

Extreme school violence in Brazil: the impact of neoliberalism on the atomization of the subject and the erosion of the social bond

*Daniel Cara**
*Andressa Pellanda***

ABSTRACT: The article analyzes the escalation of extreme school violence in Brazil as a broad social configuration's symptom, articulating recent theoretical-critical reports. It defines the phenomenon as premeditated and lethal attacks, hybrids between rampage and targeted shootings, and understands it beyond ultra-conservatism or online hate. The neoliberalization of educational policy generates erosion of the "common," weakening the social bond, reconfiguring the school as a competitive arena, intensifying the atomization of the subject and school resentment, creating conditions for capture by extremism. Facing barbarism requires restoring the school as a space of belonging and coexistence and rebuilding bonds and rights.

Keywords: EXTREME SCHOOL VIOLENCE; NEOLIBERALISM; RIGHT TO EDUCATION; SOCIAL BOND; PSYCHOANALYSIS.

Violência escolar extrema no Brasil: o impacto do neoliberalismo, na atomização do sujeito e da erosão do laço social

RESUMO: O artigo analisa a escalada de violência escolar extrema no Brasil como sintoma de uma configuração social ampla, articulando relatórios teórico-críticos recentes. Define o fenômeno como ataques premeditados e letais, híbridos entre *rampage* e *targeted shootings*, e o compreende além do ultraconservadorismo ou da circulação de ódio on-line. A neoliberalização da política educacional gera erosão do "comum", enfraquecendo o laço social, reconfigurando a escola como arena competitiva, intensificando a atomização do sujeito e o ressentimento escolar, criando condições para captura pelo extremismo. Enfrentar a barbárie requer restaurar a escola como espaço de pertencimento e convivência e reconstruir laços e direitos.

Palavras-chave: VIOLÊNCIA ESCOLAR EXTREMA; NEOLIBERALISMO; DIREITO À EDUCAÇÃO; LAÇO SOCIAL; PSICANÁLISE.

Violence scolaire extrême au Brésil: l'impact du néolibéralisme sur l'atomisation du sujet et l'érosion du lien social

RESUME: L'article analyse l'escalade de la violence scolaire extrême au Brésil comme symptôme d'une configuration sociale, articulant des rapports théorico-critiques récents.

* PhD in Education from USP, professor at the School of Education of USP. He is honorary coordinator of the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education and founder of DEEP-USP (Study and Research Group on the Right to Education, Economics, Comparative Education, and Educational Policies).

ORCID Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2136-1203>

E-mail: daniel.cara@usp.br

** PhD in International Relations from USP, general coordinator of the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, and member of DEEP-USP (Study and Research Group on the Right to Education, Economics, Comparative Education, and Educational Policies).

ORCID Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8172-5641>

E-mail: dre.pellanda@usp.br

Il définit le phénomène comme des attaques préméditées et létales, hybrides entre fusillades de rampage et tirs ciblés, le comprenant au-delà de l'ultra-conservatisme ou de la haine en ligne. La néolibéralisation de la politique éducative génère l'érosion du « commun », affaiblissant le lien social, reconfigurant l'école comme arène compétitive, intensifiant l'atomisation du sujet et le ressentiment scolaire, créant des conditions pour l'extrémisme. Faire face à la barbarie nécessite de restaurer l'école comme espace d'appartenance et de coexistence et de reconstruire les liens et les droits.

Mots-clés: VIOLENCE SCOLAIRE EXTREME ; NEOLIBERALISME ; DROIT A L'EDUCATION ; LIEN SOCIAL ; PSYCHANALYSE.

Introduction

Based on three reports (CARA, 2022; CARA, 2023; PELLANDA; ABRAMOVAY, 2025), this article analyzes the recent escalation of extreme violence in Brazilian schools, interpreting it not as a succession of isolated cases attributable solely to the rise of ultra-conservatism (CARA, 2019), but as a symptom of a broader social configuration. Instead of restricting the explanation to factors such as hate speech on social networks, the glorification of guns, or political-ideological sectarianism – although these elements are decisively relevant – the text argues that such episodes are the visible tip of a deeper process of reconfiguration of subjectivity and educational institutions under the hegemony of neoliberalism. This regime is not limited to an economic model but imposes itself as a rationality that organizes perceptions, affections, and relationships, infiltrating everyday school life through policies of individual accountability, permanent competitiveness, and the erosion of the sense of common good.

In this context, the school is gradually displaced from its historical function as a public space oriented by the idea of human development, coexistence, and the construction of a collective societal project. Neoliberal logic, by introducing performance metrics, rankings, business management practices, and the discourse of the "entrepreneur of the self," promotes the atomization of the school subject – students, teachers, administrators, and families – who come to see themselves as competitors in a results-driven market. Radical meritocracy converts social differences into supposed individual failings, obscuring structural inequalities and naturalizing failures as personal fault. This movement empties out the experience of the common, weakens the feeling of belonging, and ruptures the possibility of recognizing the other as a fellow being, opening the door to indifference, resentment, and extreme forms of aggressiveness.

Articulating this diagnosis with psychoanalysis, the article argues that the crisis of the social bond generated by this neoliberal rationality has a direct impact on the psychic constitution of individuals. The school, which could function as one of the main devices for collective symbolization and sublimation – a place where conflicts and anxieties can be given words, mediation, and framing – progressively loses its capacity to offer stable references, attentive listening, and experiences of recognition. In an institution permeated by performance pressures, the precarization of teaching work, and the weakening of bonds, adolescents find fewer and fewer spaces to work through the malaise they experience, whether related to family, sexuality, the future, or the daily violence they suffer and witness. Without this symbolic work, the risk increases that suffering translates into destructive acting out, including in the form of school massacres.

School attacks are thus read as extreme manifestations of a scenario in which the institution's sustaining function has been eroded. When the school ceases to be a place where one can speak about what does not fit, what hurts, and what exceeds the norms –

that is, when it ceases to welcome the real suffering – the subject tends to seek outlets through hatred, revenge, and the destruction of the other and themselves. The spectacularization of violence on social networks, combined with the circulation of narratives that glorify the aggressor as someone who "responds" to an experience of humiliation, finds fertile ground in adolescents already unmoored from meaningful bonds. The failure is not merely moral or individual, but structural: a school that cannot produce shared meaning and a sense of belonging becomes a setting for barbarism, not a barrier against it.

Faced with this scenario, the article concludes that confronting extreme violence in schools cannot be limited to physical security measures, repressive protocols, or purely punitive responses. Although emergency actions are necessary to protect the school community, they do not reach the root of the problem. It is necessary to restore the school as a public space for speech, listening, and the elaboration of conflict, directly opposing the logic of possessive neoliberal individualism. This implies placing back at the center the work on school climate, conflict mediation, student participation, and the construction of supportive bonds, as well as demanding the objective conditions for educators to exercise a function of care and symbolization. Only a school that recognizes and organizes itself as a community of belonging and meaning-making – and not as a kind of results-driven business – can offer young people the symbolic resources necessary for desire to be oriented towards creation and not destruction.

Extreme school violence in Brazil: conceptual definition and characterization of the phenomenon

The phenomenon of school violence manifests itself in different ways within the daily life of Brazilian educational institutions, including physical aggression, intimidation, incivility, discrimination, symbolic violence, and interpersonal conflicts. Within this heterogeneous set, however, a qualitatively distinct modality of violence emerges due to its lethality, premeditation, and structural impact on the school community and on the very public purpose of education: extreme school violence, a category that has been consolidated in the country by recent governmental and academic studies. According to the report *Attacks on Schools in Brazil: Analysis of the Phenomenon and Recommendations for Government Action* (CARA, 2023) and the research *To Remember and React: Designing Possible Futures from the Re-signification of Extreme Violence Attacks Against Schools in Brazil* (PELLANDA; ABRAMOVAY, 2025), this refers to planned attacks with the explicit intention of injuring or killing people in the school environment, constituting "the main and most dramatic manifestation of violence against schools" (CARA, 2023, p. 46) due to the rupture they produce in the social, symbolic, and protective function of the educational institution.

Extreme school violence is not, therefore, to be confused with spontaneous conflicts between students, bullying, indiscipline phenomena, isolated attacks driven by immediate impulses, or targeted aggression without prior organization. Unlike these events, extreme attacks stem from conscious premeditation, involving detailed planning, intentional choice of victims, strategic timing, gathering information about institutional vulnerabilities, and the use of weapons or instruments capable of maximizing harm. A recurring characteristic highlighted by research is that these acts reveal not only a desire to harm specific individuals but also to target the school as a public institution for socialization, relationship-building, and knowledge production, which gives them a performative and symbolic dimension that exceeds direct aggression.



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Thus, such attacks incorporate a dual direction of violence: against individuals (students, administrators, teachers, staff) and against the school unit itself, which brings them closer to already typified international phenomena, such as the *rampage school shooting* — violence directed against the institution and its community, indiscriminately — and the *targeted school shooting* — revenge against specific targets. In Brazil, it can be said that the cases constitute a hybrid between rampage shooting and targeted shooting, meaning that lethality is articulated simultaneously with personal motivations and systemic meanings linked to the school. From this hybridization arises a central specificity of the Brazilian phenomenon: the choice of the school is not contingent; it becomes a strategic setting, an instrument of public message, and a symbolic target.

Another distinctive element of this phenomenon is its communicational dimension, which structures both the planning and the subsequent impact. Young people involved in such crimes seek to project recognition, belonging, or celebrityization of the violent act, not only within the physical territory of the school but mainly in the virtual environment. This symbolic motivation is potentiated by extremist networks that operate as communities of affiliation, offering language, tutorials, legitimation, and narrative repertoires for the practice of violence. According to the analyzed reports included in the bibliography of this text (CARA, 2022; CARA, 2023; PELLANDA; ABRAMOVAY, 2025), the aggressors circulate in online groups that glorify past massacres, produce attack manuals, promote the aestheticization of brutality, and encourage the search for violent "authorism." In these networks, violence takes on a "playful" character, treated as a spectacle and competitive performance, organized "as a ludic experience," which contributes to the (anti)ethical and abject detachment of the extreme act.

The social composition of these perpetrators also confirms the structuring nature of the phenomenon. Research available to date identifies, predominantly, male students or former students, young people with a history of experiences of humiliation, invisibility, isolation, or resentment at school. The reports are emphatic, however, in stating that such subjective elements do not explain the phenomenon individually, as they only constitute fertile ground for capture by extremist ideologies, especially misogynistic, racist, pro-gun, and anti-democratic ones. This means that extreme violence is not merely a "psychological problem" of isolated young people, nor a direct effect of individualized

mental disorder, but must be understood as a social manifestation inserted in broader political and cultural crises.

In view of this, the attacks constitute, according to the study *To Remember and React*, "acute expressions of prolonged crises" (PELLANDA; ABRAMOVAY, 2025, p. 29), exposing the structural incapacity — of the state, family, and school — to sustain bonds of protection and care for children and adolescents. Extreme violence thus presents itself as a symptom of the weakening of social protection policies, the erosion of community ties, and the absence of preventive and interventional protocols, both in school networks and in state public policies. At the same time, they reveal a crisis of legitimacy of the school as a public space and place of belonging, a condition without which the institution ceases to be a symbolic reference of protection and paradoxically becomes a target.

Given this scenario, extreme school violence in Brazil should be defined as: premeditated and lethal attacks directed at the school and the individuals who comprise it, with the intention of producing death, collective trauma, and symbolic impact, often articulated with digital extremist networks and resulting from social processes of lack of protection, radicalization, institutional resentment, and crisis of school belonging. This definition goes beyond the legal-criminal treatment of the phenomenon, evidencing its multi-causal, socio-political, communicational, institutional, and subjective character, which imposes the need for integrated public policies that do not restrict confrontation to the security logic, but rather reorganize the protective, ethical, and democratic role of the school.

In the following topic, we develop the distinction between the "right to education" and the "right to learning," based on the subordination of Brazilian educational policy to economic rationality — particularly to the proficiency-curriculum system, a structuring axis of the neoliberal face of educational reforms. The idea is defended that the affirmation of this economic rationality is also a factor that influences and inflames the phenomenon of attacks on schools.

Right to Education and Right to Learning: The Neoliberal Face of Brazilian Educational Policy

The emergence, in recent decades, of the expression "right to learning" in the vocabulary of Brazilian educational policies does not constitute a mere technical or terminological innovation. It is, rather, a profound reconfiguration of a broad and historically consolidated social right: the right to education. In this process, this right is progressively disfigured and reduced to an individual dimension, measurable by criteria that are alien to — or, at minimum, insufficient for — the educational mission established in art. 205 of the Federal Constitution (BRASIL, 1988), which comprises the full development of the person, preparation for the exercise of citizenship, and qualification for work. The so-called right to learning thus becomes operationalized as a quantifiable substrate, measured mainly through proficiency assessments in large-scale exams, aligning itself with the economic and managerial rationality that has been imposed on public schools. This semantic mutation of educational policies must be understood in light of the dispute between Education and Economics, in which pedagogical questions are secondary and subordinated to the concerns, metrics, and methods specific to the economic field (CARA, 2025, p. 48). This process not only redefines the evaluation methods of school systems but also shifts the very normative meaning of the right to education.

The right to education, historically constructed as a social right of a collective nature, involves political, cultural, and human dimensions that – obviously – go beyond the measurement of results. It encompasses the State's presence in guaranteeing provision, access, permanence, structural conditions, professional valorization, adequate funding, and, above all, the public and citizen-oriented purpose of the school. In other words, it is a right that presupposes education as an "essential part of the human condition" and not as an instrument subordinate to extrinsic purposes (CARA, 2025, p. 58-60).

In contrast, the right to learning, by becoming institutionalized as the focus of public policy, shifts the center of educational action towards the individual result, typical of neoliberal grammar, according to which social rights must be converted into "performance indicators" and subjected to principles of efficiency, productivity, and economic cost-benefit. From this inflection, learning ceases to be a consequence of guaranteeing schooling conditions and becomes the measured final product of an educational system that must be competitive, evaluable, and rankable. Thus, what comes to be assured is not education as a public good, but the measurability of its individual product: performance.

This shift does not occur without an institutional engineering. It operates through an articulating device that reorganizes curriculum, funding, management, and evaluation: "the 'standardized curriculum-proficiency system'" (CARA, 2025, p. 81). Inspired by the neoliberal appropriation of human capital theory (ELIAS, 2018), in which schooling is converted into individual and state investment to generate economic productivity, this device is structured around three main elements:

1. Centrality of standardized assessments (focusing on Portuguese Language and Mathematics).
2. Curriculum reduced to the assessable areas, which transforms the school curriculum into a means to increase external indices.
3. Translation of results into management mechanisms based on goals, ranking, incentives, and punishments.

This model follows the logic that, in the economic field, seeks to subject social policies to the purposes of productivity, order, and increasing wealth as desirable educational effects (ELIAS, 2018). Education thus ceases to be justified by its formative, cultural, intellectual, and emancipatory function, and starts to be validated by its capacity to deliver measurable results. This mechanism operates both as a technical discourse and as a government device, along the lines of Michel Foucault's governmentality¹ (FOUCAULT, 2008), but which can also be understood from an in-depth and careful analysis of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony (GRAMSCI, 2023)².

¹ For Foucault, governmentality is the modern form of exercising power that consists of governing the conduct of individuals and populations through knowledge, techniques, and apparatuses, articulating biopower and subjectivation. It goes beyond the State and direct coercion, combining technologies of domination and technologies of the self, with centrality given to political economy and to urban and security mechanisms, in order to manage life, productivity, and social flows. In neoliberalism, this rationality intensifies by shaping subjects who – dramatically – "self-govern" as *homo oeconomicus*, integrating (supposed) individual freedom and state management subjected to economic interest, within the same logic of capillary power.

² In Gramsci, the concept of hegemony refers to the capacity of a class or social group to lead society not only through coercion, but above all through the construction of consensus, causing its values, worldviews, and particular interests to be internalized as universal. This intellectual and moral direction is exercised mainly within the scope of civil society, where consciousnesses are formed and meanings are disputed. It is in this context that Gramsci formulates the notion of the

The effect of this reconfiguration is profound: by restricting the educational right to the measurement of individual results, the State legitimizes the reduction of its responsibility. If individual learning becomes the core of the right, then school failure is shifted onto the subject — student, teacher, or school — and not onto the system, funding, or the precariousness of provision conditions. With this, a collective right is transformed into individual responsibility. In political terms, the demand for state guarantee is replaced by the duty of performance of educational subjects.

The neoliberal face of the right to learning, therefore, lies not in recognizing the importance of learning, but in its capture by mechanisms of quantification, competition, and accountability. By reducing the school to utilitarian cognitive training, the standardized curriculum-proficiency system empties the public function of education and legitimizes the advance of economic rationality over pedagogy. Thus, the warning is recalled: only by dominating economics will educators be able to restore the meaning of the right to education as a human right, and not as an indicator of performance and individual accountability (CARA, 2025).

Below, we develop three sub-topics, articulating the critique of the right to learning as a neoliberal expression, highlighting competence, socio-emotional competencies, Brazilian educational policies, and the relationship with extreme school violence.

The Right to Learning, Competence, and Socio-emotional Competencies

The transition from the right to education to the right to learning occurs simultaneously with the epistemological shift of education towards the regime of competence. In Brazil, the notion of competence began to organize educational policy through reforms that link curriculum, assessment, and management to the economic paradigm, so that learning ceases to be human formation and becomes the measurable acquisition of operational capacities. As Cara observes, when economics subordinates education, "education comes to be filtered through economic perspectives and criteria" (CARA, 2025, p. 48). It is within this framework that competence becomes the new regulator: teaching is not about forming subjects, but about training useful skills.

In the same movement, the second critical component emerges: socio-emotional competencies. Although presented as a humanizing advancement, within the regime of individualized learning, they are converted into a tool for subjective accountability. Socio-emotional formation replaces structural policies (funding, working conditions, and school reception) with a behavioral ideology of self-control, perseverance, empathy, and resilience. Under the imperative of performance, resilience ceases to be a human condition and becomes an obligation to endure the precariousness of schooling.

Competencies, therefore, are directly articulated with the right to learning, because both shift the focus from the right to individual performance. If the subject "does not learn," the failure is attributed to a deficit of effort, focus, emotional discipline, or self-management. As a result, the State is exempted from its duty and transforms structural inequality into individual incapacity. Under neoliberalism, educational policy

expanded State, understood as the articulation between political society (coercive institutions) and civil society (apparatuses of hegemony). The State, therefore, is not reduced to the repressive apparatus, but encompasses the set of institutions and practices that organize consensus and domination, combining force and persuasion. Hegemony is, thus, the organizing principle of the expanded State, and its maintenance or contestation depends on permanent political and cultural struggles. For Gramsci, State = Political Society + Civil Society; coercion + persuasion.

becomes a public policy that, instead of guaranteeing the right, naturalizes school failure as the student's psychic and moral failure.

Standardized Curriculum-Proficiency System and Educational Policies in Brazil: Saeb, Ideb, BNCC and the New Secondary School

The neoliberal apparatus for subordinating education to the economy materializes in Brazil through the standardized curriculum-proficiency system, a structuring axis of educational reforms. This device reorganizes public policies through a feedback loop:

1. Standardized external assessments (Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica – Saeb (Basic Education Assessment System)) → measures proficiency in Portuguese Language and Mathematics.
2. National index (Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica – Ideb (Basic Education Assessment System)) → transforms the Saeb results and student flow into a supposedly simple and pedagogically valid value, establishing goals and facilitating competitive rankings.
3. Standardized curriculum (Base Nacional Comum Curricular – BNCC (National Common Curricular Base)) → aligns content with skills measurable in the tests.
4. Secondary Education Reform (Novo Ensino Médio) → restructures the school according to neoliberal mentality: the student as an entrepreneur of the self.

Broadly speaking, this circuit produces the subordination of education to economic rationality, as educational policy becomes oriented by criteria of supposed efficiency and technical productivity, while its humanizing function is sidelined.

In this sense, the BNCC transforms the curriculum into a technical protocol, and the Novo Ensino Médio converts it into an educational market, fragmented into pathways, made more flexible, and able to be outsourced to public-private partnerships. Thus, the right is no longer organized around guaranteeing a common formation and comes to depend on the individual's capacity to navigate choices within an unequal educational market. In summary: the right to learning, linked to measurable proficiency, produces a curriculum-as-commodity and a student-as-client, while the right to education defended a public curriculum and a student-as-citizen.

From the Right to Learning to Extreme School Violence: Atomization, Resentment, and Barbarism

The critique of neoliberal reforms is not restricted to their cognitive or curricular effects: it reveals a profound social impact on school bonds. When the educational right is converted into individual performance, the school ceases to be a community and becomes a competitive arena. The centrality of competencies — cognitive and socio-emotional — produces the psychologization of inequality, individualization of failure, competition, and subjective blame, weakening belonging.

This terrain, already documented in teacher and school accountability policies, creates a dual place for students: the performative winners and the unproductive disposable ones. Extreme violence finds a fertile context here: young people who are not recognized by the standardized curriculum-proficiency system are not merely considered insufficient; they are rendered invisible. Their presence at school loses social and symbolic value.

As the official reports show (CARA, 2022; CARA, 2023), the perpetrators of attacks are often young people who experience isolation and school resentment, but

whose suffering is captured by extremist networks that offer them belonging and a language for their aggressive rupture. In this context, the violence is not impulsive: it is a symbolic production in the face of an absence of recognition.

Thus, the right to learning, when converted into a neoliberal apparatus, does not protect the school: it leaves the subject unprotected, without a place in the collective, without institutional mediation, and without public value. Barbarism emerges not from the absence of education, but from its conversion into an economic metric.

Psychoanalysis, Neoliberalism, and the Destruction of the Social Bond: Atomization of the Subject, Radical Meritocracy, and Dismantling of the Common

The psychoanalytic reading of the scenario described in the previous topics allows us to make explicit a decisive dimension of the problem: extreme school violence should not be understood merely as an "individual deviation" or as a direct effect of an ultra-conservative political environment, but as a social symptom of a broader transformation in the conditions of subject constitution and the sustenance of the collective bond. When educational policy captures the right to education – historically conceived as a social right and, therefore, structurally collective – and reconverts it into measurable individual performance, it alters not only the way of evaluating and governing the school, but the regime of subjectivation produced within it. The school ceases to operate primarily as a public place for socialization, symbolization, and the construction of belonging, to function as an apparatus for selection, comparison, and individual blame, oriented by proficiency metrics and a managerial grammar of goals and ranking. In psychoanalytic terms, this mutation shifts the school from a potentially structuring position of the social bond (capable of mediating conflicts and offering shared symbolic inscriptions) to a place that tends to accentuate subjective isolation, the weakening of collective identifications, and the erosion of devices for sublimation.

Atomization of the Subject and Precarization of Symbolic Mediations

The atomization of the subject, here, is not merely a sociological description of individualism: it expresses a modification of the "symbolic environment" in which the subject constitutes themselves. Psychoanalysis emphasizes that the subject does not emerge as a self-sufficient unit; on the contrary, they are structured in relation to the other, through language, recognition, limits, and belongings. The public school, when sustained as an institution of the common, offers precisely a minimal grammar of reciprocal recognition: places, rules, routines, rites, collectives, conflicts, and reparations. These elements are not accessories; they function as symbolic mediators that organize the drive-based experience and produce possibilities for sublimation, that is, for the displacement of psychic energy towards socially shared forms of creation, cooperation, learning, art, sports, debate, and participation.

The problem is that, under neoliberal rationality, the school starts to operate as a competitive arena, in which the legitimacy of the subject derives from performance and in which symbolic visibility is converted into a prize for the "winners" of the evaluation system. The transformation of the right into a duty of performance – reinforced by standardized assessments, a curriculum reduced to what is measurable, and management by incentives and punishments – erodes the experience of the school community and weakens the mediations capable of transforming conflict into words, difference into recognition, frustration into elaboration. As a result, malaise tends to lose its symbolic

channels of circulation and seek more direct outlets: withdrawal, cynicism, self-harm, aggression, systematic humiliation, or, in extreme cases, violent acting out.

2.4.2. *Sectarian Meritocracy, Punitive Superego, and Guilt for Insufficiency*

Sectarian meritocracy does not act only as an external ideology; it inscribes itself as an internal command. By shifting the causes of school failure from the structural field (funding, conditions of provision, inequalities, precarization of teaching work) to the individual – student, teacher, or "the school" – the neoliberal apparatus produces a guilt-ridden subjectivity. If "the right" comes to be measured by individual result, then insufficiency becomes a moral or psychic failure: lack of effort, focus, discipline, "self-control." Psychoanalysis offers an important key: this process strengthens a superego (agency of demand and punishment) aligned with the imperative of performance. It is not just about "pressure"; it is about a regime of permanent injunction ("be productive," "be resilient," "optimize yourself"), in which insufficiency produces shame and self-condemnation.

In this context, the so-called "socio-emotional competencies," when coupled with the logic of individualized performance, can function as a technology of subjective accountability: instead of opening institutional space for suffering and conflict, they often reconfigure the problem as a deficit in the individual's self-regulation, invited to adjust to the system that precarizes them. In clinical-social terms, this increases the risk that frustration is experienced as humiliation, and humiliation, in turn, as an intolerable narcissistic wound. Violence, in certain trajectories, appears as a delusional attempt to repair this wound through an inversion: from the place of the "invisible" or "failed" to the place of the absolute agent of terror, capable of imposing fear and the mark of their existence onto the other.

Dismantling of Public Space and Collapse of the "Common" as a Psychic Operator

The central point of the argument is that neoliberalism does not dismantle only policies: it erodes the "common" as an indispensable psychic operator for the constitution of the subject. Public space — as an instance of sharing, conflict mediation, rights, common language, and impersonal recognition (citizenship) — functions, from a psychoanalytic point of view, as a symbolic third that limits the capture of the ego by the private logics of competition, consumption, and comparison, offering references for belonging, recognition, and sublimation. When the school is reorganized by the standardized curriculum-proficiency apparatus (centralized assessment, curriculum reduced to what is measurable, and management by goals/rankings), and when the student is interpellated as an "entrepreneur of the self" within an unequal educational market that produces a "curriculum-as-commodity" and a "student-as-client," the experience of the common becomes rarefied: the other ceases to be a partner in coexistence and becomes a competitor; difference ceases to be worked through and becomes hierarchized; and the classroom, once a community of language, becomes an environment for measurement and classification. In this vein, the school starts to operate as a governing apparatus (in the Foucauldian sense) that conducts conduct through metrics and accountability, while simultaneously consolidating a hegemony (in the Gramscian sense) by naturalizing the reduction of the right to education to measurable performance as pedagogical "common sense."

Particularly for psychoanalysis, this erosion is serious because the common functions as a symbolic third term: something that exceeds the individual and the dual relationship (I–other), offering a shared reference (rules, meanings, purposes, narratives)

capable of containing and channeling conflict. Without this third term, psychic life tends to oscillate between two poles: (a) withdrawal and indifference, as a defense against the excess of comparison and judgment; (b) direct, unrestrained confrontations, in which the other appears as an absolute obstacle or enemy. In other words: when institutions cease to offer public forms of elaboration, conflict tends to fall back into the register of violence (physical, verbal, symbolic) or into the register of subjective collapse.

It is worth stating that the perpetrator of an attack on a school may emerge from the symbiosis between two apparently opposite psychic responses — these two poles (a and b) — but which are structurally complementary, produced by the collapse of institutional mediations: withdrawal and confrontation. Indifferent withdrawal can function as a defense against the excess of comparison, judgment, and symbolic disqualification, leading the subject to withdraw from the social bond, to anesthetize affects, and to silence speech. This movement, however, does not eliminate conflict; it only accumulates it. In the absence of public forms of elaboration — that is, of institutional devices capable of transforming malaise into language, recognition, and mediation — withdrawn suffering may return in the form of unrestrained confrontation, in which the other comes to be perceived as an absolute obstacle or enemy. In this sense, the aggressive act may not represent a rupture with the prior isolation, but its continuity by other means: defensive indifference can be converted into active violence when there is no longer a symbolic third to sustain the conflict. Thus, extreme violence can be understood less as a sudden explosion and more as an effect of a prolonged process of institutional helplessness, in which withdrawal and attack are articulated as two faces of the same impoverishment of the social bond.

School as a Device for Collective Sublimation and Institutional "Failure"

Under neoliberal rationality, the school tends to present itself as a device for collective sublimation that is progressively emptied. Sublimation is not reduced to simple behavioral containment or channeling; it is a psychic and social work through which drive-based energy finds symbolically mediated, culturally shared, and socially recognized destinations. Under certain institutional conditions, the school can offer such destinations: language and writing, scientific knowledge, art, sports, public debate, collective work, student participation, spaces for listening, and the mediation of conflicts. This is not to claim that the school "cures" constitutive malaise, but that it can transform it into an experience that can be elaborated, inscribed in time, in speech, and in the social bond.

When the school is converted into an apparatus of utilitarian cognitive training — reduced to assessable areas and subjected to the logic of goals, indices, and ranking — it begins, however, to fail precisely in what escapes the metric: symbolic work. The subject who does not perform according to hegemonic criteria not only learns less; they lose their place. And losing one's place, from a psychoanalytic point of view, means losing symbolic inscription, that is, losing the minimal recognition that their existence has value for the collective. This invisibilization produces resentment, but above all, it produces helplessness: there is no trustworthy other to address, nor a mediating instance capable of sustaining the passage through conflict and malaise.

2.4.5. From Suffering to Social Symptom: Resentment, Segregation, and Acting Out

The analyzed reports show that many perpetrators experience isolation and resentment, and that their suffering can be captured by extremist networks that offer belonging and language. Psychoanalysis allows us to qualify this point: the capture is not

merely "indoctrination"; it operates because it offers a response to subjective helplessness: a way to name the pain, an enemy, an identity, a script for action, and, above all, a sense of belonging. When the common dissolves, closed forms of belonging, rigid identities, and logics of segregation ("us" against "them") proliferate, simplifying the complexity of malaise and authorizing destructiveness as a form of "solution."

In this vein, extreme school violence can be read as a limit-expression of a crisis in the social bond: the violent acting out emerges when speech fails, when the symbolic finds no institutional support, and when the subject lacks mediations to endure lack, frustration, and difference. The attack then appears as an act that tries to establish meaning through terror: to inscribe the subject in the world through an absolute mark, even if destructive and self-destructive. This also helps to understand why such events produce "great commotion" and function as social messages: they are not merely crimes, but symptoms of an order that, by reducing life to calculation and performance, returns to many subjects the experience of having no place.

2.4.6. Implications for Analysis and for Confronting Barbarism

The analytical consequence is direct: confronting extreme school violence requires more than security protocols; it requires rebuilding the institutional conditions of the social bond. At the level of educational policies, this implies reversing the movement that transforms collective right into individual responsibility — that is, shifting the center of policy from "result" to the public conditions of schooling, belonging, and common experience. At the level of school life, it implies re-establishing the school as a space for speech, mediation, and recognition: creating and protecting times and places for the elaboration of conflict (democratic school management, restorative practices, assemblies, student unions, dialogue circles, qualified listening), strengthening the collective dimension of the curriculum (art, humanities, common projects), and refusing the individualizing psychologization of suffering (which converts inequalities and institutional humiliations into "socio-emotional deficits").

If the school is an antagonist of the logic of possessive individualism, this does not mean idealizing it as a harmonious place, but re-establishing it as a public institution capable of sustaining the real — that is, conflict, lack, difference, malaise — without needing to expel it into violence. In summary: psychoanalysis, articulated with the critique of neoliberalism already developed, allows us to understand that barbarism is not an external accident to the school, but a social effect when the school ceases to be common, ceases to be bond, and becomes merely a metric.

Alternatives for Action and the Resumption of the Right to Education as a Form of School Protection

The formulation of alternatives for action in the face of extreme school violence cannot be reduced to emergency responses or the adoption of security devices that transform the school into a fortress, without networks, without community, and without speech. The official reports (CARA, 2022; CARA, 2023) and the study (PELLANDA; ABRAMOVAY, 2025) that form the basis of this article clearly indicate that the attacks are not fortuitous phenomena, but acute expressions of prolonged crises that disorganize the meaning of the school as a place of belonging, bonding, and social protection. Confronting extreme violence therefore requires rebuilding the public status of the school, and this is only possible by restoring the right to education as the structuring foundation of educational policy, rejecting the reduction operated by the right to learning.

By converting the right to education into the right to learning, neoliberalism replaced a collective right with an individual logic of performance, producing a school that is no longer organized by care, the common, and the universality of access to culture, but by competition, measurability, and individual accountability (especially of students and teachers). Such conversion empties the political function of education, defining students not as citizens in formation, but as entrepreneurs of the self. The subordination of education to economic rationality causes the school to lose "its public and human justification" and to start meeting criteria of productivity, utility, and technical efficiency. Extreme violence also emerges as a symptom of this loss: when the school ceases to be a public space, it ceases to process conflict and to protect.

Thus, alternatives for action cannot reinforce the neoliberal depoliticization of education. They must, conversely, realign school protection with the revaluation of education as a social right, which means repositioning the school as an institution that welcomes conflicts, transforms anxieties into language, and sustains social bonds, instead of leaving subjects helpless and atomized. With this orientation, the reports point to four axes of transformative policies:

Reconstitution of the School as a Community of Coexistence and Belonging

The attacks are preceded, according to research, by trajectories of isolation, invisibility, and school humiliation. Many young people experience the institution as a place of indifference, absence of listening, and relational precariousness, later being captured by extremist networks that offer them belonging and a narrative for resentment. Prevention, therefore, is not surveillance, but the production of bonds, which requires actions such as:

- Psychological-relational reception protocols, without pathologization, focused on listening, mediation, and inclusion;
- Deliberative student participation, with councils, assemblies, and democratic management of coexistence;
- Permanent policies for conflict mediation and restorative justice, rejecting school punitivism;
- Collective projects (artistic, scientific, cultural) that give visibility to all school existences.

These actions are only possible in a model that does not treat students as competitors, but as subjects of rights. Resuming the right to education therefore means placing socialization and coexistence back at the center of school policy, rather than performance.

Ethical Dispute in the Digital Space and Combating Youth Extremism

The 2023 report reveals that sectarianization does not occur as an individual phenomenon, but in virtual communities that teach, encourage, and legitimize massacres (CARA, 2023). These networks produce belonging, recognition, and an aesthetic of hatred. Confronting this, therefore, must approach the digital space not only as a risk, but as a field for educational and democratic dispute, which implies:

- School observatories on digital sectarianization, integrating researchers, teachers, and health workers;
- Critical media education as a curricular policy, articulated with ethics, history, philosophy, and the arts;

- Reporting protocols and cooperation with digital platforms, holding them accountable;
- Production of anti-misogyny, anti-racist, and democratic educational content that disputes meanings with extremist spaces.

Such actions are incompatible with the neoliberal school, reduced to measurable proficiency. They require a public policy of democratic culture, impossible when education is treated as a market.

Intersectoriality in Protection: Education, Health, Social Assistance, and Culture

The reports insist that the school cannot be held solely responsible for prevention. Protection is not a task for school management, but a State policy, which must articulate education, security, mental health, culture, and social assistance. The following are recommended:

- Permanent municipal prevention networks, articulating various departments and guardianship councils;
- Non-pathologizing referral protocols, avoiding institutional abandonment of vulnerable youth;
- Mandatory intersectoral training for public servants, to recognize signs, trajectories, and risk contexts.

Without the right to education as a structural policy, such intersectoral links become palliative. There is only a network when the right is social; when the right is performance, the young person fails alone.

Protection and Care as the Foundation of Public Education

By adopting the right to learning as the core of educational policies, Brazil transformed the school into an evaluator and not a protector. Barbarism emerges when the institution loses its function of welcoming, listening to, and symbolizing suffering. School protection is not discipline, it is not surveillance, and it is not punishment: it is a relational right, sustained by significant adult presence, by social bonds, and by the public legitimacy of the institution.

Resuming the right to education means rebuilding the school as a public space of the common, where suffering finds words and not weapons; where conflict finds mediation and not hatred; where the young person finds a place and not anonymity.

Alternatives for action against extreme violence are not, therefore, extensions of the neoliberal logic of performance, but its antithesis. Preventing school massacres requires restoring education as a social, public, and relational right, re-establishing the school as a space for protection, coexistence, and democracy.

School Climate, Conflict Mediation, and the Social Bond: Psychoanalytic and Political Foundations of School Protection

Confronting extreme school violence in Brazil requires shifting the debate beyond the fields of public security and the medicalization of students. The reports from the Ministry of Education (CARA, 2023) and the study "To Remember is to React" (PELLANDA; ABRAMOVAY, 2025) converge in stating that the root of the problem lies not only in the circulation of weapons, digital extremism, or the absence of police

surveillance, but in the weakening of the public meaning of the school as a place of coexistence, recognition, and institutional protection.

The MEC Report characterizes the attacks as acute expressions of prolonged crises in school relationships and the social conditions affecting youth, although they only gain public attention when they result in lethality. The study "To Remember is to React," in turn, emphasizes that extreme violence is not born suddenly, but emerges from school trajectories marked by invisibility, exclusion, and unsymbolized hostility, which leave the young person without a place in the school social bond.

In this sense, preventing extreme violence is not merely a matter of physical security, but of reconstructing the social bond within the school, which implies understanding school climate and conflict mediation as political foundations of the right to education, and not as administrative devices or "complementary teaching resources."

School Climate: From the Management of Order to the Production of Bond

The notion of school climate tends to be interpreted, in educational policies under neoliberal logic, as discipline management to guarantee "better learning conditions." This approach reduces climate to an instrumental variable of performance and proficiency, subordinating school coexistence to the productivist goal.

In contrast, the three reports reject this reduction (CARA, 2022; CARA, 2023; PELLANDA; ABRAMOVAY, 2025). All three point out that school climate is a structuring dimension of protection, because it is within it that the symbolic bonds between subjects are produced — or broken. Climate is not "atmosphere," but how the school names, listens, recognizes, regulates conflicts, and grants public existence to students.

This means that, from an ethical and psychoanalytic point of view, school climate concerns whether the institution assumes the function of the symbolic Other, that is, whether it is capable of recognizing the subject and legitimizing them as part of a community. In environments marked by indifference, arbitrariness, discrimination, humiliation, or hyper-competitiveness, the student may experience the institution as a place of exclusion — an exclusion that does not necessarily expel, but that does not welcome.³

This experience of non-recognition appears recurrently in the profiles analyzed in *To Remember is to React* (PELLANDA; ABRAMOVAY, 2025), in which the young

³ The objective of this paragraph is to assert that school climate is not merely a set of pleasant or unpleasant interpersonal relationships, but concerns a profound symbolic function of the school institution. From a psychoanalytic point of view, the school may — or may not — occupy the place of the symbolic Other, that is, the instance that represents law, language, recognition, and the limits that allow the subject to constitute themselves as part of a collective. When the school assumes this function, it recognizes the student as someone who has a place, a voice, and value in the school community, even amidst conflicts, mistakes, and differences.

On the other hand, when the school climate is permeated by indifference, arbitrariness, discrimination, humiliation, or extreme competition, the institution ceases to exercise this symbolic function. In such cases, the student may remain physically at school but experience it as a space of symbolic exclusion: they are not formally expelled, but neither are they recognized, listened to, or legitimized. This is a silent exclusion, which manifests itself in the absence of belonging, mediation, and recognition, producing psychic helplessness and the weakening of the social bond.

person accumulates experiences of failure, silencing, racism, misogyny, LGBTphobia, or naturalized bullying. These factors, when not symbolized by the school, do not disappear: they are converted into resentment disconnected from language, becoming available material for extremist capture.

Thus, school climate protects not because it is peaceful, but because it produces belonging, based on speech and bond.

Conflict Mediation: To Elaborate, Not to Suppress

The three reports converge in stating that punitive and expulsory practices — such as repeated suspensions, compulsory transfers, medicalization, or referrals without institutional work — aggravate feelings of injustice and school disaffiliation. Therefore, they recommend permanent policies for conflict mediation and restorative justice, not as a "humanizing resource," but as a political structure of the democratic school.

Mediation, according to the three publications, is not reduced to appeasing or pacifying, but to recognizing conflict as an educational and citizen-building experience, where speech has a transformative effect. It is about:

- inscribing conflict in language;
- enabling accountability without expulsion;
- constructing reparation without humiliating;
- producing belonging without condescension.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, what is spoken ceases to be acted out. When the school denies space for symbolic elaboration, conflict returns as an act and, in extreme cases, as a lethal act.

Social Bond and Extremist Capture: The Community That Replaces the School

The studies also demonstrate that extreme attacks are not acts of absolute isolation. On the contrary, they are produced in digital communities of extremist belonging, where helpless resentment finds:

- language;
- cause;
- recognition;
- technical instructions;
- collective identity.

Hence the crucial point: before the attack, there is a bond. A perverse bond, but a bond nonetheless. The young person finds a place in the world not through democratic and citizen integration, but through violent inscription and a kind of destructive solidarity. Extremism offers what the school failed to sustain: a socially recognized identity, even if through a destructive path.

This imposes a central pedagogical consequence: it is not enough to dismantle extremist networks; it is necessary to dispute the field of belonging. The school needs to once again offer a meaningful bond, one that is contradictory, plural, where speech is more powerful than the weapon. And this is impossible under the neoliberal paradigm.

Resuming the Right to Education as the Right to Bond

Here, the reports converge with the theoretical critique of neoliberal policies discussed earlier in this work: the school can only protect if it exercises its public function of producing social bonds. The right to education, in this sense, is not the "right to learn content," but the right to exist in public space and to appropriate culture.

Resuming the right to education means:

- guaranteeing the curriculum as a common cultural good, not reduced to proficiency;
- abolishing the individual blame for failure, shifting responsibility to institutional conditions;
- recognizing suffering as a political issue, not as an individual psychological defect;
- strengthening school climate as a State policy, not as a managerial strategy.

The prevention of extreme violence therefore depends on rejecting the managerial school — which expels through performance — and on rebuilding the public school as a space for mediation, culture, citizenship, and listening.

A protected school is not the most surveilled one. It is the one that recognizes, listens to, and symbolizes the subject. The social bond is not an adornment; it is the condition for the existence of the democratic school. Without the right to education understood as the right to bond, barbarism finds voice, community, and weapon.

Final considerations

Throughout this article, we have sought to support the thesis that extreme school violence, as it has been configured in Brazil in recent decades, cannot be understood as an isolated deviation or a mere succession of tragic events, attributable exclusively to individual pathologies, "family failures," or the diffusion of extremist discourses on networks. Based on the report from the Ministry of Education on attacks of extreme violence against schools (CARA, 2023) and the study *To Remember is to React*, produced by the National Campaign for the Right to Education in partnership with FLACSO Brazil (PELLANDA; ABRAMOVAY, 2025), it becomes evident that these episodes express prolonged social crises that cut across the school, youth, and educational policy itself.

The first movement of this work consisted of conceptualizing extreme school violence, distinguishing it from the everyday violence present in educational institutions. Based on the reports, we adopted the definition of planned attacks, with the intention of killing and producing public commotion, generally committed by students or former students, configuring a hybrid between *rampage shooting* (attack on the institution as a whole) and *targeted shooting* (revenge against specific targets). This definition highlights the symbolic character of these acts: it is not just about injuring people, but about targeting the school as a public institution, a space for sociability and the production of the future.

In a second movement, we articulated this phenomenon with the process of neoliberalization of educational policy, taking as a reference Daniel Cara's analysis of the subordination of education to economic rationality and human capital theory. It was shown how, in Brazil, the shift from the right to education to the so-called "right to learning" is not a mere terminological adjustment, but a political turn: a social, collective, and relational right — involving access, permanence, material conditions, cultural project, and human formation — comes to be translated into individual results, measured by standardized assessments and converted into proficiency indicators.

This turn materializes in the standardized curriculum-proficiency system: large-scale external assessments (such as SAEB), synthetic performance indices (IDEB), curricula

referenced to measurability (BNCC), and reforms such as the Novo Ensino Médio, which narrow the purpose of the school to the formation of efficient, flexible, and adaptable "human capital" towards the entrepreneur of the self. In this grammar, the right to learning, presented as progress, ends up functioning as the neoliberal face of the right to education, as it:

- shifts responsibility from the State to the individual (student, teacher, school);
- psychologizes and moralizes school failure, transforming structural inequalities into "lack of effort" or "socio-emotional deficit";
- converts the school into a competitive arena, where a few "perform" and many are silently discarded.

At the same time, as educational policy organizes itself around performance and accountability, the protective role of the school weakens. The institution ceases to be a reference for belonging, bonding, and recognition to become, often, a setting for humiliation, pressure for results, and invisibility for the most vulnerable — the poor, Black people, Indigenous people, LGBTI+ individuals, students with disabilities, etc. The study *To Remember is to React* shows that many perpetrators of attacks accumulate histories of failure and symbolic exclusion, without having been offered institutional spaces for listening and elaboration, before being captured by online extremist communities.

It is at this point that it becomes decisive to recover the right to education in its full meaning, that is, as the right of everyone to enter a common world, through school, under conditions of equality — a world made of knowledge, historical memory, arts, sciences, human rights, political debate, and democratic coexistence. Education, thus understood, is not reduced to the acquisition of skills useful to the market; it is an experience of the social bond. Placing the right to education back at the center of the agenda means breaking with the neoliberal capture that reconfigures it as a mere guarantee of measurable learning.

From this follows the third axis of this article: the centrality of school climate, conflict mediation, and the social bond as psychoanalytic and political foundations of school protection. The reports converge in stating that the prevention of extreme violence requires robust programs for:

- democratic management and student participation, with strengthening of student unions, councils, and collectives, especially for historically vulnerable groups;
- school coexistence and conflict mediation, with emphasis on restorative justice and programs for intervention in the school climate;
- human rights education, confronting racism, misogyny, and other forms of discrimination, and the effective implementation of laws dealing with Afro-Brazilian, African, and Indigenous history and culture;
- mental health and psychosocial support, with strengthening of RAPS, CAPS I, multidisciplinary teams in schools (Law 13.935/2019), and reduction of stigma regarding psychological suffering.

These actions are not accessories. They redefine the function of the school: from a place where individual resilience is demanded to endure precarization, to a public space that assumes the task of sustaining suffering, conflict, and difference in the form of speech and bond, and not of violence.

By articulating these elements, we defend, in synthesis, three theses:

1. Extreme school violence is a sectarian product of a process of social and educational lack of protection, aggravated by the neoliberal rationality that converts the school into a performance machine and abandons its function of symbolic mediation of youth malaise.

2. The right to learning, as hegemonic in recent reforms, is insufficient and, in many aspects, complicit in the lack of protection, as it contributes to shifting the focus from the collective right to education to individual merit, legitimizing the silent exclusion of those who do not perform.
3. The prevention of extreme violence requires resuming the right to education as the right to bond, which implies strengthening democratic school climate, conflict mediation, mental health articulated with the school, human rights education, and coexistence policies, as well as disputing the digital space against extremist networks.

In terms of public policies, this means that emergency measures of physical security – although necessary – are radically insufficient. The installation of cameras, metal detectors, or ostensive policing does not reach the structural causes of the problem and, in many cases, reinforces logics of fear, surveillance, and criminalization of youth, without offering belonging. What the reports from the MEC and the Campaign/FLACSO indicate, in line with the critique of neoliberal reforms, is that the true "safe school" is not the most armored, but the most democratic: one in which students have a voice, in which teachers are valued and have working conditions, in which the curriculum makes sense for social and political life, in which suffering is not privatized but recognized as a collective issue.

We conclude, therefore, that confronting the barbarism of attacks on schools requires confronting, at the same time, the barbarism of an educational project that transforms right into performance and subject into human capital. Resuming the right to education — against its reduction to the meritocratic right to learning — is a condition for the school to once again become a space for protection, speech, and future. Without this, any prevention policy will remain superficial, acting on symptoms without touching the structure that produces, isolates, and arms youth malaise.

Ultimately, what is at stake is not only the safety of schools, but the type of society we want to produce with them: a society organized by competition, calculation, and disposability, or a society that recognizes in the school the privileged place of the common, of the bond, and of the dignity of all childhoods and youths.

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