participated in the focus group were chosen because they worked at School A and School B with the ZOE program. The individual interview was with a person in charge of the alert systems, and he had a good overview of the setting in each school.

Initially, I wanted to interview several of the students' parents. However, parents were very hard to get ahold of, and almost none wanted to participate. In conversations with teachers and school staff, it was frequently mentioned how difficult it is to get parents to come to meetings at school, and to get them engaged in their children's education. Towards the end of the field work at School B, one mother wanted to participate. This interview is included in the sample, and it serves as one parent's opinion. It is, naturally, very limited how representative this single

interview is, but her statements serve as an addition to the other adults that were interviewed in this study.

5.2.1 Sample Size

Bryman (2016) asserts that the broader the scope of a qualitative study, and the more comparisons in the sample that are required, the more interviews need to be carried out. The sample from School A and School B are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 Sample School A and School B. Table developed by the researcher.

School A				School B			
Participant	Age	Grade	Gender	Participant	Age	Grade	Gender
Student 1 (AS1)	17	10	Female	Student 1 (BS1)	18	11	Male
Student 2 (AS2)	15	8	Male	Student 2 (BS2)	15	10	Male
Student 3 (AS3)	14	8	Female	Student 3 (BS3)	17	10	Female
Student 4 (AS4)	14	8	Female	Student 4 (BS4)	15	8	Male
Student 5 (AS5)	15	8	Male	Student 5 (BS5)	14	8	Female
Student 6 (AS6)	14	7	Male	Student 6 (BS6)	15	8	Male
Student 7 (AS7)	16	10	Female	Student 7 (BS7)	14	8	Female
Student 8 (AS8)	13	7	Female				
Student 9 (AS9)	14	7	Female				
Student 10 (AS10)	18	10	Male				
Total number of student interviews School A: 10							
Teacher 1 (AT1)			Female	Teacher 1 (BT1)			Female
Teacher 2 (AT2)			Male	Counselor 1 (BC1)			Male

In this study, the total sample includes ten student interviews from School A, of which six were female, and four male. I conducted two teacher interviews in School A, one female and one male. Students and teachers from this school are identified by the letter A. In School B, I

conducted seven student interviews, three of which were female, and four were male. I had one female teacher interview, and one interview with the male school counselor. Students, teacher and counselor from this school are identified by the letter B. In addition to the interviews presented in Table 7, I had one interview with a parent, one individual interview with an employee at the Secretariat of Education, and one focus group with employees at the Secretariat of Education in Bogotá. The parent (BP1) was the mother of one of the students at School B, and the individual interview with an employee at the Secretariat of Education was with a male who worked there as a systems engineer, and is in charge of the alert systems at schools. The focus group consisted of four persons, one male, three females, that all worked with the ZOE project. The participant from the individual interview is identified by Sec1 (male), and the participants in the focus group as Sec2 (female), Sec3 (female), Sec4 (male) and Sec5 (female). The total sample size is shown in Table 8.

Table 8 Total number of interviews and participants. Table compiled by the researcher.

Interview	Number of interviews
Student interviews School A	10
Student interviews School B	7
Teacher interviews School A	2
Teacher interviews School B	1
School Counselor interviews School B	1
Parent interviews School A	0
Parent interviews School B	1
Individual interviews Secretariat of Education (Sec 1)	1
Focus groups Secretariat of Education (Sec 2, Sec3, Sec4, Sec5)	1
Total number of interviews	24
Total number of participants	27

Key Informants

As Bryman (2016) describes it, the ethnographer relies a lot on informants, and certain informants can prove particularly important to the research. Such people are termed key

informants, and they often develop an appreciation for the research and can help the researcher towards situations, events, or people that are likely to be helpful to the research progress. At School A, student AS1 was such a key informant. She showed me around the school on my first day there, and she always included me in classroom activities and showed a great deal of interest in the research in general and in Norway and the researcher in particular. Moreover, the teachers at School A gave me a warm welcome and were always eager to help out with whatever I needed, from participating with interviews and information, to lending out their keys and providing rooms for the student interviews. At School B, the key informant among the students was BS1, who proved to be a very good example of a person with a lot of resilience, as it will be shown in the following chapters. I did not follow BS1's classes (as he was in 11th grade), but I got to know him in the school-yard and realized that he was a perfect fit for my study. This student was always willing to talk and share his experiences and opinions, and he suggested other students that could participate in interviews. For the reasons mentioned here, BS1 is mentioned somewhat more in the findings and discussion chapters than the other students at School B. Furthermore, the school counselor at School B was another key informant. He was very helpful and shared lots of interesting information with me. In addition, he assisted me with finding rooms where I could conduct interviews, as well as agreed to an interview.

5.2.2 Interview Process

In this study, most of the interviews were individual. This decision was taken because I wanted the students to trust the interview situation, and I focused on letting participants know that I would not report anything they said to their principals, teachers, or peers. Parts of the content of the interviews were sensitive, and I found it more likely that students would open up and talk honestly with me in individual interviews. All student interviews were conducted in closed rooms, where other people could not listen or enter while we were having the interview. Another reason for choosing mostly individual interviews, is because participant observation was conducted. This method allowed me to spend a lot of time with students in groups, and I got to see how the dynamics were inside and outside the classroom, and I thus did not find it necessary to interview students in groups. The one focus group I did conduct, was with four employees at the Secretariat of Education. This was done because they were adults, who were considered more likely to behave well and work well within a group interview, and also because of convenience. When I was setting up the focus group, it proved easier for the four participants to come to School B and conduct the interview all at once, rather than talking to them separately.

A general weakness in a focus group is the risk of members of the group not daring to state their real opinions or holding back information. However, the four participants in my focus group were all respectful and let each other talk, and also built on the others' statements and supplemented each other. Thus, new ideas emerged as the interview moved along, and the focus group method proved fruitful for this research.

All interviews were audio recorded, and they lasted from 20 minutes to over an hour. Most interviews were conducted at the schools, with the exception of the interview with the teacher in School B, which was conducted at a coffee shop close to the school, the individual interview with an employee at the Secretariat of Education, which was conducted at a coffee shop close to the Secretariat of Education in Bogotá, and the parent interview which was conducted at a coffee shop in Bogotá city center. The interview guides are found in Appendix 3 (English) and Appendix 4 (Spanish).

Before entering the field, I had prepared interview guides for the different participants. These guides were tested on some of my peers before arriving in Bogotá, which led to some adjustments in the sequence and content of the interview questions. Moreover, when I was in the field, the interview guides were further adjusted, after the first two interviews had been conducted. I took out the questions concerning the program I initially wanted to study, and added questions about students' conceptualizations of learning, and what family and friends meant to them. As this was my first time conducting field work with observations and interviews, I developed as an interviewer during the time I spent at the schools. In the first few interviews, I stuck quite firmly to the interview guide and the questions I had prepared, but as I got more used to interviewing I got even better at asking follow-up questions, and at asking alternative questions if the students did not answer or did not understand the question. Moreover, informal participants (students and teachers that I talked to and observed, but that are not included in the sample) helped me to be more professional, as I would pick up on important topics during my time at the schools also from these informants.

5.3 Method of Analysis

The data collected during field work is mainly presented in the findings chapter, and then further scrutinized in the discussion chapter. However, findings concerning the areas around the schools, general descriptions of the schools and the ZOE program, have been included already

in chapter 2 in order to provide a contextualization of the phenomena under investigation. All interviews and field notes were coded after they had been transcribed.

5.3.1 Coding

According to Bryman (2016), coding consists of breaking down the data into component parts, which are given names. Moreover, coding entails reviewing transcripts and field notes and giving names to component parts that seem to be of theoretical significance, and/or that appear as particularly noticeable within the social worlds of the participants. Furthermore, coding in qualitative data analysis is most often in a constant state of potential revision and fluidity. The collected data are treated as potential indicators of concepts, and the indicators are constantly compared to see which concepts they best fit with (Bryman, 2016). Coding of my data started as a bottom-up process, with the interview transcripts and field notes as a starting point. The coding was data-driven at the beginning, as initial themes and ideas started to emerge already when the interviews were being transcribed and while reviewing the field notes. Parts of the coding process were also concept driven. When I started doing the coding, I realized that many of the codes I had created fit into the concepts presented in the literature review. This kind of coding is known as an abductive approach, meaning that one uses a method that combines the inductive method where the data is the starting point, with the deductive method, where the theory is the starting point that drives the processing of the data (Bryman, 2016).

The research questions were taken as a starting point as soon as the transcribing process was done. I read thoroughly through field notes and transcribed interviews, and wrote down keywords, quotes, sentences and phrases as I started to look for emerging themes and similarities and differences in answers in the interviews and field notes. To secure a systematic process, I initially organized the findings into six different groups – *Students School A*, *Students School B*, *Teachers School A*, *Teacher and Staff School B*, *Parent School B*, and *Employees at the Secretariat of Education*. This resulted in a preliminary coding scheme. Thereafter, another coding scheme was made, based on the themes from the first scheme, but structured into the categories *learning environment*, *school environment*, *urban violence*, *resilience*, and *teacher worries*. All categories except the last one are taken from the literature review. *Teacher worries* emerged from the data material, and was later re-labeled *adult worries*, in order to include other school staff, parent, and Secretariat of Education employees.

NVivo

Braun and Clarke (2008) explain how codes identify a feature of the data which appears interesting to the researcher, and that they refer to the most basic element of the raw data that can be assessed in a meaningful way concerning the phenomenon. After the initial coding process was done, I started a systematic coding of all data material using the software NVivo. This was done after elaborating the final coding scheme. The codes were structured into five categories, with several codes under each main category. The categories were mainly taken from the literature review, with one extra category that emerged during the initial part of the coding process; *Adult Worries*. The coding category *Learning Environment* had five codes; *Disturbances and Noise*, *Learning*, *Respect and Disrespect*, *Students*, and *Teachers*. The category *School Environment* had seven codes; *School Environment*, *School A Bad Reputation*, *School Surroundings*, *Social Problems*, *Safety/Lack of Safety*, *Work Environment*, and *Secretariat Programs*. *Resilience* had six codes; *Domestic Violence*, *Future*, *Lack of Present Family*, *Normalized/Used to the Situation*, *Relationships*, and *Survival Strategies/Coping Mechanisms*. The category *Urban Violence* had three codes; *Heavy and Dangerous Neighborhood*, *Insecurity*, and *Violence*. *Adult Worries* also had three codes; *Teachers' Affection/love for the Students*, *Frustrations*, and *Vulnerable Students*. After the coding in NVivo was finalized, the number of references for each code was added to this coding scheme, that is, the number of times text was coded into this code. The results of this extensive coding formed the basis for the findings and discussion chapters, and codes that had many references in the data material constitute the most important findings of this research. The final coding scheme is found in Appendix 6.

5.4 Quality Measures

This study was approved by Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) on the 11th of August 2017, before data collection in Bogotá started. Regarding other quality measures, reliability and validity are concepts that are most commonly applied in quantitative research. In qualitative inquiries, trustworthiness and authenticity are more often used. Trustworthiness is again associated with credibility, transferability, and dependability. Credibility entails ensuring that the research is carried out according to the principles of good practice, as well as submitting the research findings to the members of the social world who were studied in order to confirm that the researcher has correctly understood that social world (Bryman, 2016). In order to assure the

latter, this thesis will be sent to School A and School B, as well as a summary translated to Spanish. In this study, several steps were taken to gain the trust of the participants. The letter of support from the University of Oslo was presented to the principals of the two schools before starting field work, as well as a document explaining the content of the research. During field work I focused on having the consent of my participants before interviews were conducted. All participants were treated anonymously, and their names are replaced with the acronyms presented in Table 7. Most of the students I interviewed were underage, so parents' consent was needed in order to conduct interviews. The consent participation form is found in Appendix 5. Getting parental consent was a challenge, as the students would lose the forms I gave them, so I had to be persistent and have several copies of the form at hand at all times. However, after several attempts I managed to get the participant consent from most of the students I wished to interview. Those students that I did not get consent forms from were included as informal informants. The students who were 18 years old, teachers, school counselor, parent, and Secretariat of Education employees signed the consent form themselves. Getting busy teachers in a chaotic school to meet up on time and then find a quiet place to conduct the interview was not always an easy task, and that is why I only have two teacher interviews from School A, and one teacher interview and one staff interview from School B.

As a qualitative researcher, one is always at risk of being biased. One example is that as an outsider, I came into the school contexts in Los Mártires with my own set of norms and values, and I was mainly used to being at Norwegian schools before arriving in Bogotá. In order to overcome this bias, I decided to immerse myself in the school cultures, and get to know the students as well as possible. However, as a researcher I must admit that my observations might be colored by my own views on how a daily school life can be other places than at public schools in Los Mártires. Moreover, I developed friendships with several students and teachers during field work, which might have influenced the way I perceived the school environments. Nevertheless, I conducted interviews with many students in order to get a broad understanding of the events under investigation, and I aimed at not letting students' and teachers' opinions color and/or direct the data collection process.

In order to assure transferability, qualitative researchers are encouraged to produce thick descriptions, that is, rich accounts of details in a social setting (Bryman, 2016). This has been carried out throughout the data collection and presentation of this research, and is especially prominent in chapters 2, 6 and 7. Authenticity is again divided into different criteria, and among

them we find *fairness* (does the research fairly represent different viewpoints from members of the social setting?) and *ontological authenticity* (does the research help members to better appreciate perspectives of other members of their social setting?) (Bryman, 2016). Bryman (2016), however, states that the authenticity criteria has not been influential in qualitative research. Even so, the fairness concept is sought to be met by interviewing and observing as many students as possible, with supplements from school staff, one parent, and employees at the Secretariat of Education. If this research will help students and teachers in School A and School B to better appreciate the perspectives of other students and teachers is yet to be seen, as the thesis has not been read by any of the participants yet. Nevertheless, the questions asked during the interviews often made students reflect and think about recurring issues in their school environment, and some of them would approach me a few days after the interview to make further comments and keep on discussing issues that came up during interviews. Before the interviews, I focused on letting the students know that the interviews were not a test, that the data would be treated anonymously, that everything they said would be treated confidentially. I also told them that I was interested in hearing their perceptions in the most honest way. I aimed at not asking leading questions, but rather questions that would make the students talk and explain as much as possible.

Another way of assuring quality in qualitative research, is through triangulation. Triangulation is the use of more than one method or source of data in the study of a social phenomenon so that the findings can be cross-checked (Bryman, 2016). In this study, triangulation was done in several ways. Firstly, as it has been thoroughly described in this chapter, not only students were interviewed, but also several adults. Secondly, both participant observation and semi-structured interviews were used as methods, in order to check that observations were consistent with interviews. Thirdly, I had many informal conversations with students and teachers that are not included in the sample. Finally, documents have also been used as sources of data, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. These ways of alternating the methods used and the sources of data have strengthened my findings because I could double check that what I observed was consistent with the documents I had read, and furthermore with what was reported in interviews and informal conversations. These methods also uncovered several nuances and different perceptions that might have otherwise been overlooked.

5.5 Ethical Concerns

Closely related to the quality measures are the ethical concerns during the research design, data collection, analysis, and reporting. Firstly, as I have mentioned, I strived to be unbiased. Even though I was an outsider in Bogotá, this proved to be a challenge. People I met during my stay in Bogotá, both in relation to field work and in my time off, had their own stories and perspectives about Bogotá and Los Mártires. It was almost impossible not to get influenced by all the stories about the neighborhood, resulting in me being extra careful as I was walking from the bus stop to the schools. Moreover, School A has a bad reputation amongst the Colombian population, so I was somewhat anxious on my first day there. However, after a few days in the school I realized that although the school has a lot of challenges, most of the students were nice and welcomed me in the best way. The challenge for me, after a little while, was to not get too attached to the students so that I would be biased in their favor. I kept reminding myself that this was an academic research, and every day I would write out my field notes and reflect upon them, which helped maintaining focus on the research purpose and helped me stay mostly unbiased.

As already mentioned, I had extensive meetings with the principals in both schools before starting field work. In these meetings, we discussed what I was there to do, and I assured the principals that all data would be handled confidentially and that the participants' names would not appear anywhere in the final product. Los Mártires is the real name for the neighborhood where School A and School B are located, but there are almost 40 schools in this neighborhood, and the real school names are not revealed in the thesis, even though the principals gave me permission to use the school names. This was done in order to assure anonymity for the participants, which is a way to keep them safe, and to make sure that they will not have any negative consequences of participating in the study. Both principals approved my stay at the schools, and the school staff that were interviewed said that I could use their names in the study. Nevertheless, I chose also to anonymize these participants, for the same reasons as those given for anonymization of the students. The first days in both schools, I introduced myself to teachers and students, and let them know why I was there. I also made it clear that they decided what they wanted to share with me, and that there was no pressure to answer questions if they did not wish to.

The pictures that have been used in this thesis are all taken by the researcher, and they do not show the faces of any student or school staff. Principals and teachers in both schools gave me permission to use these pictures in the thesis. For people with specific local knowledge of schools in Los Mártires it can be possible to identify the schools, but for those people who are most likely to read this thesis, it is highly unlikely that they will be able to uncover the real school names based on the information given in this thesis.

5.6 Delimitations and Limitations

Qualitative research in general has several limitations, especially compared to quantitative inquiries. One aspect is that purposive sampling does not allow the researcher to generalize the findings to a population (Bryman, 2016). Generalization of the findings is not the goal of this study, but rather providing thick and detailed descriptions and analysis of phenomenon in two school settings in Los Mártires.

I am aware that my presence at the schools might have influenced observations that were made and what was said in interviews. However, conversations with teachers revealed that my observations concurred with teachers' experiences with and views on students and the environments at school. Students were often curious as to what I was doing at their school, but according to the teachers they behaved as usual in spite of my presence there. This behavior included being loud and noisy, swearing, play-fighting in class, and making jokes with sexual content. Some students saw me as an extra teacher, and even called me "teacher" when they wanted to talk to me (this in spite of the fact that I would sit at a student desk with the students in class, and I did not lecture them or take the teacher's place). Other students saw me as a friend and a confidant, especially the older students, and yet others simply wondered what I was doing in their school yard. The latter example was especially true for the primary school students that I did not have any classes with, but that would approach me during breaks and free time with curiosity and questions.

For a master thesis such as this one, limitations in time and scope naturally confine the research. With more time at hand, I could have included even more informants, and I could have found other strategies in order to get more parent interviews. Even so, I could not have generalized my findings to Colombia, or even to Bogotá. As stated before, this research is limited to studying students' experiences in two selected public schools in Los Mártires.

From the beginning of this research, it has been a strength that I am fluent in the Spanish language. This meant that I could conduct observations and interviews without the need of an interpreter, and I could include literature that has been published in Spanish, which has proven highly useful for the study. However, as in all kind of communication, there might be misunderstandings, and additionally, I was not completely familiar with Colombian slang before I came to Bogotá. Therefore, when students used words or terms that I did not understand, I would ask them or someone else to explain this to me, and thus my vocabulary also expanded during my time at the schools (the word *ñero* is a good example of such a word).

As stated in the introduction chapter, this thesis does not attempt to study the school system in Colombia or Bogotá, but rather examines challenges and resilience among students in School A and School B. However, the school system is represented here by teachers and other school staff that interact with the students every day. With these limitations and delimitations in mind, the next chapter presents the main findings of this research.

6 Findings

The methods that were described in the previous chapter lead to the findings which will be presented in this chapter. Both extensive field notes and the different interviews have been coded into the categories mentioned in chapter 5.3, and as laid out in Appendix 6. This chapter is structured as follows: First, the learning environment in the schools are described, firstly by explaining some general similarities and differences between the two schools, and then divided into School A and School B to take a further look at how these environments affect the students. Then, the school environment in each of the schools is described, before I uncover the resilience that was found among students in School A, and then in School B. The last section of this chapter provides an overall comparison of the learning environment, school environment and resilience between the two schools. The contextualization provided in chapter 2 serves as a backdrop for my findings.

6.1 Learning Environment

Under the coding category *Learning Environment*, the codes *Disturbances and Noise* and *Learning* had very many references in the transcribed interviews as well as in the field notes. The noise came both from outside and inside the schools. In School B, there was less noise than in School A, but also here the learning environment was characterized by disturbances and students who talked to each other instead of paying attention in class.

In both schools, students did not have their own textbooks, but notebooks where they copy what the teachers write on the blackboard, solve tasks and do homework. Copying text off the blackboard was a big part of the work for the students. The school libraries have the text books, and sometimes the teachers would bring them to class. There was a higher frequency of use of textbooks in School B than in School A. Many of the books were old and outdated, an example being the social sciences (a subject that also includes history and geography) books that are from 1995 in School A's case.

In general, students were given very specific and detailed instructions on what to do in class, and a lot of the time these details concerned the design of the task at hand, and, "doing it in the most creative way", as teachers would say repeatedly. Data showed that most of the time there was more focus on making the work look pretty than on the contents of the task at hand, both

from teachers' and students' side. There was a lot of drawing in most of the subjects, and the students expressed that they enjoyed this kind of creative work. Moreover, in many of the classes in School A, when grades were handed out, the teacher would sit at the desk and attend to each student, while there was no plan for what the rest of the class were to do. This most often resulted in a lot of disorder, talking, screaming and playing inside the classrooms. At School B, the teachers would often give the students a task to solve, and then sit and grade papers from other classes for the rest of the period. Students in School B would in general solve these tasks quite silently while sitting in groups or alone.

6.1.1 School A

The learning environment in School A was challenging, especially in certain classes. Many times, it was hard to hear what the teachers said due to noise and disturbances. Several students expressed that this affected their learning outcomes. For others, they said that the environment did not affect them, and that they simply kept on working in spite of these disturbances.

Disturbances and Noise

Observations showed that in 7th grade in School A, the learning environment was characterized by excessive noise and uneasiness. In one English class, the teacher left for a longer period of time. During this time, some students were fighting, some played football inside the classroom, others were screaming. The noise reached a level which made it very hard to work in this class, but nevertheless, a few of the students kept on working in this atmosphere. However, most students that kept quiet during this class later expressed that this kind of learning environment was stressful and chaotic for them.

Another factor in School A was the acoustics inside the classrooms. When several students were talking at the same time, it sounded like one big chaos, and a lot of the time the sound level would reach a volume that made it possible to surpass only by shouting. This is reflected in the field notes, where the words *noise* and *noisy* are mentioned many times for School A. Other disturbances included students play-fighting, eating candy and food inside the classroom, shouting out repeatedly and loudly "teacher, teacher, teacher", phone use, books and backpacks being thrown around, screaming, and students walking or running around. In order to get the students to calm down and sit down at their desks, teachers often had to get explicitly angry and yell at the students. Moreover, classes would frequently get disrupted by students or teachers

from other classes knocking on the door to talk to someone. On one occasion, AT1 was called on, and was away for a while. When she came back she explained that some boys from 10th grade were trying to light a fire in one of the hallways. Furthermore, the noise outside the building was quite loud due to cars, ambulances, and people on the street talking and shouting.

A girl in 10th grade said that some of her classmates were annoying because “they never shut up” (AS1). She said that this affected her learning process because sometimes she could not hear what the teachers were saying due to the noise. Other students reported ill-discipline and little attention paid in class, which would affect the students that wanted to listen to the teachers. Data also showed that the classes were very noisy, and that some students found their peers unbearable and rude at times. An 8th grader described his classes like normal, “because there is disorder, and they scream and bother” (AS5), and said that this did not affect him personally, but that it could affect his classmates. Observations showed that students were tired during large parts of the school day, and also that they were frequently hungry, which they expressed by shouting out repeatedly in class “I am hungry!”

Learning Processes and Perceptions of Learning

Data revealed that teachers at School A were often frustrated about the teaching situation they experienced. One teacher said that the learning processes of the students were slow, and that the teachers had to find ways to make the students “fall in love with studying” (AT1) and get them interested in and focused on the topic at hand. She provides the following example:

In 8th grade, I teach Spanish, literature. But I cannot say to them “we have to read this book”, because they are not going to read it. So, I have to relate it to them orally. So, I tell them what the book is about, I make voices, or we watch the movie (AT1).

Another solution was for the students in 7th grade to read out a paragraph of the book chapter each, in class. The second teacher who was interviewed in School A mentioned similar challenges as AT1:

We have a social job here, but we also have an academic job, so that [...] creates frustrations, because the academic processes are very slow. [...] So, one, sometimes is thinking “yes, these kids are achieving certain skills on the one hand, but in the academic they are very far behind [...]”. So, one feels a bit frustrated because of this. That they read poorly, that the spelling is terrible, that maybe there is no vision of further studies. And one wishes that all of these kids would go to university, to a professional world, to be prepared for that (AT2).

Data showed that although it was challenging to be a teacher at School A, teachers did what they could in order to provide the students with a social and academic formation. Regarding “no vision of further studies” (AT2), most of the students that were interviewed expressed quite clear goals for their futures, including further studies. This will be commented on towards the end of this chapter, as *students’ future visions* fall under research question 2. Regarding how students in School A conceptualized *learning*, students said that learning was to guide oneself about where to go (AS1), to grow more and understand, to keep improving in the subjects (AS3), to get to another level and feel more prepared for the future (AS4), to pay attention to the teacher (AS9), and that it was a culture and learning a little bit of everything (AS10).

6.1.2 School B

At School B, the learning environment was calmer than at School A, but also at this school there were challenges such as ill-discipline, noise, and rudeness. It was found that the students at School B had higher academic standards than at School A, which was also confirmed by teachers in interviews.

Disturbances and Noise

My observations showed that the atmosphere at School B in general was quieter and calmer than at School A. Even if the students were eating and talking to each other in class, classes were calmer than in School A. Students did not scream in class, and better acoustics within the classrooms made it easier to hear what teachers were saying. In 10th grade, there was a girl who used to study at School A. She explained that she changed schools because the academic level in School A was low, and that the disorder at the school was too much for her. Nevertheless, there was frequently noise from the halls and the classrooms next door, and also from the school yard for the classes that were held on the first floor. Observations showed, however, that students usually worked through these disturbances. Overall, observations reflected what is described in chapter 2 concerning the areas around School A and School B. Even though the learning conditions were more favorable at School B than at School A, there were several challenges, like the school counselor explained:

The coexistence, the discipline in the classroom affects directly the academic results. And it is impossible that a kid who has a good level of behavior learns sufficiently, when the classmates are shouting, saying things, making noise, sabotaging the class (BC1).

A girl in 10th grade confirmed this, and explained the environment in her class like this:

Honestly, when we are in class, and the teacher is explaining, they [the other students] do not let the teacher explain. They bother a lot. And sometimes you do not understand anything, and it is not because you are not paying attention, but because there are a lot of distractions from the classmates. They talk and shout and sabotage the class (BS3).

BS7 said that he found the learning environment very heavy, because the other students were rude, used swearwords and were shouting, which bothered him. Observations also showed that like in School A, several students expressed being tired throughout the school day, and on several occasions students were asleep in class. Moreover, students in School B were mocking each other to a greater extent than students in School A. One example is when the 8th grade I followed had a presentation, and a boy who was presenting used the word *so* a lot, which caused laughter and comments among his classmates.

Learning Processes and Perceptions of Learning

In School B the 8th grade that I followed was given one chapter each of a book to read at home, and then present the contents of this chapter in class. Even though the students were not asked to read the whole book, this showed a higher reading and learning capacity than in School A. Another example of different academic achievements is the students' English level. I attended many English classes in both schools, and noted that students in School B had a higher English level than School A students. Moreover, teachers at School B did not mention the same frustrations as teachers at School A did, and rather said that what they did not like that much about their job was the bureaucracy one has to deal with as a teacher.

BS1 said that learning was to experience new things each day, and to learn how to behave in society. BS2 said that rather than learning the different subjects, it was important to learn in order to be a better person. BS5 had a more specific approach, and said that learning was to know what has happened in the country, the history, and the sciences. BS6 explained that for him, learning was to memorize, and to be able to be proud of himself because he learned something more in life. To these perceptions, BC1 added that learning was divided into a social learning and a conceptual learning. He described social learning as the relations between the peers, and the conceptual learning as what the students learn in the school subjects. According to BC1, the most important learning for students in School B was the social learning.

6.2 School Environment

Under the category *School Environment*, the codes *School Environment* and *School Surroundings* had the most references, followed by *Safety/Lack of Safety*. Most students in both schools said that they felt unsafe on the street, including on the way from their homes to school, because they could get robbed. Also the parent who was interviewed expressed worries regarding the school surroundings: “Last year, they attacked and stabbed one of my sons. I was traumatized” (BP1). The sensation of insecurity was shared by the researcher during field work. Every day on my way to School A, I observed homeless people on the sidewalks and along the streets. They were mostly male, and lived on the street amongst the garbage. They used the street as their toilet, and they looked skinny, dirty, and heavily drugged. Along with these street dwellers, the drug issue appeared as a big challenge in and around both schools.

6.2.1 School A

From observations in School A, the school environment proved favorable in terms of companionship, relationships between peers, relationships between students and school staff, and extracurricular activities. Students and teachers confirmed these observations in interviews. However, observations also showed that some students would frequently lay over their desks, crying. In these situations, it was difficult to uncover the reasons for the students’ bad mood, but the situations were normally solved by peers or teachers.

Several classrooms in School A had “norms of coexistence” – posters which were made by students. These norms included respecting peers and teachers, no fighting, no playing inside the classroom, raise of hands when wanting to speak, and keeping the classroom clean and tidy. Observations showed that these norms were violated by many students on a daily basis.

Sport Activities

In School A, football matches took place during breaks almost every day. When there was a game, it was neither the school bell nor the time that decided when the next class started. It was the end of the football match that decided this. This activity was well organized and supervised by a gym teacher. She would set up the schedule for the games, and students chipped in to pay an external referee during the games. On several occasions, the results of these games were the topic of conversation way beyond the time that was spent on the football field. One example

was when the 8th grade girls lost to the 11th grade girls: “The other team played dirty and that’s why we’re upset”, one of the girls complained after the match. The students got to discuss this disappointment in class, and it became clear how important football is for many students in School A. The teacher in this class tried to turn the discussion into a talk about injustice, and what the students could learn from this experience. This serves as an example of how the teachers in School A continuously tried to influence their students with good values, which was an important part of their job according to themselves. There were also less organized sport activities at School A. Some students practiced gymnastics in their breaks, and others were playing unorganized football in the school yard while the organized football matches took place.

Safety at School

In general, students said that they felt good at School A. Most students reported feeling safe and protected, while a few students said that they could not feel safe anywhere. Data revealed that the dangers inside School A included that material possessions like cell phones, pens, and clothes could get stolen, in addition to presence of drugs, and fights at school. One of the students told me frustrated one day: “They robbed my colored papers. Because at this school people are like rats” (AS1). Teachers frequently talked about insecurities and mentioned that there were several small gangs at school. In the interviews, students said that they were afraid of getting robbed at school, and that they also were afraid of fights. They explained that students bring knives into school, and that the plastic spoons they are handed for their lunch sometimes are made into knives. Most students at School A, however, said that they felt safe inside the school because of the school staff, which are responsible for the students, and also because of the security guards at the entrance. All of the students that were interviewed said that they felt safer inside the school than on the outside.

School Surroundings

Under the category *Urban Violence*, *Insecurity* had the most references, followed by *Heavy and Dangerous Neighborhood*. The code *Violence* had several hits, but fewer than the two other codes. Under *Heavy and Dangerous Neighborhood*, a teacher at School A described some of the realities for students in that school. He explained that some of the mothers were sex workers, many parents did not have a stable income, and that domestic violence occurred frequently.

One of the students expressed “what do I need calculus for when I will be selling empanadas on the street for a living anyway?” highlighting some of the realities for students in this area.

School A is located close to The Bronx. As described in the chapter 2.4, this area was previously a so-called tolerance zone, with free flow of drugs and a lot of violence. It was an area where the police would not enter. Since the intervention in The Bronx in 2016, drug sales spread to other places in the neighborhood, amongst them the areas around School A and School B (Ávila, 2016). The homeless people that live among the garbage made the students at School A feel insecure, and many times it smelled like urine outside the school building. In a conversation with the principal at School A, he said that he gets to school at 5:30AM every day. He then talks to the police and asks them to “clean up” (basically chasing away the homeless people) the streets around the school so that it will be safe for the students to arrive. One of the teachers at School A expressed “There is a lot of insecurity. There are assaults here. There are stabbings here, with knives. Here they kill. It is very dangerous” (AT1). Another teacher elaborated on the same issue:

The security issue is associated with this climate around, that you see garbage, there are homeless people [...] the sensation or the perception of insecurity is very strong in the sector. [...] I never trust that I can walk relaxed here, no I always go out like with my precautions, careful, because...well, we are talking about for example people who live on the street and consume [drugs], and for their consumptions they need sources of income, that, obviously they will not obtain with work, but maybe robbing (AT2).

The vast majority of the students and teachers in School A that participated in this study, said that they would never come to this area at night. Most students expressed concerns about the safety in Bogotá in general, and even primary school students asked me about the security situation in my home country, because, as they said, “here in Bogotá there are a lot of robbers”. However, AS5 said that he did not see any bad things about attending a school located in Los Mártires, and that he never felt unsafe in the neighborhood.

Just opposite School A there is a square, which is also filled with homeless people. On one occasion, some of the students had “Olympics” at this square – they were running around the square several times, and the teachers timed them. I joined the students in this activity and noticed that the police chased away homeless people before we got there. The teachers that took part in this event said that they had talked to the police before going out with the students. While the students were running, one of the teachers noticed that one bag had been stolen. This was a plastic bag that had been put on the ground, containing the numbers for the participants. The

students reacted by saying “oh, but then it’s already in street 13 by now”. No one acted upset about this, and observations showed that this was events students and teachers were used to. After this incident, no one expressed any worries about getting robbed or other intimidating things happening to them while they were outside at the square.

Most students in School A said that the reasons why they felt unsafe in the neighborhood were because they could get robbed (several students reported that they had been robbed), there were many ñeros¹⁴ and homeless people in the area, because of drug selling and consumption, and they feared getting hurt. Teachers in School A mentioned drug addiction, murders, and sexual commerce as major challenges in the area. AT1 also said that on several occasions, new teachers would come once to School A, and not return the next day because of the insecurity. She also described “I have seen, on the street, because of drug addiction or alcoholism, how they hit each other, how they rob, how they rob with weapons. It is very common here” (AT1). Moreover, one of the students in School A explained that being robbed was not the limit of what might happen to you in the neighborhood:

It might be that they hit you if they want something from you and you resist. So they will hit you in order to take away from you what they want. They can use a knife as well. They threaten you (AS2).

6.2.2 School B

At School B, there were no organized football matches or championship like the one at School A. Sometimes students would play football or do other sport activities during the breaks, but this was more spontaneous, and not planned or organized like it was at School A.

Safety at School

Like in School A, students at School B reported feeling good at school, and BC1 also highlighted a good school environment among the students. One of the students elaborated why he thought the environment was good like this:

We, the young people, tend to have problems at home. So many times, when you have problems at home, the only way to stop thinking about this, and forget it slightly, is the school. So, an escape from the problems is to come to school, be with your friends, to joke around a bit, laugh, so yes - I love to be at school (BS1).

¹⁴ Ñero is explained in footnote 11 on page 18

Most students in School B said that they felt more or less safe and protected at school, and they all said that they felt safer inside school than on the street. Nevertheless, School B was not exempt from challenges. Like in School A, students in School B would always bring their backpacks with them throughout the school day, and when they left the classroom without it they would ask a friend to look after it. In the interviews, students said that they did this so that possessions such as cell phones would not get stolen. There were also, on occasions, physical confrontations outside the school, where students from School B were involved. Regarding students' safety within the school, the school counselor asserted:

The students are safe, but not when it comes to the drug issue. Yes, they are safe because the teachers are very present. The vast majority of the physical confrontations have happened outside of the school, in other areas, even with kids from other schools. It is not common that you pass outside here and you see kids beating each other. [...] But the topic of drugs is something that scares me a lot, because...I think [...] in many schools, the problem of drug trafficking is a quite big social problem. And we do not know how to protect them against that (BC1).

Also in the focus group, the drug issue was addressed, and Sec2 said that the proximity to drugs for these students makes it complicated for teachers to handle. Moreover, she believed that the school environment in School B needed to be strengthened a lot. She elaborated:

I think that the schools have had a hard job. Because, these kids, with their family dynamics, and their life stories, their norms, limits, are not as strict as a school asks for. Like the uniform put on well, the shoes in perfect shape, no one is talking. So, the school is in a big conflict, because kids come without respecting norms, authorities. And try to establish these limits generates a big shock with them (Sec2).

BT1 also claimed that many students at School B were involved in drugs, and that it is very difficult to help them get out of this problem. She also reported that there is a lack of support from the parents, and that there is an easy access to drugs on the street, and even through the school gates. Moreover, BT1 said that inside the school, students are selling drugs, and that teachers cannot do much about it when they have no proof of what exactly is occurring.

School Surroundings

Observations showed that the streets surrounding School B were quieter and safer than those surrounding School A. This was also confirmed by students and school staff in interviews, and BC1 said that the area around the school is safer and calmer than in other parts of Los Mártires. Observations in the school surroundings showed that there was some garbage lying around, but not nearly as much as in the area around School A, and there were only a few homeless people

on the street. Instead of all the commerce, there are many auto repair shops, and the area is more residential.

Nevertheless, there is also a lack of safety around School B, especially concerning drugs, which are easy to obtain: “Just around the corner here you can find it [...] It is not hard at all. You can stop here on the corner of the park, and the sellers are there. They are easy to recognize” (BC1). One of the students also explained that she did not like to go out of school in the break, because some students use this break to do drugs. Sec3 reported noticing the smell of marijuana from the park close to School B and confirmed that students consume drugs there. Nevertheless, she said that in terms of security she did not find the area around School B insecure. BC1 said that he felt totally safe in the area that surrounds the school, and that when he finishes work at 6:00PM (in Bogotá, it is dark outside by 6:00PM), he walks to the bus stop without any problems. However, when we were walking outside the school one afternoon he quickly told me to put my phone away, “because it is not safe to take out your phone here” (BC1). Moreover, one of the students described the school surroundings like this:

The bad thing is the insecurity around the school. So, from the moment you go out from the school gates, you are totally unsafe. There have been cases where my classmates have been robbed, here [pointing at a spot just outside the school gates], on that corner. So, like, you would think that the school and the school surroundings should be a secure environment, but even so they rob you (BS1).

Another student said that he walks to school with his father every day. He is not allowed to go alone, “Because of the dangers. That they can rob me, they can kill me, all that” (BS2). When asked about the school surroundings, BS6 answered: “They are full of drugs, violence, killings, gunmen. This part is very dangerous. There are times when we get out [of school], you see many ñeros” (BS6). BS1 said that his phone was robbed at gunpoint close to School B, and BS2 reported one of his experiences in the following way:

If you are lucky, nothing happens to you. But if not, well, here they have tried to rob me a lot. With knives. One time, I was with a friend, and they put the knife here, on the neck, and I did not know what to do, and we had nothing, not cell phone or anything. We did not know what to do, but they understood that we did not have anything, and we got out of it. I feel unsafe everywhere here. One cannot feel safe anywhere (BS2).

6.3 Resilience

Under the coding category *Resilience*, the two codes that had the most references were *Relationships* and *Survival Strategies/Coping Mechanisms*. The codes *Future* and *Lack of Present Family* had several hits, while *Domestic Violence* and *Normalized/Used to the Situation* had only a few references in the data material. Many students talked about relationships, which emerged as an important topic in this study. This includes relationships between students, between students and their family, between students and teachers, and between students and other school staff, such as the school counselors. The relationships most often proved to be a positive support for the students, while in some cases there was a lack of trust towards classmates, teachers, and school staff. Data showed that in both schools teachers aimed at passing on good values to the students and influence them in a positive way towards their future. There was, however, a big difference between the teachers in School A and School B regarding the teachers' disposition towards the students. At School A, the teachers were clearly concerned about their students in every way, while at School B they were a bit more distant.

6.3.1 School A

Relationships

Family and Friendship

The vast majority of the students that were interviewed in School A said that their families constituted the most important people in their lives. As one of the students expressed it:

The importance my family has is fundamental, because it is like; my mother is my example to follow, me continuing forward to maybe be able to give her a good old age, and to teach my brother the best things (AS10).

Other students said that family meant everything to them, and that family was more important than friends, because the family is the base of everything and because they could always count on them. Regarding friendship, students in School A described friendship as a loving feeling, as a person who is always there for you, - in the good times and the bad times, as someone who does not speak badly about you, and as a support between two people.

A theme that repeatedly emerged in interviews with teachers, staff, the parent, and employees at the Secretariat of Education, was the complicated home situations for many students. One

teacher in School A explained it in this way: “So, the parents of these kids have to prostitute, they have to be part of a micro traffic network, and to be street vendors, because there are no sources of employment” (AT1). Observations in the teachers’ room at School A revealed that several teachers expressed concerns about specific students, and they would express concerns like “her home situation is difficult” when talking about specific students.

School Staff

Observations showed that on several occasions, teachers would take phone calls during class. However, teachers in School A proved to be patient and to care a lot about the students. Furthermore, it was interesting to see that the teacher that was the strictest in class, was the teacher that many students also reported liking the most. In general, students in School A said that they liked their teachers and that they cared about them. AS3 said that if she had a problem, she would turn to AT1, and AT1 herself expressed:

So, we are not only teachers. Here, the teacher is the one who guides, who teaches, who listens, who cares, who hurts because of his/her students. We are mothers, fathers. We get them clothes. Many of them depend on us (AT1).

In the focus group with the employees at the Secretariat of Education, this was confirmed by one of the participants. She said that “I think that the fundamental support, in School A, has been the teachers. The team of teachers that School A has - I take my hat off to them in every sense” (Sec5). AT1 said that she decided to become a teacher because she wanted to help others, and that to her, “There is nothing more wonderful than to be part of the molding and education of an individual” (AT1). She enthusiastically described what she liked the most about her job:

Everything! Spend time with the kids, be part of their...be a grain of sand that they need for their life projects. What I like the most is...to be able to be that part that they need at home. Many times, they do not have people that hug them, that listen to them, above all, be able to give them a smile, at least, and that they know that there is always someone who can help them. That what they need is to want. Want to move ahead. The teachers here, we are known for having a lot of affection, for being affectionate with them, for understanding them. Because we are very conscious that behind every dirty face that we have here, there is a wonderful human potential (AT1).

The second teacher who was interviewed in School A gave a similar depiction:

The contact with the children. [...] the social work that you do with them. It is like a bit re-adapting them into society. Because there are some kids that come here with some serious problems, of gangs, some consume [drugs], others are abandoned, others have been through several schools, and they are rejected in those schools, so the social work

that the school does, is to give them a re-adapting into the school system. [...] They even acknowledge this when they graduate from here. They get in like some [persons], and they go out like other persons, with other, different characteristics, more towards being a citizen, towards something cultural. The formation here is more social than academic. Because that is what they need the most, in any way. [...] they see that there are other alternatives. I also come from a neighborhood, I come from that social class, but the education is an alternative for us, to move forward [...] (AT2).

Coping Mechanisms

During observations, it was noticed that several times in School A, students would exhibit internal control in the classrooms when classes got too noisy. Some students would shout “hey, shut up!” in order to get the classmates to calm down and stop interrupting the teachers. As mentioned, personal belongings frequently went missing at school. When a girl in 8th grade lost her school uniform sweater, she handled this by getting all her classmates’ attention, and telling them that “I have to look through your backpacks”, which she did without finding the sweater.

In the focus group with the employees at the Secretariat of Education, the participants described the conditions for many of the students in School A in this way:

In School A, in the statistics we have made, we found many kids that are children of sex workers. So, they, during the day they experience a lot of things, and the school turns into a shelter, of nutrition, of care, of protection. Kids that do not have any food at home, that are not taken care of by anyone. In fact, a primary school student said, “my friend is my dog, because my father works all day, and I do not live with anyone else”. So, for them, the school turns into their home, their protection (Sec5).

As stated earlier, the area around School A was relatively unsafe, and one student reported being robbed of his cell-phone and wallet on the street close to school. Regarding what strategies to use to prevent this from happening again, he explained:

Maybe not go through the same place again, maybe leave the cell phone at home sometimes [...] Be careful, maybe walk with more people, walk in the middle of the street, because on the sidewalk I am more prone to get robbed, and well, have my phone charged [with money], so that if something happens [I can call for help] (AS10).

When he felt unsafe, AS10 said that he would change where he was walking or go into an open store. Furthermore, he would tell his mother if he felt insecure, and said that there was not much point in telling the police, because they would not do anything about it. AS5 also said that he would turn to his mother or brothers if he had a problem in his life, and several other students had similar coping strategies. They reported that they would pay a lot of attention and be very aware while walking on the street, hide their valuables, and that if they felt in danger they would

look for someone to help them, preferably an adult. Moreover, they would walk into a store, walk faster, and walk together with other people - either with friends, parents, or other people on the street.

Several students in School A mentioned that they turned to God when they had problems, and this was also reflected in the religion classes, where the teachers would say statements like “we all need something to believe in”. Moreover, in the same building as School A, there is a church. Regarding the frequency of use of the church, one student said;

Lately we have used it a lot, because bad things have happened to the people inside the classroom. Many deaths of relatives. The students have lost many loved ones. We do not really know why. Accidents, I think...So, being solidarity, we started to ask for mass, and the teachers said that they wanted to do it each month (AS7).

Attitude

During observations, something that was quickly noticed in both schools, was the students’ attitude. Many students were very tough and used many swear words and exhibited a “could not care less” attitude. This was also seen among primary school students at School A, who would play, tease each other and play-fight with the same kind of attitude as the older students. Some students were rude towards the teachers, while others treated adults with respect and admiration. However, it was most often the students that talked the loudest and were most rude that were most visible in the classroom situations and during breaks. These observations were confirmed by teachers in interviews. In the teachers’ room at School A, one of the teachers I followed in classes admitted that 7th grade was a particularly difficult class, which was also my impression during observations. This teacher explained the students’ attitude as a survival mechanism within their school environment.

Students’ Future Visions

As shown in chapter 6.1, AT2 expressed concerns about his students having no vision of future studies, and that his role as a teacher in this school had a lot to do with preparing students for the future and directing them towards a good path. Students, however, contradicted this teacher’s view throughout the interviews, as most of the students that were interviewed proved to have clear goals of what they wanted to do with their lives. One student said that in 10 years, “Well, I would think I was the boss of a company, administrating that company” (AS1). After graduating from school, AS2 said that he wanted to study legal medicine, but he also mentioned

that to study in Colombia is very expensive, so that had to be taken into account. Other students said they wanted to get their career through El SENA¹⁵, and after this program either get a job or work towards getting a scholarship in order to get into university. AS6 said that he wanted to study medicine or law. Other students planned to work after high school to save up money for university. None of the students said that they did not want to attend further studies. These visions of wanting to study, but knowing that studies are expensive is summed up neatly by a student in the 10th grade, who therefore had a clear plan A, as well as a plan B:

Well, I have two options. The first one is to go to the United States. My father is already [...] doing the paperwork to see if I can do that. So when I finish here, I will go to the United States to study psychology. But, if that is not possible, the idea is that they hire me in a state company, [...] being a technician as an administrative assistant. So, like, follow a career in that. To have a plan, to see if I can study what I want to (AS7).

6.3.2 School B

Relationships

Family and Friendship

Family proved to be highly important for the students in School B as well. BS2 said that his family meant everything to him, and BS6 said that his family constituted the most important people in his life. He also said that if he had a problem, he would turn to his mother. Regarding the importance of friends, one student said that it was important, but not as much as the family (BS2). Another student said “My family is more important to me than my friends, because friends come and go, but the family, on the other hand, is forever. They will always be there for you” (BS4). Many students also expressed that the companionship amongst school-mates was very strong, and that they would support each other in most situations. Several students said that their classmates were not more than classmates, but underlined the importance of their best friend/s. As a contrast to this, a student in 10th grade mentioned her classmates when talking about in what situations in her life she felt unsafe:

Sometimes with the people who surround me. The classmates. Sometimes I am insecure about them. Because [...] they can smile to you in one moment, but in another moment,

¹⁵ El SENA is explained in chapter 2.3

they can stab you in your back. So, I say that I do not have friends, because I do not trust anyone a lot (BS3).

Although family was important for the students, there was a lack of commitment from parents, as BC1 explained. He stated that the problems in the families were neglect and abandonment and that many parents were not present. Sec1 also mentioned parental neglect as one of the problems at School B. The teacher who was interviewed in School B elaborated on this:

These are areas where the students live more alone. There is not a strict control from their parent's side. So, when they do not have an example like that, it is easier that they do not care about this. They are not aware that they must answer for their actions and measure their acts. So that is a tendency of the youngsters today. [...] In this school, there are a lot of problems in the families. Many of the places are places where the family members are delinquent, or where the mother is not there, or the father is not there, or where the kids grow up with the grandma, the aunt and uncle, because the parents are not there (BT1).

The mother who was interviewed also reported difficult family situations for many students:

Many kids cannot tell their moms about difficult things. Because their mom hits them, and that makes them scared, so even if they are in a horrible problem, and they do not know how to get out of it, they do not have anyone to talk to. And that is when they get lost (BP1).

BS1 was a student with a particularly difficult family situation and serves as an example of what school staff and Secretariat employees described. He explained that his father killed his mother when he was five years old, and BS1 was left to live with an uncle. This uncle abused him mentally and physically and forced him to work on his farm, without paying him. The uncle was violent to him, hit him, and he wanted BS1 to stop attending school. When the primary school BS1 attended at the time found out about his situation, they took action, and BS1 went to live at an orphanage. After some time at the orphanage, he went to live with his older sister in Bogotá, where he was living at the time this research was carried out.

School Staff

In School B, several teachers would give the students a task, and then leave the classroom, or not respond to the students when they were calling for them. As mentioned earlier, the teachers in this school would also use the classes to grade papers from other classes, and observations showed that they were not as present in the classrooms as teachers in School A were. Some teachers in School B did not know all of their students' names, and a few teachers had quite a fierce attitude towards the students, and were sometimes rude and derogatory rather than simply

strict. Moreover, they would sometimes talk on their phones during class, like teachers in School A did.

On the other hand, the school counselor expressed that what he liked the most about his job was the interaction with the students, especially with the teenagers, because they are challenging and less prone to trust in authority figures. Gaining the trust of these students was something BC1 valued a lot, and observations and interviews showed that many students trusted him. One of the students in School B talked about him this way;

I feel that if something happens to me, I have to talk to him. Sometimes it is difficult, because they are very personal things, but if I need to talk to someone, I talk to him. He cares about you and he gives you advice (BS3).

Coping Mechanisms

At School B, BS1 exemplified several characteristics of resilience, like good problem-solving skills and a high survival instinct. Moreover, he had the following strategies for facing the school surroundings and the insecurity inside school:

I think that the only escape from getting robbed, is to look after your things well...that is why you see that all the people carry their backpacks. It is not because they like to carry their backpacks with them all the time because that looks nice, no, it is for safety. Because if you just leave it there, and do not look after it, they will rob the valuables, so...the only solution to this topic is like carry your things with you and be aware with four eyes like we say here in Colombia, not be careless with them (BS1).

The same student said that his favorite thing to do at school, was to be outside in the school yard, because “the breaks are the spaces where you forget more or less about the school things, and to like let the mind rest in relation to what we were doing before” (BS1). BS4 said that if he felt unsafe, he would run. Moreover, at School B, students said that in order to feel safer on the street, they would walk with their classmates or parents, they would walk quickly, and go straight home after school. BS6 said that he would get to know the so-called ñeros in the neighborhood, so that they would give him a helping hand if he ever got into problems. BS6, and a few other students at School B also said that they would take up the fight if they were assaulted or got robbed.

BT1 said that she believed that students have the capacity to leave things behind and concentrate on what they are doing in the moment. In her opinion, students can put their problems aside as

long as they keep busy, concentrated, and remain motivated in what they are doing at school. She elaborated:

For example, also, at school there are kids with complicated families, because they are thieves, but the kid, in noticing the example that he has, he wants to do something else in his life. This bad example makes them want to take a good road. For example, a student that is very involved in drugs, but this kid consumes if, for example, he is not doing sports. So, sports also...I have many students that because of sports they have stopped consuming (BT1).

Attitude

In the 10th grade I followed at School B, many students displayed a lot of attitude. Several students in this class were quite vulgar and rude, and made a lot of sexually loaded jokes. In one of the first classes I attended with them, the students were working on their own theater pieces. All the stories the different groups came up with had either dramatic, violent, and/or a sexual content. During observations it became evident that this toughness was a way for the students to assert themselves within the school environment, and that they also demonstrated resilience this way.

Students' Future Visions

In School B, students' future visions diverged between the possibility of El SENA, work, and going into university. BS1 reported that his plan after graduation was to do a course in El SENA, because he did not have money to study. BS2 said that he wanted to study environmental engineering, BS7 wanted to study economics, and BS5 said that she would work for her father's business, and then start university. A student in 8th grade had a very clear plan for his future:

It is already decided, my life. First, I like the idea of the military. So, that also motivated me to get into boxing to be physically well. So, I want to provide my military service here in Colombia, [...]. And then, I go to the French legion. After that, I want to continue in the French Legion (BS6).

6.4 Comparison School A and School B

As shown throughout this chapter, the school environments in School A and School B were characterized by good peer relations and positive experiences of extracurricular activities, especially sports in the case of School A. The learning environments were more challenging, due to noise and disturbances, which many students said affected their ability to follow the

classes. The learning environment in School A was more chaotic and noisy than the learning environment in School B, and the school surroundings were more problematic around School A than around School B. An employee at the Secretariat of Education explained these differences like this:

What also happens in School B is the mobility...like, there are many cars and many car accidents. And this also affects the kids, because they are kids, and you can cross the street running, and in whatever moment a motorcycle or a car can pass by. For the rest of it, there is not that much conflict in this school. There is the presence of homeless people around the school, but very reduced compared to the area around School A. Even if the schools are really quite close to each other, like 10 minutes walking. And the topic of prostitution does not exist around School B (Sec1).

Relationships between peers were mostly good at the two schools, but the relationships between students and teachers were characterized by a more distant attitude at School B than at School A. These relationships were primarily academic in the case of School B. The girl in 10th grade at School B who had formerly attended School A said that she preferred School A: “Because of the teachers. How the teachers treat the students. There [at School A], they listen to you” (BS3). Another student at School B explained that he did not like to play football or run around during the breaks, because “the teachers here are very demanding, so if one sweats obviously one smells, and if you get to the class smelly the teacher starts like ‘the classroom smells bad’” (BS1). None of the students that were interviewed at School B said that they would turn to the teachers if they had a problem, while at School A, several students reported that they would turn to their teachers for help and support.

Sec5 said that from her point of view, both schools make an effort to give quality education. Moreover, she said that teachers, social workers and other people who come into these schools to work with the students should do it because of love and passion and because they like it, because if not the students “will eat you alive” (Sec5). In both schools, teachers were always late for class. Usually, most of the students were inside the classroom long before the teachers got there, and during the time spent at the schools the teachers never got to class at the scheduled class time. Students sometimes commented on this phenomenon, like a boy in School B did when we were waiting for the gym teacher one day, and he expressed: “The teacher is always late” (BS2).

Students in both schools expressed that their coping mechanisms included being careful, paying a lot of attention, and look after their things well. When walking in the neighborhood, students

in both schools said they would walk faster if they felt unsafe, and one student in School B said he would run. Both in School A and School B students said that they would walk together with other people in order to feel safer. Some students in School B said that they would go straight home after school, and one student said that he would get help from the ñeros in the neighborhood. None of the students in School A mentioned getting help from ñeros. Coping mechanisms that were expressed only among students at School A include hiding one's valuables, look for an adult to help, walk into a store, and change where one is walking. Moreover, observations showed that students in School A exhibited internal control in the classroom at times.

In School A, students demonstrated resilience by exhibiting internal control in classroom situation, standing up for themselves, and being careful and alert while walking in the area surrounding the school. Many students in School B demonstrated resilience in several ways. In spite of their difficult backgrounds and many challenges (like being orphans, having few economic resources, and living in a complicated neighborhood), many students were strong, reflected, kind, able to study in a noisy environment, they could stand up for themselves, and they showed several ways of being able to look out for themselves.

Students in both schools aimed at getting some kind of further education, either through El SENA or at a university. Students in the two schools mentioned that it is expensive to study in Colombia, and admitted that they might have to work for a while in order to save up money for university. The students that were interviewed at School A wanted to pursue careers like medicine or law, and one student wanted to open her own business. Moreover, one School A student had a back-up plan to study in Colombia if her plan to study in the United States fell through. At School B, the students who participated in interviews wanted to study environmental engineering or economics, and one student wanted to get into the French Legion. Most students in both schools said that school taught them responsibility, discipline, and fellowship, and that it helped them obtain good values. On the other hand, they expressed that the school did not prepare them well for tertiary level studies.

So far, findings regarding learning environments, school environments, and resilience have been presented. How these findings relate to resilience theory, to the concepts presented in the literature review, and to the school contexts will be elaborated in the next chapter, which constitutes the analysis and discussion of this research.

7 Discussion

The previous chapter uncovered several aspects of students’ perceptions of their learning environments and school environments, as well as coping mechanisms within these contexts. The current chapter will discuss these phenomena, drawing on the literature and theory presented in chapters 3 and 4. This chapter follows the structure of the research questions, and thus starts out by discussing the learning environments and school environments, before analyzing resilience among the students. The two schools are not given separate sections throughout this chapter, but are rather continuously compared to each other.

7.1 How do the Learning Environments and School Environments Affect the Students?

As explained in chapter 3.1, the learning environment constitutes the school itself and is considered to be very close to the learner, while the school environment is a broader concept. In addition to the physical school space it includes factors like the environment around the school, students’ families and initiatives from the Secretariat of Education. Figure 12 is an elaborated version of Figure 9 which was presented in chapter 3.1. In the developed version, many of the codes mentioned in chapter 5.3 have been placed into the figure, either on the school environment side, or the learning environment side, or in the overlapping area.

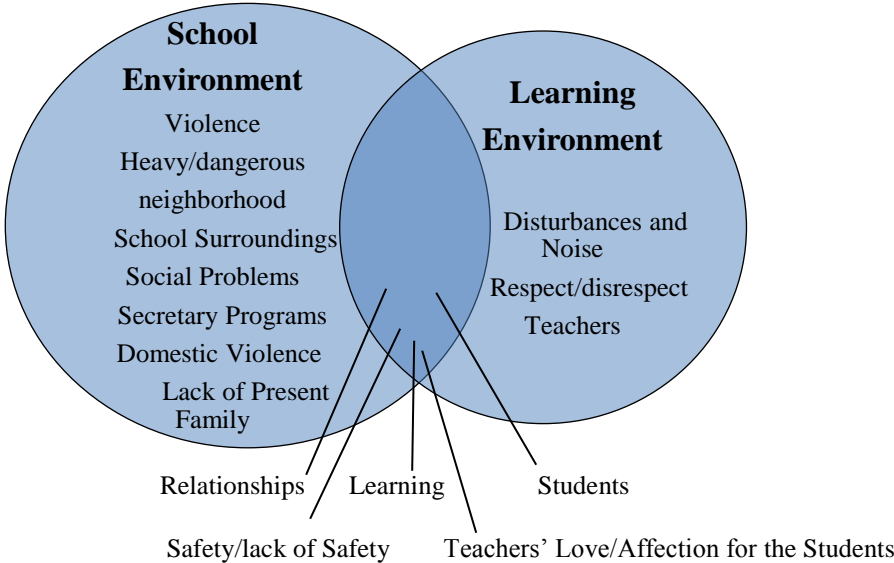


Figure 12 School Environment and Learning Environment elaborated. Figure compiled by the researcher.

The codes relationships, learning, safety/lack of safety, students, and teachers' affection/love for the students are ones that are found in the overlapping area between school environment and learning environment. These topics are where the students are in focus and the aspects that mostly influence students' resilience, as will be reflected throughout this chapter.

7.1.1 Learning Environment

The learning environment entails different conditions and factors that create a stimulating learning experience for the students (Abualrub et al., 2013), and the learning environment is one of the topics through which the school environment influences violence (Johnson et al., 2012). A good learning environment can thus decrease the probability of violence at school, while a challenging learning environment constitutes a factor that may enhance school-related violence.

Disturbances and Noise

In both schools, observations showed a clear pattern when it comes to the level of noise in different grades. 7th grade was the noisiest of the classes I attended in each school, followed by 8th grade. 10th grade was calmer and quieter than both 7th and 8th grade in both schools. These findings indicate that the level of restlessness and matureness depends on the age of the students, like teachers in both schools also argued. Another reason may be that students in their last years of school take school more seriously than students in lower grades. Nevertheless, other factors naturally also need to be taken into account – like home situation, peer influence, and the time of day (as observations showed that the students in general were more restless just before lunch and towards the end of the day), to mention a few. As observations and interviews showed, School A had a lot of ill-discipline and noise in class, and students could be rude and unbearable. Several students in School A managed to keep on working in spite of this, and can thus be seen as possessing resilient qualities by undergoing a normal development under difficult conditions, which is consistent with what Fonagy et al. (1994) claims.

As explained in chapter 2.6, School A is known for having a bad reputation. In the focus group with four employees at the Secretariat of Education, this topic came up, like one of the participants expressed: “The stigma and the social representation of what it means to be studying in School A” (Sec4). Teachers also expressed that in School A, they receive students that other schools are not accepting anymore, which can lead to a complicated and complex

group of students. Students with difficult home situations and drug problems are likely to be less motivated than students who do not face such challenges. This influences the learning environment, as Abualrub et al. (2013) stated that students' motivation form part of the learning environment. The perceptions of School A's bad reputation were clearly linked to the school surroundings, which proved more difficult and with a higher level of insecurity than the area around School B. Many students mentioned the tough school environment in interviews, and also reported that several schoolmates could get challenging and even violent at school. One girl in School A expressed "They [the boys in her class] like to hit the girls" (AS8).

As mentioned in chapter 6.1, the learning environment in School B was quieter and calmer than at School A. Nevertheless, there were challenges in this school as well, and BS4 reported that noise created by peers affected what he got out of the classes. Observations showed, however, that most students in School B would work through disturbances like noise from the other classrooms and the school yard, indicating a high level of agency as described by Davidson (2010) among these students. Regarding peer influence, data showed that several students in School B would join their classmates in talking, mocking, and other activities than those assigned by teachers, while other students were able to more or less ignore their peers and quietly keep on working regardless of how other students were behaving. Again, the latter mentioned students thus hold more agency as described by Davidson (2010) than the ones that got influenced into a non-academic behavior inside the classroom.

During observations and the time spent at each school, I also had informal conversations with teachers and students that are not included in the interview sample. One such teacher at School B expressed that in his opinion, the recognition of authority had been lost among his 10th grade students. Observations confirmed that this was a fact for many of these students. However, these students behaved differently with different teachers, and were particularly rude towards the above-mentioned teacher. Several students would speak badly about him to the researcher, not pay attention in class, and answer him in rude manners. On the other hand, BS2 reported that this particular teacher was the one he liked the most, because he focused on teaching the students good values that would serve them in their lives. BS2 also said that he found many of his classmates rude, and that this affected his learning experience in class. Thus, it can be concluded that in this particular 10th grade class in School B, the students who were most visible both in the classroom situations and outside of class (students who were described in chapter 6.3 as having a rude and vulgar attitude) did not enjoy this teacher's teaching methods, while

quieter students like BS2 enjoyed and appreciated these classes. The fact that the relationships between teachers and students were unfavorable for several students in School B can be seen as one of the reasons for issues within the learning environment, as these relationships are one of the key relationships within the school climate (Hernandez & Seem, 2004).

A comparison of the two schools reveals a higher level of ill-discipline, noise and disturbances at School A than at School B, and better acoustics in the classrooms in School B than in School A. This constitutes a calmer learning environment as described by Abualrub et al. (2013) at the latter school. Although the level of noise was not as substantial at School B, students at this school said that the noise in class affected what they got out of the classes.

Even though students in School B described their learning environment also in positive ways, none of the interviewed students had as enthusiastic and positive descriptions of this environment as students in School A did. Through Abualrub et al.'s (2013) pedagogical lens on learning environment, the learning environment is viewed as directly related to the teaching and learning processes, which includes the relationships between teachers and students, relationships among students, the teaching and learning climate. Therefore, I argue that that one of the reasons why students in School A described their learning environments as better than students at School B did, is the good relationship between students and teachers at this school. Another aspect related to teachers is that they were always late to class in both schools. It can be questioned how teachers can expect students to turn up to class in time when the teachers do not.

Learning Processes and Perceptions of Learning

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) microsystem consists of relationships between the individual and the environment. In this case, the environment is the school. Within the school, the mesosystem entails the relations and interactions between peers and school staff. At School A, teachers reported slow learning processes among the students, which is located at the microsystem level in Bronfenbrenner's (1977) scheme. Teachers expressed that while the social job they did was fulfilling, the low academic level among students was frustrating for them. In School B, observations and interviews showed that the academic learning processes were better for students than at School A. Students generally had a higher academic level, and the environment within the classrooms was more favorable for students' learning. The learning environment relates to different factors that create a stimulating learning experience (Abualrub et al., 2013),

and based on observations I argue that the learning experience was more stimulating at School B than at School A.

Learning environment is described as the sum of teaching and learning activities and approaches, and it is close to the learner (Abualrub et al., 2013). Different learning activities and approaches can thus lead to different learning experiences for the students. Students' conceptualizing of what learning means differed between what BC1 described as social learning and conceptual learning (or academic learning), indicating different learning approaches. It was interesting to find that students in School A described learning mostly as related to the school subjects, while at School B, student answers were divided more or less 50/50 between learning as something social and academic learning. These findings indicate that although the academic level was lower at School A, students in this school overall constructed learning as what was taught in the subject matters. For students in School B learning included both an academic and a social formation. The latter is expressed by one of the students, who said "To come to school is to learn how to live in society" (BS1).

7.1.2 School Environment

As reported in the findings, the school environments in both schools were generally good. It is thus reasonable to conclude that in the two schools, good school environments constitute one of the reasons why there was little violence within the schools, in spite of challenges in the surrounding neighborhood. Johnson et al. (2010) found that students' own actions and the surrounding environment were the most important characteristics influencing violence in schools, which was also seen to a certain degree in School A. Nevertheless, observations showed that the school environment within School A generally was good, perhaps even better than at School B, which students also confirmed in interviews. This leads me to argue that even though the surrounding environment affects students at School A, the learning environment inside the school has not been significantly affected by this, and that many students enjoy attending this school. One example is a boy who enthusiastically expressed "It is a luxury to be studying here" (AS10).

The school climate involves four key relationships, among them the relationship between a student and his/her parents and community (Hernandez & Seem, 2004). Teachers in both schools reported several cases of poor family circumstances, where students often were left alone for long periods, or where the students did not live with their parents. Moreover, in the

interview with an employee at the Secretariat of Education, it was affirmed that “It’s a fact that in these schools, there are kids that are sons and daughters of sex workers” (Sec1). Living under circumstances like these constitutes what within resilience theory is labeled adversities. None of the students that were interviewed reported having parents that were sex workers. However, it is highly unlikely that students would admit it if that was the case, and teachers also explained that such kids do not always know what kind of work their parents really have. Nevertheless, such circumstances can lead to unfocused and worried students, which again can influence the school environment. For these reasons, the difficult home situations for several students can be one of the influencing factors leading to challenging environments in the schools.

On the other hand, extra-curricular activities can be a positive factor in the school environment, because they form part of the schools’ social environment (Johnson et al., 2012). At School A, observations showed that the regular football matches were a unifying factor for students. The vast majority of the students would gather around the football court to watch these matches, and there was often cheerleading. In general, the “between the classes games” caused a lot of involvement, enthusiasm, and feelings among students, and this activity was seen as positive aspect of the school environment at School A.

As stated in chapter 3, there are six topics in the school environment that influences violence; student behavior, norms of behavior, relationships with school staff, learning environment, school safety, and neighborhood environment (Johnson et al., 2012). As asserted in the findings, School A had norms of behavior written up on the classroom walls in several classrooms. This was not seen at School B, but this does not necessarily mean that such norms did not exist. Taking some of the norms from School A as examples (respect for teachers, no fighting, no playing inside the classroom, raising one’s hand when wanting to speak, and keeping the classroom clean and tidy), my observations in the field showed that students at School B followed such norms to a greater extent than students at School A. It can therefore be concluded that the presence of written norms in the classroom did not affect the way students in School A behaved in class much, and that students in School B to a certain extent managed to behave without such written norms.

Safety at School

School safety is one of the topics through which the school environment influences violence. What was found in Johnson et al.’s (2012) study, was that school safety revolved around school

security efforts such as school police, school security and administrators. As presented in the findings, students in School A and School B in general felt safe at school. School A sometimes had the presence of police inside the school, while at School B this was not seen. Students in School A reported that they did not know why the police were there, and did not mention feeling safer at school because of this police presence. Moreover, students at School A in general reported feeling safe even though material possessions could get lost, and all students said that they felt safer at school than on the outside. “I feel protected here on the inside” (AS3) a girl in 8th grade asserted. In addition to feeling safe at school, a student in 10th grade described a positive school environment, and expressed that “It gives me joy to come here” (AS10).

Like in School A, the students interviewed at School B generally felt safe at school, and all of them said that they felt safer at school than on the street. The schools were thus seen as a positive factor in students’ lives, like a teacher in School B reported: “I know that there are kids in the school that prefer to be in school than to be outside, than to be at home” (BT1). These findings correlate with what Johnson et al. (2010) found, namely that students’ own actions are an aspect for the initiation and increased severity of violence in schools. It can be concluded that the students who participated in the interviews acted in ways that did not enhance the level of violence within their schools, thus improving their school environments.

Drugs

Johnson et al. (2010) state that the school environment is important for preventing drug and alcohol use, and I argue that strengthening the environments within the two schools is a challenging but important task. Principals and teachers should take this task seriously and strive to reduce drug use and other negative factors for students in a school day that is characterized by restlessness, noise, rudeness, and the fear of getting robbed. Drug distribution and consumption emerged as a concern among students, school staff, the parent, and employees at the Secretariat of Education. As presented in chapter 2, drugs are a common issue in Bogotá in general, and even more so in the neighborhood of Los Mártires in particular (Ávila, 2016). The data gathered confirmed these tendencies, as participants reported presence of drugs around the schools, students selling drugs to their peers at school, and students in School B using the breaks to do drugs during the school day. Also in School A it was reported that some students did drugs during the school hours, and AS2 said that those who wanted to do drugs at school found places to hide in order to consume, and that this made him feel unsafe at school.

School Surroundings

As presented in chapter 3.2, violence in urban areas leads to fear and insecurity (Moser, 2004), which is the case for many students in School A and School B. As described in chapter 2, Bogotá in general, and the neighborhood of Los Mártires in particular, have high levels of insecurity. “Bogotá is a city where you do not have areas that are absolutely safe, where nothing ever happens” (BT1), a teacher in School B expressed. This insecurity influences schools and students in several ways. As shown in the findings chapter, many students in both schools reported feeling unsafe on their way to school and back, due to the risk of getting robbed and/or held at gunpoint. Furthermore, the drug issue in the neighborhood was addressed as a concern by most participants. Moreover, observations in the area confirmed what was found in the background literature regarding a high presence of homeless people, and a high level of insecurity, especially in the streets surrounding School A. In chapter 2 it was described how distribution of drugs in Bogotá got decentralized after the intervention in the area known as the Bronx. Data showed that the parks close to School A and School B are often used for drug sales. Due to these challenges, the Secretariat of Education decided to initiate the ZOE project. Such projects can be implemented to create and strengthen a positive school environment (Wekke & Sahlan, 2014). As ZOE was initially started to prevent drug use among students, the presence of this program at School A and School B can be seen as a measure that can strengthen a positive school environment.

According to Moser (2004), poverty and inequality are overlapping conditions that make some people resort to crime and violence, which might be one of the explanations of the high presence of crime and violence in Los Mártires, being a low-middle-income area (Bogotá Chamber of Commerce, 2009). Moreover, Moser (2004) explains how urban violence has a dramatic impact on people’s well-being when it comes to livelihood security and the functioning of local institutions like schools. Findings showed that the level of fear and insecurity that many students perceive, was a highly present factor in their lives. However, the schools were in general perceived as safe spaces, and as much safer than the spaces outside the schools. Even though a few students said they could not feel completely safe anywhere, both schools were considered to be safe spaces where one had the opportunity to engage in academic and extra-curricular activities with peers, and where there was little occurrence of physical violence.

Values and behaviors in the neighborhood can be brought into school and become a source of violence (Johnson et al., 2012). Observations and interviews confirmed that this was a reality

for both schools, however more so for School A than School B. It was reported that in these schools, students brought drugs and knives into school, and that personal belongings could easily get robbed. Johnson et al. (2012) mention neighborhood environment as one of the six topics through which the school environment can influence violence, and the neighborhood is described as one of the layers in connection to a school that contribute to the school environment (Moore, 2012). Moreover, Johnson et al. (2012) found that the students who participated in their study did not differentiate between violence in the neighborhood and violence within the school. The findings of my study indicate that this was not the case for students in School A and School B. In general, students were concerned about the possibility of violence and armed robbery in the neighborhood, while they expressed mostly positive associations with attending school. Violence at school did not appear as a big concern among the students, while the drug issue and peers' rude behavior did. However, the neighborhood does influence the school environment in terms of easy access to drugs, and some students bringing knives into school and sometimes stealing their peers' personal belongings. Even though students in general reported feeling safe at school, it would be inaccurate to describe School A and School B as completely safe, based on the data collected in this study. Nevertheless, my findings deviate somewhat from the existing literature on the topic, which is interesting because it shows that in the violent urban neighborhood of Los Mártires the schools can constitute safe and pleasant places for the students. Furthermore, it shows that violence in the neighborhood does not necessarily lead to violence within the schools.

Like Johnson et al. (2012) argue, the school environment consists of both the social and physical environment at school. Moreover, the different layers that contribute to the school environment include the neighborhood where the school is located (Moore, 2012). The area around School A is comprehensively described in chapters 2 and 6. AS2 stated that there was a lot of insecurity around the school, and another student expressed that "I'm always scared" (AS3). Moreover, when talking about the area just outside of the school building, she said "On the outside, in the afternoons, it's dirty, it smells of shit" (AS3). One conclusion that can be drawn from these statements and the other findings related to School A's surroundings is that the area surrounding School A is not favorable for students' wellbeing and sense of safety on their way to school and back. Wekke and Sahlan (2014) highlight the need to improve the areas surrounding schools in order to support teaching and learning, and I argue that attending school in an area characterized by insecurity and dirt does not favor students' learning experiences.

Like the streets around School A, the area surrounding School B has also been extensively described in chapters 2 and 6. Although the area is quieter and safer than the area around School A, a boy in 10th grade expressed “One can never be safe here. You have to always walk with the five senses” (BS2). Also the parent who was interviewed expressed worries about the unsafe area around School B due to drugs, robberies and violence. Again, these conditions are not favorable for students’ learning processes as described by Wekke and Sahlan (2014). Sanchez (2006) explains how disorder and violence have become parts of people’s daily life in big cities in Latin America, which was also seen among students in my study. Even though most students expressed concerns about their neighborhood, observations showed that students were used to these environments, as is particularly exemplified by AS5, who expressed that he did not see any bad things about attending school in Los Mártires.

Moreover, the findings concerning the school surroundings around the two schools indicate that students in different environments perceive insecurity in different ways. Students in School A and Students in School B described the areas around their schools in fairly similar ways, even though background literature, interviews with school staff and Secretariat employees, and observations showed that the area around School A is more insecure than the area around School B. This is an interesting finding, and it may be concluded that living under certain conditions makes the students used to this situation, in accordance with what Sanchez (2006) describes. This can explain why students in School A did not show a higher level of concern about the school surroundings than students at School B did.

7.1.3 Concluding Remarks

Answering the question “How do the learning environments and school environments affect the students?” has been done throughout the previous chapter and the current one. When it comes to learning environment, the focus has been on disturbances and noise, peer influence, learning processes, and perceptions of learning. Regarding school environment, the focus has been on sport activities, safety at school, and the school surroundings.

A high level of noise and disturbances within the learning environment in School A affected the students’ learning processes because it was difficult to hear what the teachers said. Some students, however, managed to not get influenced by these factors, thus demonstrating resilient qualities. In School B, the learning environment was calmer, and the academic outcomes of classes were higher. Although there were distractions and disturbances there as well, students

usually managed to work through this, demonstrating resilience. Some students were more prone to peer influence than others, as seen in both schools. However, students in School B were usually better at ignoring their noisy peers and keep on working though these disturbances than students at School A were. Sporting activities proved to be a positive and important part of the school environment at School A. Such activities were also present at School B, but to a less significant extent than at School A.

Students' perceptions of learning differed somewhat between students in the two schools. While School A students constructed learning as an academic formation, School B students saw it both as social learning and as academic learning. These differences can be explained by different teaching and learning approaches in the two schools, and also by differences in students' motivation.

The school surroundings affected students in both schools in terms of insecurity, but a considerable amount of violence within the two schools was not found. However, the schools were not perceived as totally safe, as is exemplified by students saying that they always had to carry their belongings with them, and several students mentioning having been robbed of their personal belongings at school. Different aspects of the learning environments and school environments can enhance resilience among the students, while other factors outside and inside the schools can decrease students' resilience, which will be addressed in the following section.

7.2 How do the Students Demonstrate Resilience?

The description of resilience that best fits the students who participated in this study is the successful adaption that happens to an individual in spite of challenging circumstances (Everson, 2015). In order to build resilience, Kiswarday (2012) states that a person needs inner personal strength, social and interpersonal skills, and external support and resources. These characteristics describe some of the students who participated in this study, while others lacked such traits. Downes (2017) explains how resilience requires resources in order to resist groupthink, which is highly relevant for students both in School A and in School B. As stated in the findings chapter, some students would work through noise and disturbances, while others would follow their peers and join in the noise, name-calling and sexually loaded conversations. Those students that managed to not get influenced by their peers thus have more resilience than students who were more prone to get affected by their schoolmates.

Most of the resilience literature describes resilience as human beings “bouncing back” after going through adversities (Kim, 2015; Theron & Theron, 2014; Prince-Embury & Saklofske, 2013; Prince-Embury, 2013; Luthar et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2013; Greene et al., 2004; Kiswarday, 2012; Richardson, 2002). As it will be discussed below, this fits well for one of the students who was interviewed (BS1), but not for the rest. Students at School A and School B live in a state of constant worries of violence, theft, and drugs in the areas surrounding their schools, and most of them have not gone through one or two specific adversity incidents and then bounced back to a normal or above-normal state as described by Kim (2015). Even so, data showed that students in School A and School B demonstrate resilience on a daily basis, and these findings thus align more with Fonagy et al.’s (1994) description of resilience as the normal development that occurs under difficult conditions and Everson’s (2015) explanation provided above.

Internal resilience characteristics include attitude, intelligence, problem-solving skills, sense of mastery, survival instinct, and spirituality/religion (Greene et al., 2004). When it comes to the latter characteristic, several students in School A mentioned religion. AS10 said that God was one of his essential friends in life, and someone he would turn to if he needed help. It is thus valid to conclude that the resilient qualities that AS10 holds may be a result of his religious beliefs. He said that ever since “God touched my head” (AS10), he stopped doing drugs, and he started making an effort to be good at school. At School B, a student in the 10th grade said that God was her best friend, “because he guides me in everything” (BS3), and that if something is wrong, she prays to God. BS3 had lost her parents and did not have many friends at school, but still appeared strong and confident, and her religious beliefs are thus likely to have influenced the level of resilience she holds.

Diving deeper into the resiliency literature, art is mentioned as a creative endeavor that is a gateway to the response of resilience (Kim, 2015). As explained in chapter 6.1, creativity and artistic design were a big part of the school work students did in both School A and School B. These kind of activities can, according to Kim (2015) enhance resilience, and are most likely one of the factors that makes students in School A and School B cope with their daily school lives within a challenging context.

Many students in both schools possess resilience in different ways. The student that appeared to have the most resilient qualities, however, was BS1, who in spite of a complicated past as an orphan and growing up with an abusive uncle, showed excellent problem-solving skills and a

high survival instinct. These are characteristics Greene et al. (2004) emphasize as typical of resilient people. Moreover, BS1 had clearly “bounced back” after facing adversities such as violence and the loss of his mother. Within Richardson’s (2002) Resilience Model¹⁶, BS1 has moved on to resilient reintegration after disruption (losing his parents and growing up with a violent caregiver). Through dealing with difficult life events, he has gotten results in the forms of personal growth, knowledge, self-understanding, and increased strength. Observations showed that BS1 was humble, kind, mature, a good student, a good friend, he took care of the people around him, and he was always eager to help peers, teachers and other school staff out when they needed it. Resilient people have intellectual ability, easy temperament, autonomy, self-reliance, sociability, effective coping strategies, and communication skills (Prince-Embury, 2013), all characteristics that BS1 holds. In interactions with other people, BS1 displayed great communication skills, good social skills, and he was highly autonomous. Moreover, resilient students face fears and seek to solve problems, and they demonstrate optimism, become positive role models, and show flexibility (Kim, 2015). In addition to being effective problem solvers, resilient people have insight, and they show a high tolerance of stress. Again, BS1 fits directly into these descriptions. When field work was conducted, BS1 was in his last grade, and working on his graduation project. This was a group project where one of the tasks was to make a physical model of the device they were constructing. The model got destroyed by accident, and even though BS1 was disappointed and upset about this, he quickly managed to think of a way for himself and the rest of the group to afford new materials, and started working on the model again from scratch. This situation serves as an example of how BS1 demonstrated resilient qualities.

As emphasized in the beginning of chapter 7.2, most students that participated in this study had not gone through one or a few specific disruptions as described by Richardson (2002), and thus do not fit as neatly into Figure 10 as BS1 does. Nevertheless, the stressors, adversities and life events that appear in the model are all found in the students’ school environment, as it has been described in the findings and in chapter 7.1. The protective factors in Richardson’s (2002) model are the resilient qualities that students have, such as being able to work through noise and disturbances in classroom situations. Regarding the different types of reintegration in the model, it is harder to place students (except BS1) into the different categories, as they were exposed to continuous adversities rather than one specific disruption. Nevertheless, my

¹⁶ Explained on pages 35-37

observations showed that some students (like AS4, AS7, AS10, and BS6) had qualities that resembled those that fit into the resilient reintegration category. For the others, reintegration back to homeostasis is the most suitable category. None of the participants in this study showed signs of belonging in either of the two last categories (reintegration with loss and dysfunctional reintegration).

7.2.1 Relationships

The support of social networks is important for people if they are to adjust well to challenging life-circumstances, and a supportive family as well as positive schooling experiences can help students adjust well to adversities (Theron & Theron, 2014). For students in School A and School B, these social networks consist of a students' relationships to their family, friends, and school staff. Students who have several good relationships and enough support are more likely to adjust well to their challenging situation than students with poorer support from these social networks. Within Richardson's (2002) resiliency model, support from one's social networks forms part of the reintegration a person goes through after a disruption, and this support can help students reintegrate successfully after adversities. As stated in the findings chapter, relationships emerged as an important topic for most of the students who participated in this study, and the resilient qualities that many students hold can thus be linked to positive relationships with family, friends, teachers, and/or other school staff.

Family and Friendship

Data showed that for the students, their families were more important to them than their friends. However, for students in School B, the companionship amongst peers was highlighted as strong, indicating that relationships to other students were important for these students. The findings suggest that most students had strong family connections, which can help them adjust well to the challenging environments around them, according to the social ecology of resilience theory (Theron & Theron, 2014). Within Bronfenbrenner's (1977) systems theory, these social networks form part of the exosystem, which consists of social structures that influence or encompass the immediate setting of a person and thus affect, delimit, or determine what happens in a person's setting. On the other hand, the lack of support from one's social networks can make students less likely to adjust well to challenging environments and situations (Theron & Theron, 2014). At School A, it was reported that some parents were sex workers, others

distributed drugs for a living (none of the participants of this study reported having parents with such professions). Other parents were street vendors without a stable income, and parents in general worked long hours and did not have much time for their children. It is thus appropriate to conclude that many students in School A did not have the support of their families. At both schools, a lack of commitment from parents was reported among school staff, and this was also confirmed in the field by the difficulty to get parents to participate in the study. One student at School B contradicted Theron and Theron's (2014) statement that the lack of a supportive network would make it difficult for him to adjust well to his environment. BS1 had no family except his sister, and still demonstrated efficient coping mechanisms and a good adjustment towards his school environment, as uncovered in chapter 6.3 and previously in the current chapter.

School Staff

Several students at School A exemplified resilient characteristics by demonstrating sociability and coping strategies like internal control in the classroom. Within Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecology of human development, human development is characterized by the accommodation in one's life between the individual and its surrounding environments. At the mesosystem-level, the relations between the students and their settings (like school staff, family, and peers) take place. Drawing on the resilience framework and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) systems theory it can be concluded that students in School A are likely to have a good development and gain resilient characteristics due to the support from their teachers.

As explained in the literature review, education that supports resilience is characterized by good teacher-community connections, as well as ordinary and extraordinary teacher actions (Theron & Theron, 2014). Johnson et al. (2012) describe relationships with school staff as one of the topics through which the school environment can influence violence. As the findings show, the relationships between teachers and students in School A can be described as extraordinary, while in School B these relationships were more ordinary. Nurturing and supportive teachers can enhance students' resilience and help them develop into competent, caring adults (Greene et al., 2004). Whether or not the students in School A will turn into more competent and caring adults than Students in School B is beyond the scope of this research, due to time limits. However, my findings suggest that School A students have a better chance of this happening than students in School B, due to the differences in the student-teacher relationships.

Kiswarday (2012) urges teachers to provide a care and support for students by listening to them, demonstrating kindness, respect, and compassion, much like teachers in School A did. Greene et al. (2004) also found that in schools, nurturing and supportive teachers can teach students resilience and play an important role in helping students develop into competent, caring adults. It is thus likely that students in School A have a higher possibility of developing resilient qualities than students in School B do, as there was a clear difference between how teachers approached their students in the two schools. While at School A the teachers expressed that “The kids here are practically ours” (AT1), teachers at School B had a more distant and in some cases derogatory approach to their students, and they focused mainly on the academic aspect of their job. The latter was also confirmed by some students in the interviews, exemplified by “The teachers can be difficult to you” (BS3). An employee at the Secretariat of Education also mentioned some problems with teachers in School B, and stated that: “At this moment, there are several complaints at School B about teachers being aggressive towards the students” (Sec1). These findings concur with what was found in another study, where many students in public schools reported that teachers offended students in class (Bromberg, 2016).

7.2.2 Coping Mechanisms

Bolling (2014) sees social resilience as a quality to withstand or adapt to stressors. These qualities can also be called coping mechanisms, and several students in both schools demonstrated such mechanisms. The coping mechanisms described in chapter 6.3 constitute qualities that individuals use in order to adapt to the stressors around them as described by Bolling (2014). Moreover, students would turn to adults (preferably their parents) and/or to God when they had a problem. The findings indicate that students in School A were highly aware of the dangers and challenges that surround their school, and that they enact several means in order to be safer and deal with their situations on a daily basis. Prince-Embury (2013) mentions autonomy and self-reliance as two of the characteristics within resilient people, like several students at School A demonstrated. One example is a student in 10th grade who expressed; “Well, it is me who has to bring my life forward” (AS10), indicating that the responsibility for his education and his life ultimately rests upon himself.

As the findings demonstrated, most students in School B would continue working in spite of disturbances like noise and disorder, which within the resiliency framework constitutes strategies for adapting to stressors (Bolling, 2014; Richardson, 2002). Regarding other coping

mechanisms, some students at School B mentioned getting to know the ñeros in the area in order to get protection from them, and one student said that he would take up the fight and resist if he got assaulted or robbed. No students in School A reported such coping mechanisms. Moreover, students in School B mentioned being careful with one's belongings, running, walking with other people on the street, and walking quickly, all adaptive strategies as described by Bolling (2014). The school itself could also be a way to minimize one's worries, like one student explained: "Many times, when you have problems at home, the only way to stop thinking about it, and slightly forget it, is the school" (BS1). As presented in chapter 6.4, coping mechanisms that were expressed only by School A students include hiding one's valuables, looking for adults to help, walking into a store, changing where one is walking, and exhibiting internal control in the classroom. One explanation of why students in School A mentioned more coping strategies than students in School B may be that the area surrounding School A has a higher level of insecurity than the area around School B. Moreover, students in the two schools that manage to stay away from drugs in spite of life stressors and easy access to drugs, possess positive coping skills and resilience according to Winfield's (1991) framework.

Theron and Theron (2014) assert that the ways in which children are affected by different types of adversities vary, and this is connected to the level of resilience that one holds. An example of students who reacted differently to the same adversity, is BS2 and BS6. BS2 described getting scared when he was robbed, and said that he would give away his valuables in such situations. BS6 described several situations in which he had been robbed, and said that instead of giving the robbers what they wanted, he fought back, because he practices boxing and could defend himself. He reported feeling angry after these encounters, not scared. According to Theron and Theron (2014), BS6 thus holds more resiliency than BS2. However, BS6 was one of few students who said that he would fight back in the case of attempted robbery, so this can also be seen as a unique case, and even as youth naivety, as all adult participants in this study urged students to give away everything they have if they were robbed.

Attitude and Agency

Among other factors, the school climate consists of attitude among individuals within the school system (Hernandez & Seem, 2004). As explained in chapter 6.3, many students in School A and School B had a tough attitude, and it was shown that a teacher in School A explained her students' behavior as a coping mechanism within a tough school environment. In School B, the

teachers did not express the same, but observations showed that several students' attitude was a way for them to assert themselves within the school environment, thus demonstrating resilience. Students in both schools therefore possess at least one of the traits Greene et al. (2004) described as an internal resilient characteristic, namely attitude.

As opposed to ecological systems, human beings possess agency, which is our greatest asset. This means that people act consciously, and one of the manifestations of human agency that relate to crisis response is that humans can anticipate (Davidson, 2010). This makes us able to recognize risks, which Davidson (2010) sees as an important resilient characteristic. Observations and interviews showed that students in both schools were good at recognizing possible risks in their environments, and they utilized a number of coping strategies to overcome or avoid these risks. Human agency is, however, distributed unequally among people, and the level of agency that one holds can influence the resilient qualities (Davidson, 2010). It can thus be concluded that students with a lot of agency are more likely to overcome challenges like noise and disturbances within the classroom, while students with less agency are more likely to get distracted by these disturbances, and also more prone to peer influence. The chaotic situation in 7th grade which was described in chapter 6.1 serves as an example where students with agency managed to work through the chaotic classroom situation, while students with less agency got influenced by their peers into highly non-academic behavior.

7.2.3 Students' Future Visions

Students in School A and School B had clear goals of what they want to do with their lives, and most of these goals included further studies either at university level or through El SENA. Future visions are included under resilience because having positive visions and plans for the future means that students have a survival instinct as described by Greene et al. (2004), which is an internal resilient characteristic. There were few differences between students' future visions at the two schools, which may indicate that for the students that were interviewed, nurturing and supportive teachers did not influence their future plans in a substantial way.

7.2.4 Concluding Remarks

Answering the question "how do the students demonstrate resilience?" has been done with a focus on relationships (between students and their peers, school staff and family), different coping mechanisms that students apply, and regarding students' visions of the future.

Students in both schools in general said that their families constituted the most important people in their lives, and that friends were important, but not as important as family. Moreover, data showed that teachers in both schools aimed at passing on good values to their students. The relationships between teachers and students were stronger and more favorable at School A than at School B, and it was thus concluded that students in School A are more likely to develop resilient characteristics than students in School B.

Coping mechanisms are important indicators of one's resilience, as it has been explained in chapter 4. How students in School A and School B consciously or unconsciously cope with attending schools in a violent urban area demonstrates both that these students possess resilience, and that they are used to living under such circumstances. The findings show that students in School A and School B had many similar coping strategies, but in some aspects they differed. School A students mentioned more strategies than School B students did. This may be related to the area around School A being more challenging than the area around School B.

Finally, all students that were interviewed in both schools had plans of tertiary level studies, but they expressed a lack of preparation from the school when it comes to future studies. On the other hand, students expressed that the schools taught them good values for the future. Moreover, it has been asserted that many students in these schools demonstrate resilience by successfully adapting to their difficult school environments.

With the discussion and remarks made in this chapter in mind, the next chapter provides an overall conclusion of the research questions presented in chapter 1.2 of this thesis.

8 Conclusion

Drawing on the findings and discussion presented in chapters 6 and 7, this conclusion summarizes the main ideas that have driven this research. Within a resilience theory framework and with a qualitative research strategy, this thesis set out to answer two main research questions; (1) *How do the learning environments and school environments affect students in two public schools in Los Mártires?*, and (2) *How do students in the two schools demonstrate resilience within these contexts?*.

Data gathered in the field and background literature led to an initial understanding of students' learning environment and school environments, and a further analysis of these findings uncovered how students demonstrate resilience within their school contexts. This chapter is organized according to the two main research questions and presents summaries from each school before comparing them to each other. Moreover, what I regard as the principal contribution of this research will be portrayed in the final remarks.

8.1 How the Learning Environments and School Environments Affect Students

School A

The findings showed how the learning environment in School A was challenging due to aspects like noise, uneasiness, and disruptions. The noise inside the classroom affected students' learning processes because it made it difficult to hear what the teachers were saying in class. Moreover, teachers reported a slow learning process among their students, which may be due to this difficult learning environment. However, it is admitted that other factors must also be taken into account, like the students' home situations. By teachers, learning in School A was characterized as being a more social than academic formation, and observations in the classrooms proved that this was the case for students in 7th, 8th, and 10th grade.

The school environment at School A proved favorable in terms of peer relations, relationships with school staff, and sport activities. The norms of coexistence that were written up in many classrooms did not appear to affect students' behavior in any notable way. Nevertheless, students expressed feeling good at school, and most students felt safe and protected. Even so,

insecurity at school was an issue, due to the fact that personal belongings could get stolen, there was a presence of drugs, and students brought knives into school. These factors made students more careful with their belongings, and several students reported that they would try to stay out of fights if this occurred at school.

School B

School B had a calmer learning environment, but also here classes were characterized by a certain level of ill-discipline, noise, and rudeness. Some students were prone to engage in non-academic activities in class, while many of them kept on working in spite of such disturbances. The school environment was characterized by good peer relationships, and students reported feeling good and more or less safe and protected at school. Nevertheless, students at this school would never leave their personal belongings unattended, but rather carried them with them at all times because they were highly aware of the possibility that personal belongings could get robbed at school. The drug problem was also addressed by participants in School B, and the teachers in this school said that this issue affected many of their students.

Comparison

Similarities in learning environments and school environments within the two schools include good school environments, teachers being persistently late for class, and students being hungry at different parts of the day, to mention some factors. Differences include less organized sport activities at School B than at School A, and better acoustics inside the classrooms in School B than in School A. Moreover, the academic level was higher at School B than at School A, and students in School B were able to keep on with their school work in spite of disturbances and noise to a greater extent than students in School A.

The area surrounding School A was more unsafe than the streets around School B. Students were afraid of getting robbed and/or held at gunpoint on their way to school and back, and some students were not allowed to go to school by themselves but were rather accompanied by their parents. Moser (2004) explains how urban violence has a dramatic impact on people's well-being when it comes to livelihood security and the functioning of local institutions like schools. I have argued that this is not exactly the case for the two schools where this research was conducted, as School A and School B function well as institutions and safe spaces where students are taught important values, in spite of being located in a violent urban area. As

Johnson et al. (2010) argued, values and behaviors in the neighborhood can be brought into school and become a source of violence. This was to a certain extent seen in both schools, exemplified by drug sales at the schools and students sometimes bringing knives into school. However, school violence did not appear as a big concern among the students and school staff that participated in this study, and neither was violence within the schools observed during field work. It can thus be concluded that most students in School A and School B to a great extent manage to separate behaviors in the neighborhood from their school lives. Most students also described their schools as safe spaces and said that they enjoyed being at school.

As shown in Figure 9 and Figure 12, learning environment and school environment are somewhat overlapping concepts, and topics that are found within this overlapping area include relationships, learning, safety/lack of safety, students, and teacher's affection/love for the students, which have been commented on throughout the two previous chapters and this one. The ways students respond to and deal with their learning environments and school environments will be explained in the next section, which sums up the resilience that students in the two schools demonstrate.

8.2 How Students Demonstrate Resilience

An individual needs inner personal strength, social skills, and external supports and resources in order to build resilience (Kiswarday, 2012). Moreover, Theron and Theron (2014) highlight the importance of support from one's social networks in order to adjust well to challenging life-circumstances. For students in School A and B, external supports include support from peers, school staff, family and friends outside the school. How these relationships affect students' development of resilience will be summarized in the following section.

School A

Among the sample of students that was presented in chapter 5.2, all students reported good relationships with their families. However, interviews and informal conversations with teachers and employees at the Secretariat of Education uncovered difficult home situations for several students in School A. According to Kiswarday (2012), students need the support from their networks in order to build resilience, and family is considered to be an important part of these networks. It can thus be concluded that the students who were interviewed in this study are

more likely to develop resilient characteristics than peers who lack this support from their families. Moreover, a normal development in spite of difficult conditions was observed among many students at School A, which aligns with what Fonagy et al. (1994) describes as resilience. Many students hold resilient characteristics like social skills, attitude, survival instinct, self-reliance, and effective coping strategies in the face of attending school in a challenging neighborhood. Coping strategies that were discussed in chapter 7.2 include, but are not limited to, internal control in the classroom, being careful when out on the street, and looking after one's belongings. Moreover, the good relationships between teachers and students in School A have been highlighted. Within the resilience framework and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) systems theory it was concluded that students in School A are likely to have a good adjustment to life situations and develop resilient characteristics due to this support from their teachers.

School B

Also in School B, the students that were interviewed reported good relationships with their families, and a good companionship between peers, which indicates the possibility of developing resilient characteristics as described by Kiswarday (2012). Also at this school, students' normal development under difficult conditions as described by Fonagy et al. (1994) was observed. Moreover, students had effective coping strategies like being careful with their belongings, walking fast and/or together with other people on the street, and having a lot of attitude. These strategies exemplify qualities students hold in order to adapt to stressors, as described by Bolling (2014) and Richardson (2002). Moreover, some students described school as a safe space where they could forget about worries at home and in the surrounding area.

Comparison

As explained in chapter 4.2, Bronfenbrenner (1977) argues that human development is characterized by the accommodation in one's life between the human being and its surrounding environments. This is highly relevant in the cases of students in School A and School B, as resilience was looked for within their learning environments and school environments. As explained in earlier chapters, these environments among other aspects entail the relationships that the individual has with family, school staff, and peers. Students in both schools reported that family was important to them, and I have argued that the strong family connections have been a factor in the development of resilient characteristics for students in both schools.

Relationships with teachers differed between the two schools, and drawing on Theron and Theron's (2014) definition, it has been argued that these relationships were ordinary in School B and extraordinary in School A. It is thus concluded that teachers at School A support students' resilience to a greater extent than teachers at School B.

Moreover, Bolling (2014) views social resilience as a quality to withstand or adapt to stressors, and these qualities are exemplified by students' coping mechanisms. Similar coping mechanisms in both schools include being careful and paying a lot of attention when walking in the neighborhood and looking after one's personal belongings well at school. Another characteristic of resilience is religion (Greene et al., 2004), and some students in both schools described religion as an important part of their lives. Moreover, art is mentioned as a creative endeavor that is a gateway to resilience (Kim, 2015). I have argued that students in School A and School B have good chances of enhancing their resilient qualities this way, as art and creativity were important parts of the teaching and learning processes in both schools. Lastly, in School B one of the students that were interviewed stood out as possessing more resilience than his peers. Among the sample at School A there was not one specific student who stood out as holding more resilience than others. However, among the 755 students that attend this school (Secretariat of Education, 2017), there are probably several students with the same characteristics as BS1, but such students were not found during the sampling process.

8.3 Final Remarks

This study has shown that good school environments can be found even within schools that are located in a violent urban neighborhood. It has been discussed how challenging learning environments and school surroundings affect students on a daily basis, and how students in both schools demonstrate coping strategies and resilient qualities within these environments. Differences in learning environments, school environments, and resiliency among students in School A and School B have been uncovered. This shows that even schools located close to each other face different challenges when it comes to insecurity level and the level of noise and disturbances within the classrooms. Moreover, the resilience among students in the two schools was different due to the surrounding areas being different, different home situations, and different types of relationships with school staff. The similarities and differences uncovered throughout this research makes this study more interesting than two separate studies of School A and School B, because the schools were continuously compared against each other. This

provided me with more reference points during field work and the opportunity to observe the phenomenon contextually. Moreover, comparing the two schools to each other allowed me to examine the contexts and characteristics of School A and School B in detail at the same time as I discovered contrasts and similarities across the two cases.

As chapter 3 showed, the existing literature that was found on the topics of school environment and violence has focused on the effects of a good school environment in decreasing violence within a school. This thesis has had a different approach, by looking at the school environments in two educational institutions where school violence is not seen as a big challenge. It has been discussed that the neighborhood of Los Mártires certainly affects the students, but that most students that participated in this study manage to differentiate between what goes on in the neighborhood and what goes on at school. Moreover, a qualitative comparative study between these specific schools in Los Mártires has not been done before, and it is my hope that the findings uncovered here can contribute to a better understanding of the daily school lives students in the two schools encounter. Furthermore, it is my greatest hope that this thesis has described what challenges students meet at school and in their neighborhood in a nuanced and accurate way. All possible misinterpretations of the school situations and the surrounding areas that may have occurred are the sole responsibility of the researcher.

The scope of this study has been to uncover learning environments, school environments, these environments' influence on students, and students' coping mechanisms in two public schools in one of Bogotá's many neighborhoods. As it was highlighted in the introduction, the scope of this research does not aim at analyzing a school system, even though representatives of the school system are present throughout the thesis (teachers, school counselor, employees at the Secretariat of Education and even the students themselves). Interesting follow-ups to this study could include (1) a study on teachers' resiliency in these environments and their will to persevere at the schools, (2) an analysis of how the Secretariat of Education faces the many challenges in public schools in Los Mártires and Bogotá, and (3) a comparative study between public schools and private schools in a certain area of Bogotá, looking at what differences exist between school realities for students in private and public schools.

Nevertheless, I sincerely hope that the school realities and coping strategies discussed throughout this thesis will provide the reader with some useful information about what it is like to be a student at a public school in the neighborhood of Los Mártires, and enhance knowledge about the challenges these students deal with on a daily basis.

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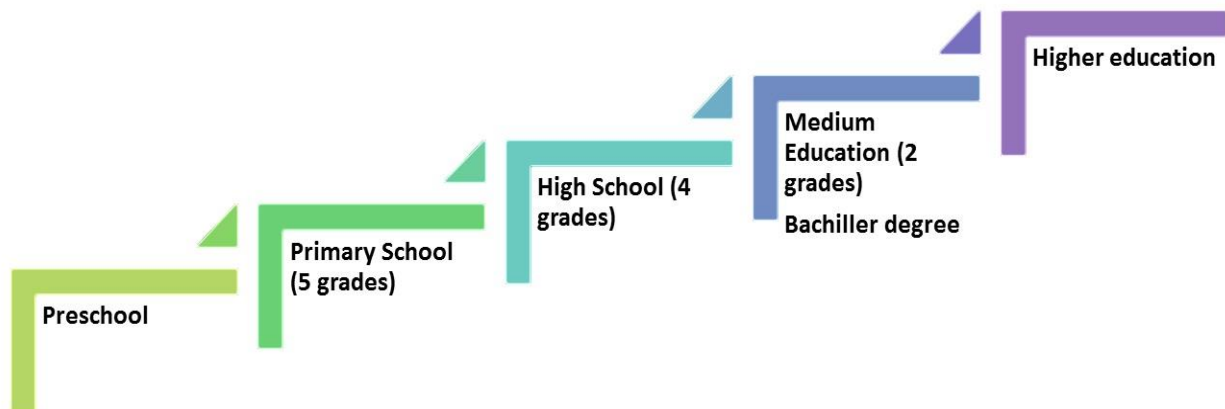
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Primary and Secondary Education System in Colombia



Source: https://db.in.tum.de/teaching/ws1415/hsufg/Kolumbien_20142015/Webseite/examples/navbar/educationSystem.html

This figure shows the different levels within the Colombian Education system, from preschool up until finishing secondary education, which in total constitutes 11 years of primary and secondary school. The students that were interviewed in this study were either at the high school level (7th and 8th graders), or at the medium education level (10th and 11th graders). The informal participants that were observed and that I had informal conversations with were found at the primary school level, high school level, and medium education level.

Appendix 2 – Observation Guide

Observation Checklist at Field Schools

1) School Environment

- a.** Description of the school – the exterior, the interior, the school buildings
- b.** How are the school surroundings? Describe!
 - i.** Safety/lack of safety?
 - ii.** Social problems
- c.** How does the school environment seem? Why?
- d.** How does the school environment seem to affect the students?
- e.** What kind of activities do the schools have outside of classrooms activities to foster a good school environment?
- f.** What programs from the Secretariat of Education are prominent at the schools?

2) Learning Environment

- a.** How does the learning environment seem?
- b.** Does the learning environment facilitate learning for the students? In what ways? And if not; how so?
- c.** Students' behavior
- d.** Noise and disturbances
- e.** Teachers' role
- f.** Peer influence – is it visible? How?
- g.** What are the classroom situations like?
 - i.** To what extent are the students paying attention in class?

3) Resilience

- a.** Relationships
 - i.** Among peers
 - ii.** With teachers and other school staff
- b.** Students' coping mechanisms
 - i.** Attitude
 - ii.** Other coping mechanisms

Appendix 3 – Interview Guides in English

Interview Guide Students

Background Questions

- What age are you?
- Where were you born?
- Whom do you live with at home?
- What jobs do your parents have?
- What importance does your family have for you?
- What class are you in (grade)?
- For how long have you attended this school?
- Did your parents go to school?
 - o If yes: What level did they reach?
 - o If no: What did they do instead of going to school?

Attending school in a violent urban area/coping mechanisms

- Can you describe what a typical school day looks like for you?
- How do you get to school and back home?
- How long do you stay at school?
- What do you have for lunch?
- How many students are in your class?
- What is it like for you to be in school?
- Do you see any bad things about attending school in this neighborhood, Los Mártires?
 - o If so: what bad things? And how do you on a daily basis deal with attending school in this area?
 - o If not: why do you feel safe in this area?
- If you ever feel unsafe (in school, at home, or somewhere else), what do you do?
- Whom do you turn to when you feel unsafe?

School environment, learning environment, safety

- What are your classes like?
- What is it like in class when the teacher talks?
- How are students in your school like in general, and how are students in your class in general?
- What is learning to you? What does it imply?
- What importance do your friends have for you?
- What do you understand by a friendship/what does friendship mean to you?
- What are your teachers like?
- Are there any particular teacher/s that you like more than the others? Why?
- What is the school's principal like?
- Can you describe your school to me?
- How do you feel when you are at school?
- What is the environment like?
- How are the school surroundings and the school buildings?
- What is your favorite subject at school? Why?
- What are your favorite things to do when you are in school?

- If you have a problem or an issue you need help with (it can be something personal or related to school, or something else) – whom do you turn to? Why?
- When do you feel safe? (In what situations) Why?
- When do you feel unsafe? (In what situations) Why?
- Where do you feel safe? (At school, at home, somewhere else?) Why?
- Where do you feel unsafe? (At school, at home, somewhere else?) Why?
- Do you feel happy when you are at school? Why/why not?
- Do you feel protected when you are at school? Why/why not?
- How do you feel that the school environment is affecting your performance at school?
- Have you ever experienced or witnessed violence?
 - o If so: Please describe what happened, and how you dealt with it
 - o If not: Do you know anyone who has?

Future plans/final questions

- What do you think you will do when you graduate from school? (Further studies? Work? Something else?)
- What do you want to work with when you grow up?
- How is school preparing you for the future?
- Do you have any additional information that you would like to share with me? (Related to what we have talked about, or something else)
- Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?

Interview Guide Teachers

Background/general information

- For how long have you been working in this school?
- Why did you decide to be a teacher?
- Why did you choose to work in this school?
- What do you like the most about your job?
- What do you like the least about your job?
- Can you describe a typical day in this school for me?

Learning

- How would you describe the concept of learning?
- How do you think the students in this school understand learning and what it is? What does it entail?

School located in a violent area

- Do you have any concerns with working in a school that is located in Los Mártires?
 - o If yes: what concerns?
 - o If no: what makes you feel relaxed about working in this area?
- What do you see as the main challenges with the school being located in this area?
- Can you relate some stories from the neighborhood that has you concerned as an employee here (if there are any)?

- Does it seem to you that the students in general are happy, safe and protected when they are at school? Why/why not?
- Could you describe the school environment that exists in this school?
- How do you think that the school environment is affecting the students' performance in school?
- Could you please describe the area in which the school is located?
- How do you think the neighborhood is affecting the children's school experience and their academic results?
- Have you ever experienced or witnessed violence in Los Mártires or anywhere else in Bogotá?
 - o If so; can you please describe what happened
 - o If no; do you know someone who has?

Finishing up

- Do you have anything else you would like to tell me? (It can be related to what we have talked about now, or something else)
- Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Guide School Counselor

General information/background

- For how long have you been working at School B, and what is your position here?
- How did you end up working exactly at this school?
- What do you like the most about your job?
- What do you like the least about your job?

Learning Environment/School Environment/School Safety

- Can you describe a typical school day here for me?
- How would you describe "learning"?
- What do you think learning entails for students in this school? (What does it mean for them?)
- In your opinion, are the students generally happy, safe, and protected when they are at school? Why/why not?
- Can you describe the school environment and the learning environment here at school?
- How do you think the school environment affects the academic results of the students?

Violent Urban Area

- Can you describe the area around the school?
- How do you think this zone affects the students and their school experience?
- Do you have any worries with coming to work here in Los Mártires? (You finish work around 6PM, when it is dark)
 - o If yes: What worries?
 - o If no: What makes you feel relaxed about coming to work here?
- What are the main challenges for a school that is located in this area?

- Are there any stories from the neighborhood that has you worried as an employee here?
- Have you ever experienced or witnessed violence here in Los Mártires or somewhere else in Bogotá?

Resilience and finishing up

- In what ways do the students show/have resilience in the realities or situations they find themselves in?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Interview Guide Parent

General information

- Where do you live, and who do you live with?
- What do you work with?
- What school do your children attend?
- For how long has your son (BS6) been attending School B?

Learning and school environment

- What does the concept learning mean to you?
- And what do you think learning means to BS6?
- Does it seem to you that your son BS6 is generally happy, safe, and protected when he is at school?
 - o Why/why not?
- What does BS6 usually tell you from his school days? Please describe
- In what way/s do you think the school environment affects BS6's academic results?
- Have you ever wished that your children were attending another school?
 - o Why/why not?

Violent urban area and Resilience

- Can you describe the area where School B is located?
 - o How do the students face going to school in this area?
 - o How do your children get to school? Do you feel relaxed when it comes to the way they get to school?
- Do you have any concerns with sending your children to a school that is located in Los Mártires?
 - o If yes; what concerns?
 - o If no; what makes you feel relaxed about your children attending school in this area?
- What do you see as the main challenges with the school being located in this area?
- Can you recount some stories from the neighborhood that has you concerned as a parent (if there are any)?

- How do you think the area affects the students?
- Have you even experienced or witnessed violence in Los Mártires or anywhere else in Bogotá?
 - o If so; can you please describe what happened?

Finishing up

- Do you have anything else you would like to share with me?

Interview Guide Individual Interview with Employee at the Secretariat of Education

General information/background

- Can you please tell me what position you have at the Secretariat of Education, what your profession is, and what your work at the Secretariat consists of?

Violent Urban Area

- Can you describe the area of Los Mártires? (In terms of security, well-being, people, population, commercial activity, etc.)
- Can you more specifically describe the areas around School A and School B?
- How do you think the areas around the schools affect the students?

School A and School B

- What kind of work does the Secretariat of Education do in School A and School B?
- What are the main problems/challenges in School A and School B?
- Do you think the students feel protected, safe and happy at school?

Resilience

- How do you think the students face the challenges that exist around the schools?
- In what ways do the students have/show resilience?

Interview Guide Focus Group with Employees at the Secretariat of Education

General information

- Can each of you please tell me how long you have been working at the Secretariat of Education, and what positions you hold there?

ZOE

- Can you explain to me what the School Orientation Zone is about? When and how did it start?
- What is the work you do at School A and School B?

School A and School B

- Can you describe the external dynamics of School A and School B?
- How have things been in this area after the intervention in “the Bronx”?
- How do you think the dynamics outside the schools affect the students?
- Both schools are public and located in Los Mártires. When you spend time at the schools, what differences do you see when it comes to school environments and problems inside the schools?

Resilience and Finishing up

- How do you think students in School A and School B face attending schools in Los Mártires? What strategies do they use to face this situation?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix 4 – Interview Guides in Spanish

Guía de Entrevista Estudiantes

Preguntas generales/antecedentes

- ¿Qué edad tienes?
- ¿Dónde naciste?
- ¿Con quién(es) vives en tu casa?
- ¿Qué trabajo tienen tus padres?
- ¿Qué importancia tiene tu familia para ti?
- ¿En qué clase estás (nivel)?
- ¿Por cuánto tiempo has asistido este colegio?
- ¿Tus padres iban al colegio?
 - o Si sí; ¿hasta qué clase/nivel/año estudiaron?
 - o Si no; ¿Qué hicieron en vez de ir a la escuela?

Asistiendo colegio en un área urbana violenta/mecanismos de supervivencia

- ¿Puedes describir un día típico para ti en el colegio?
- ¿Cómo llegas al colegio y cómo vuelves a casa?
- ¿Por cuánto tiempo estás en el colegio cada día?
- ¿Qué comes para el almuerzo?
- ¿De qué tamaño es tu clase? (¿cuántos alumnos?)
- ¿Cómo es para ti estar en el colegio?
- ¿Hay algunas cosas malas en asistir a una escuela en la localidad de los Mártires?
 - o Si sí; ¿Qué cosas malas? ¿Y cómo te enfrentes diariamente con asistir a una escuela en esta área?
 - o Si no; ¿Por qué te sientes seguro/a en esta área?
- Si alguna vez te sientes inseguro/a (en el colegio, en casa, o en otro lugar), ¿qué haces?
- ¿A quién acudes cuando te sientes inseguro?

Entorno/ambiente escolar, entorno/ambiente de aprendizaje, seguridad

- ¿Cómo son tus clases?
- ¿Cómo es en la clase cuando el profesor habla?
- ¿Cómo son los estudiantes de tu colegio en general, y cómo son los estudiantes de tu curso en general?
- ¿Qué significa aprendizaje para ti? ¿Qué implica?
- ¿Qué importancia tienen tus amigos para ti?
- ¿Qué entiendes con una amistad/qué significa una amistad para ti?
- ¿Cómo son tus profesores?
- ¿Hay algún/a profesor/a que te guste más que los otros? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Cómo es el rector/la rectora del colegio?
- ¿Puedes describir tu colegio, por favor?
- ¿Cómo te sientes cuando estás en la escuela?
- ¿Qué tal el ambiente?
- ¿Cómo son los alrededores del colegio y los edificios del colegio?

- ¿Cuál es tu asignatura favorita en el colegio? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Cuáles son tus cosas favoritas que hacer cuando estás en el colegio?
- Si tienes algún problema con el cual necesites ayuda (personal/académico, etc.) – ¿A quién acudes? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Cuándo te sientes seguro/a? (en qué situaciones) ¿Por qué?
- ¿Cuándo te sientes inseguro/a? (en qué situaciones) ¿Por qué?
- ¿Dónde te sientes seguro/a? (en el colegio, en casa, otro lugar) ¿Por qué?
- ¿Dónde te sientes inseguro/a? (en el colegio, en casa, otro lugar) ¿Por qué?
- ¿Te sientes feliz cuando estás en el colegio? ¿Por qué/por qué no?
- ¿Te sientes protegido/a cuando estás en el colegio? ¿Por qué/por qué no?
- ¿Cómo sientes que el ambiente escolar afecta a tu prestación en las asignaturas?
- ¿Has vivido violencia alguna vez?
 - o Si sí; Describe qué pasó, y cómo te enfrentaste con eso
 - o Si no; ¿Conoces a alguien que sí lo ha vivido?

Planes futuros/terminando

- ¿Qué crees que harás cuando salgas del colegio? (¿Estudios? ¿Trabajo? ¿Otra cosa?)
- ¿Con qué te gustaría trabajar cuando seas grande?
- ¿Cómo te prepara para el futuro tu colegio?
- ¿Tienes otra información que quieres compartir conmigo? (por ejemplo, del ambiente escolar, ambiente en las clases, ambiente de aprendizaje, familia, profesores, violencia, Los Mártires, u otras cosas)
- ¿Tienes algunas preguntas para mí?

Guía de Entrevista Profesores

Información general

- ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas trabajando en este colegio?
- ¿Por qué decidiste ser profesor/a?
- ¿Por qué decidiste trabajar en este colegio?
- ¿Qué es lo que más te gusta de tu trabajo?
- ¿Qué es lo que menos te gusta de tu trabajo?
- ¿Puedes describir un día típico para ti en el colegio?

Aprendizaje

- ¿Cómo puedes describir el concepto de aprendizaje?
- ¿Cómo crees que los estudiantes en este colegio entienden aprendizaje y lo que es?
¿Qué implica para ellos?

Colegio ubicado en un área violenta

- ¿Tienes algunas preocupaciones con trabajar en un colegio que está ubicado en Los Mártires?
 - o Si sí; ¿Qué preocupaciones?
 - o Si no; ¿Qué es lo que te hace sentir relajado acerca de trabajar aquí?
- ¿Cuáles son los retos/desafíos principales para un colegio ubicado en esta área?

- ¿Puedes relatar una(s) historia(s) de la zona que te tiene preocupado/a como empleado/a aquí? (Si hay alguno/s)
- ¿Te parece que los estudiantes generalmente están felices, seguros y protegidos cuando están en el colegio? ¿Por qué/por qué no?
- ¿Puedes describir el ambiente escolar que hay en este colegio?
- ¿Cómo crees que el ambiente escolar afecta a los resultados académicos de los estudiantes?
- ¿Puedes describir la zona donde está ubicado el colegio?
- ¿Cómo crees que esta zona afecta a las experiencias escolares de los estudiantes?
- ¿Alguna vez has vivido o visto violencia en Los Mártires u otro lugar en Bogotá?
 - o Si sí; ¿Puedes describir lo que pasó?
 - o Si no; ¿Conoces a alguien que sí lo ha vivido/visto?

Terminando

- ¿Hay otras cosas que quieres contarme? (Puede ser relacionado a lo que hemos hablado, u otras cosas)
- ¿Tienes alguna/s pregunta/s para mí?

Guía de Entrevista Orientador

Información general

- ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas trabajando en Colegio B, y cuál es tu puesto aquí?
- ¿Cómo llegaste a trabajar justamente en este colegio?
- ¿Qué es lo que más te gusta de tu trabajo?
- ¿Y qué es lo que menos te gusta?

Ambiente de Aprendizaje/Ambiente Escolar/Seguridad Escolar

- ¿Puedes describir un día típico para ti en el colegio?
- ¿Cómo puedes describir el concepto de aprendizaje?
- ¿Y qué crees que significa aprendizaje para los estudiantes este colegio? (¿Qué significa/implica para ellos?)
- En tu opinión, ¿los estudiantes generalmente están felices, seguros y protegidos aquí en el colegio?
- ¿Puedes describir el ambiente escolar y el ambiente de aprendizaje que hay aquí en el colegio?
- ¿Cómo crees que el ambiente escolar afecta a los resultados académicos de los estudiantes?

Área Urbana Violenta

- ¿Puedes describir el área alrededor del colegio?
- ¿Cómo crees que esta zona afecta a los estudiantes y su experiencia escolar?
- ¿Tienes algunas preocupaciones con venir a trabajar aquí en Los Mártires? (Sales del trabajo a las 6PM cuando está oscuro, ¿no cierto?
 - o Si sí; ¿Qué preocupaciones?

- Si no; ¿Qué te hace sentir relajado acerca de venir a trabajar aquí?
- ¿Cuáles son los principales retos/desafíos para un colegio que está ubicado en esta zona?
- ¿Hay alguna(s) historia(s) de la zona que te tiene preocupado como empleado aquí?
- ¿Alguna vez has vivido o visto violencia aquí en Los Mártires u otro lugar de Bogotá?

Resiliencia y terminando

- ¿De qué manera muestran/tienen resiliencia los estudiantes frente a sus realidades/sus situaciones?
- ¿Hay más cosas que quieres compartir conmigo?

Guía de Entrevista Padres

Información general

- ¿Dónde vive usted, y con quiénes vive?
- ¿En qué trabaja usted?
- ¿En qué colegio van sus hijos?
- ¿Cuánto tiempo lleva su hijo (BS6) en Colegio B?

Aprendizaje y ambiente escolar

- ¿Qué significa para usted el concepto aprendizaje?
- ¿Y qué cree usted que aprendizaje significa para BS6?
- ¿Le parece que su hijo BS6 generalmente está feliz, seguro y protegido cuando está en el colegio?
 - ¿Por qué? / ¿Por qué no?
- ¿Qué suele contarle BS6 sobre su vida cotidiana en el colegio? ¿Puede describir?
- ¿De qué manera cree usted que el ambiente escolar afecta a los resultados académicos de BS6?
- ¿Alguna vez ha deseado que sus hijos asistieran a otro colegio?
 - ¿Por qué? / ¿Por qué no?

Área urbana violenta y Resiliencia

- ¿Puede describir la zona donde está ubicado Colegio B?
 - ¿Cómo se enfrentan los estudiantes a asistir a un colegio en esa zona?
 - ¿Cómo llegan sus hijos al colegio? ¿Se siente tranquila acerca de la manera de que lleguen al colegio?
- ¿Tiene algunas preocupaciones con mandar a sus hijos a un colegio que queda en la localidad de Los Mártires?
 - Si sí; ¿Qué preocupaciones?
 - Si no; ¿Qué le hace sentir relajada acerca de que sus hijos asisten a un colegio en esta zona?

- ¿Cuáles son los principales retos/desafíos con que el colegio está ubicado en esta zona?
- ¿Hay algunas historias de la localidad que le tiene preocupada como madre?
- ¿Cómo cree usted que la zona afecta a los estudiantes?
- ¿Alguna vez ha vivido/visto violencia en Los Mártires u otro lugar de Bogotá?
- ¿Puedes describir?

Terminando

- ¿Tiene otras cosas que quiere compartir conmigo?

Guía de Entrevista, Entrevista Individual con Empleado en la Secretaría de Educación

Información General

- ¿Puedes contarme qué puesto tienes en la Secretaría de Educación, cuál es tu profesión, y de qué consiste el trabajo que haces en la Secretaría de Educación?

Área Urbana Violenta

- ¿Puedes describir la zona de Los Mártires? (En términos de seguridad, bienestar, gente, población, comercio, etc.)
- ¿Puedes más específicamente describir los alrededores de Colegio A y Colegio B?
- ¿Cómo crees que las zonas alrededor de los colegios afectan a los estudiantes?

Colegio A y Colegio B

- ¿Qué tipo de trabajo hace la Secretaría de Educación en Colegio A y Colegio B?
- ¿Cuáles son los principales problemáticos en Colegio A y Colegio B?
- ¿Crees que los estudiantes se sienten protegidos, seguros y felices en los colegios?

Resiliencia

- ¿Cómo crees que los estudiantes se enfrentan a las problemáticas que existen alrededor de los colegios?
- ¿De qué maneras muestran/tienen resiliencia los estudiantes?

Guía de Entrevista Grupo Focal con Empleados en la Secretaría de Educación

Información General

- ¿Puede cada uno de ustedes decir cuánto tiempo lleva trabajando en la Secretaría de Educación, y qué puestos tienen ahí?

ZOE

- ¿Pueden explicarme de qué se trata la Zona de Orientación Escolar? ¿Cuándo y cómo empezó?
- ¿Qué es el trabajo que hacen en Colegio A y Colegio B?

Colegio A y Colegio B

- ¿Pueden describir las dinámicas externas de Colegio A y Colegio B?
- ¿Cómo han sido las cosas en estas áreas después de la intervención en “el Bronx”?
- ¿Cómo creen que las dinámicas externas de los colegios afectan a los estudiantes?
- Los dos colegios son públicos y ubicados en Los Mártires. Cuando ustedes pasan tiempo en los colegios, ¿cuáles son las diferencias que ven en términos de ambiente escolar y problemáticas dentro de los colegios?

Resiliencia y Terminando

- ¿Cómo creen ustedes que los estudiantes en Colegio A y Colegio B se enfrentan a asistir colegios en Los Mártires? ¿Qué estrategias usan frente a su situación?
- ¿Hay otras cosas que quieren compartir conmigo?

Appendix 5 – Request for Participation in Research Project

Solicitud de participación en proyecto de investigación *Experiencias de alumnos en un área urbana de Bogotá*

Respetados padres de familia,

Me dirijo a ustedes para socializarles la investigación que llevaré a cabo en el mes de octubre en los colegios Liceo Nacional Agustín Nieto Caballero y Colegio Eduardo Santos, así como para solicitarles su consentimiento para las actividades que tengo previstas con los niños.

Mi nombre es Ane Omland, soy estudiante de la Maestría de Filosofía en Educación Comparativa e Internacional la Universidad de Oslo (Noruega), y la presente investigación tiene como propósito la realización de mi tesis.

¿De qué se trata la investigación?

Con este estudio espero conocer las experiencias que los alumnos tienen al asistir a una escuela en el barrio de los Mártires, como lo son el Liceo Nacional Agustín Nieto Caballero y el Colegio Eduardo Santos.

Mi trabajo en los colegios se basará en observaciones en la sala de clase y en entrevistas individuales con los participantes. Después de las entrevistas individuales con los estudiantes, la investigadora querrá llevar a cabo entrevistas con los padres que quieran participar. La investigadora se encargará de las entrevistas, que durarán aproximadamente 20 minutos cada una. Toda la información que se da en las entrevistas y durante las observaciones en el colegio se tratará de forma anónima, y los datos serán utilizados únicamente para los fines de esta investigación y se tratarán confidencialmente.

Espero que esta investigación, además de favorecer mis estudios de posgrado, sirva para promover conocimiento y generar consciencia sobre la situación actual de la educación en los mencionados colegios.

Participación voluntaria

La participación en este estudio es voluntaria, y usted puede en cualquier momento retirar su consentimiento sin dar ninguna razón. Si se retira, toda la información sobre usted será anonimizada. Usted puede decidir (1) si su hijo/hija participe o no, (2) si usted(es) mismo(s) participen o no, y (3) si la investigadora podrá tomar fotos de su hijo/hija o no.

Si desea participar (y/o dejar que su hijo/hija participe en las entrevistas), por favor llene el formulario que viene junto con esta solicitud. Si tienen preguntas sobre el estudio, por favor póngase en contacto con la investigadora: Ane Omland, al celular 3223643000, o al correo aneomland@hotmail.com.

¡Muchas gracias por su atención!

Un cordial saludo, Ane Omland

Consentimiento para participar en el estudio - estudiantes

He recibido la información sobre el estudio, y doy el consentimiento para que mi hijo/hija participe. Sí: ____ No: ____

Doy el consentimiento para poder tomar fotos de mi hijo/hija (las fotos serán usados únicamente para fines de esta investigación). Sí: ____ No: ____

Nombre del participante (alumno): _____

Nombre del padre/tutor legal: _____

Firma del padre/tutor legal: _____ Fecha: _____

Consentimiento para participar en el estudio – padres

He recibido la información sobre el estudio, y quiero participar.

Nombre del participante: _____ Fecha: _____

Fechas/días/horarios que me convienen para llevar a cabo la entrevista:

Request for Participation in Research Project *Student Experiences in an Urban Area of Bogotá* (English Translation)

Dear parents,

I am writing to you to explain the research that I will carry out in September, October and November in School A and School B, as well as to request your consent participation for the activities that I plan with the students.

My name is Ane Omland, I am a student in Master of Philosophy in Comparative and International Education at the University of Oslo (Norway), and the present research's purpose is the production of my thesis.

What is the research about?

With this study, I hope to uncover the experiences that the students have with attending school in the neighborhood of Los Mártires.

My work in the schools will be based on observations in the classrooms and on individual interviews with the participants. After the individual interviews, the researcher wishes to carry out interviews with the parents who want to participate. The researcher will be in charge of the interviews, which lasts approximately 20 minutes each. All the information from the interviews and observations in the schools will be treated anonymously, and the data will be used only for the purposes of this study and will be treated confidentially.

I hope that this research, in addition to serving my studies, will serve to promote knowledge and raise awareness about the current educational situation in the aforementioned schools.

Voluntary participation

The participation in this study is voluntary, and you can at any time withdraw your consent without giving any reason. If you withdraw your consent, all information about you will be anonymized. You can decide (1) if your son/daughter participates or not, (2) if you participate yourselves or not, and (3) if the researcher can take photos of your son/daughter or not.

If you wish to participate (and/or let your son/daughter participate in the interviews), please fill out the form that comes with this request. If you have questions about the study, please contact the researcher: Ane Omland, on the cell phone number 322364300, or email aneomland@hotmail.com.

Thank you for your attention!

Kind regards,

Ane Omland

Consent to participate in the study - students

I have received the information about the study, and I give consent for my son/daughter to participate. Yes: ____ No: ____

I give consent to take photos of my son/daughter (the photos will be used only for the purposes of this research). Yes: ____ No: ____

Name of participant (student): _____

Name of parent/legal guardian: _____

Signature of parent/legal guardian: _____ Date: _____

Consent to participate in the study – parents

I have received the information about the study, and I want to participate

Name of participant: _____ Date: _____

Dates/days/times that suit me for carrying out the interview:

Appendix 6 – Coding Scheme for NVivo Coding

<i>Category:</i>	Resilience	Learning Environment	School Environment	Urban Violence	Adult Worries
<i>Codes:</i>	Domestic violence (7)	Disturbances and noise (62)	Good/bad (75)	Heavy/dangerous neighborhood (26)	Teachers' affection/love for the students (4)
	Future (30)	Learning (71)	School A bad reputation (7)	Insecurity (33)	Frustrations (3)
	Lack of present family (18)	Respect/disrespect (8)	School surroundings (74)	Violence (14)	Vulnerable students (3)
	Normalized (3)	Students (59)	Social Problems (9)		
	Relationships (61)	Teachers (61)	Safety/lack of safety (47)		
	Survival Strategies/coping mechanisms (57)		Work Environment (7)		
			Secretariat Programs (9)		

The coding scheme shows the main categories used in NVivo, and the codes under each category. The scheme also shows how many references each code had in the total data material (transcribed interviews and field notes).