



SPOTLIGHT: Peace education in Colombia

A pedagogical strategy for durable peace

October 2014

Colombian context: Why does peace education matter?

After many years of violence, there is a need to transform the way people relate to each other in Colombia. There is a prevailing culture of violence related not only to over five decades of internal armed conflict, but also to high homicide rates associated with organized crime, common delinquency and interpersonal disputes.

This culture of violence is perpetuated by cultural norms that promote violence as a way to resolve conflicts, through stories, customs, habits and behaviors that are reproduced and passed on across generations and between groups. Changing attitudes, values and beliefs that validate violence is necessary in order to promote peace in Colombia, and peace education can make a crucial contribution to this social transformation.

A peace process began in 2012 between the Government of Colombia (GOC) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), marking the fourth official peace talks with this group. As negotiations progress, there is growing hope that a successful agreement will be reached. Even so, signing a peace agreement does not ensure progress in overcoming poverty, inequality and violence. Achieving a sustainable and durable peace also requires social, economic and political reforms, a culture of peace and reconciliation and widespread respect for democracy and the rule of law.

Peace education can play a critical role during the transition period following the signing of a peace agreement. Also, as international experience has shown, peace can be pursued even in the midst of conflict through small social transformations that gradually build a critical mass to undermine the justifications of armed groups and encourage a culture of peace. Therefore, whether or not the current negotiations end in a peace agreement, efforts still should be made to counter the prevalent culture of violence in Colombia.



Conceptual framework: A basic understanding of peace education

Peace education is a prominent and efficient method for promoting reconciliation and a culture of peace among youth and broader society using educational methodologies that aim to transform societal perspectives and worldviews. When communities engage in a process of learning, new ideas can emerge by challenging and reflecting on existing worldviews. The community can find new ways to communicate and relate to one another. In this way, peace education can help prepare individuals and communities to confront, challenge, resist and ultimately eliminate violence in all its forms and manifestations.

Peace education can refer narrowly to formal education for students in schools, but can also refer to a broader approach aimed at influencing the worldview of all society members (including students) to increase support for peace and reconciliation. In the broader approach, peacemaking requires major societal change. Schools are only one agent of social change; there is a need for broad participation of youth, community members, and political, societal, and cultural institutions, leadership and elites.

For IOM's Migration and Childhood Program, "peace pedagogy" or a "pedagogical strategy for peace" refers to the broader approach to peace education mentioned above, which is aimed at social transformation among communities as a whole rather than only within schools. This approach is informed by a report by Manuel Rojas Rubio, "Pedagogy: A Tool for Supporting the Construction of a Durable Peace – General action guidelines for the transition," the main source for this analytical bulletin.

SPOTLIGHTS, produced by IOM's Migration and Childhood Program with financial support from USAID, are analytical bulletins that aim to deepen understanding and enrich reflection on the situation of children, adolescents and youth in Colombia. Information comes from reports and studies produced by IOM and other institutions, as well as news and other secondary sources.



Various approaches to peace education

There are many ways to conduct peace education. Goals and programs depend on the conceptions and creativity of those implementing peace education programs as well as on the specific societal needs and context. General themes addressed in peace education are more or less constant, but the particular contents, techniques, and methods must be adapted to the particular case. In general, the aim is to influence and transform worldviews, and this includes values, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, motivations, and behavior.

Societies involved in conflict need not wait until all ideal conditions are present, but should still be aware of the challenges that may arise. Political and societal conditions have an enormous effect on peace education, as they determine the kind of approach that can be used in each particular context: direct or indirect. The two approaches are not exclusive, and various combinations can be selected to fit the specific context and conditions.

- When political and societal conditions are unfavorable, it is best to use an **indirect approach** by focusing on themes and skills that do not refer directly to the conflict. This can include encouragement of openness, cooperation, reflection, critical thinking, alternative ideas, sensitivity to human rights, social and political engagement, tolerance, empathy, and skills for conflict resolution, rejection of violence and promotion of peace.
- If conditions are more favorable, a **direct approach** can be used by focusing on specific themes directly related to the conflict. This includes the history of the conflict, its causes and costs, the meaning of peace and the challenges to achieving it, perceptions of the former rival group, transitional justice and reconciliation. Addressing the history of the conflict along with collective emotions and perceptions can serve as an effective basis for the formation of new collective memory, which is also in some sort of coherence with the former rival's collective memory, in order to facilitate the construction of a new ethos of peace from which a culture of peace can evolve.

In general, peace education can also help to strengthen democracy, citizen participation and respect for rule of law, which are positive outcomes in any context. In particular, however, peace education strategies to develop competencies that will stop aggressive behavior and promote critical thinking, conflict resolution and democratic participation is, without question, a crucial way to contribute to peacebuilding.

Peace

Rather than the mere absence of war (the concept of “negative peace”), peace is defined in this context as a proactive and ongoing approach to handling difference and conflicts, in a civil and nonviolent manner, aimed at constructing a more equitable and just social order.

Conflict

An inevitable element of all social life that can be addressed either through force, aggression and war or in a civil and nonviolent manner that converts conflict into a potential catalyst for social change and the creation of new alternatives to social problems.

Peace Education

Refers narrowly to formal education, or broadly to influencing the worldview of all society members, using educational methodologies aimed at societal transformation to increase support for peace.

Pedagogy

In general, the instructional methods and practice of teaching; in this context, an intentional set of programs and projects systematically oriented toward cultural change.

Peace Pedagogy

A pedagogical strategy aimed at promoting durable peace and reconciliation through communication and education activities using methodologies designed to challenge manifestations of violence and aggression, and to make visible and promote a culture of peace.





A pedagogical strategy for building a durable peace in Colombia

A particular pedagogical strategy for achieving a durable peace in Colombia is proposed by Manuel Rojas Rubio, in a report produced as a consultant for IOM. The term pedagogy refers to a strategic set of programs and projects systematically oriented toward social transformation by promoting changes in perspective, attitudes and behaviors. A pedagogical strategy for peace refers to communication and education activities designed to challenge manifestations of violence and aggression, and to make visible and to enhance experiences of harmonious coexistence and peace. The aim is that individuals, families, communities, institutions and civil society organizations have the information, motivation and tools to actively participate in reconciliation and rebuilding of the social fabric, in the short term, while in the long term building a more democratic, equal, tolerant and peaceful society.

Components

The strategy proposed involves two main components: **communication** conceived as interaction with broad participation and **education** aimed at the formation of peacebuilders.

The **communication** component aims to provide clear information targeted to specific populations, to present benefits of peacebuilding in order to motivate those who are apathetic or opposed to the process, to coordinate actors involved in peacebuilding processes, and to promote participative planning especially among traditionally excluded groups. Communication should be organized horizontally and from the bottom up, and would occur on two fronts: retrospectively towards the past (historical memory, truth, reconciliation) and proactively towards the future (participative planning, projects, reforms).

The **education** component involves innovative educational strategies, including formal education (schools, universities) as well as non-formal education (seminars, forums, skill-building workshops) and informal education (recreational and cultural activities). The objective is to provide victims, demobilized populations and those traditionally excluded from educational opportunities with conceptual and practical tools to (a) construct life plans, rebuild the social fabric, compile historical memory, and achieve reconciliation and (b) participate in peacebuilding and community development initiatives.



National participation strategy in which students and teachers work alongside communities, to introduce peace as a systematic research area within universities, and to bring students and teachers into communities to share knowledge and support territorial development.

Community meeting spaces to share, reflect and learn about reconciliation and coexistence through recreational and creative activities with inter-institutional coordination between ICBF, cultural and social centers, family advocates, justice centers, universities. Can include life skills in areas of health, sexuality, work and citizenship.

Aims



Educate and inform society about the peace process and counter rumors



Ensure broad and active community **participation**



Mobilize citizens and create community meetings spaces



Promote **reflection and discussion** among diverse actors and points of view



Motivate and coordinate action among actors and institutions





Wider peacebuilding context



Contextual conditions are crucial for determining the results and impact for peace education, and certain political, social and educational conditions are needed for successful implementation:

- Tangible and well-publicized **progress towards peace** that includes negotiations
- **Economic, social and political reforms** are particularly vital, and these should include **concrete change in the short term** to recuperate societal optimism and confidence
- Substantial **societal support** and confidence in the peace process (facilitated and strengthened by concrete short-term change) including major political parties and organizations and a majority of civil society in order to legitimize peace education
- **Readiness for reconciliation** relating to **openness** of the society to alternative messages concerning the culture of conflict and collective memory, and the tolerance to hear these messages
- **Governmental and political support** to place peace education among the main societal goals

Peace negotiations

Pedagogical strategy for peace

* Education * Communication

Transition Period

Reforms

Political Social Economic



Concrete, tangible change in the short term:

Security
Education
Infrastructure
Employment

Strengthen institutions



Long-term peacebuilding goals



Broad participation

Major societal change requires broad participation of youth, community members, and political, societal, and cultural institutions, leadership and elites. In particular:

- **Schools** are one important agent of social change.
- **Mass media** can transmit information to a wide public about new peaceful goals, the past rival group, one's own group, the developing relations, and so on.
- Community-based interventions can empower **community members** using local cultural understandings and practices to advance peace making and reconciliation.
- National and international **NGOs** can help spread the message about the importance of peacebuilding, help establish cooperative relations, and provide economic assistance, thereby showing that peace has important benefits.
- **Truth and reconciliation commissions** can help to reveal the truth about the past by exposing acts of violence, rights violation, discrimination, and other misdeeds.



Impacts



Promote **reconciliation** and reconstruction of the social fabric



Encourage **citizen participation**, democracy, and rule of law



Create alternatives for overcoming **inequality**



Provide opportunities to guarantee the rights of the **vulnerable, poor** and **marginalized**



Challenges

A pedagogical strategy for peace faces a number of challenges, including some general challenges such as the need to reactivate confidence and overcome fear of political violence, in order to promote participation. There is a fundamental psychological resistance that includes the reactions of victims as well as the support of a large portion of the general population for a military end to the conflict. Despair and distrust exist as a result of the multiple peace processes that failed in the past. The interests of those benefitting from the war economy is also a major challenge, which includes systems of corruption, patronage and organized crime.

In addition, there are a number of challenges specific to each component:



Communication challenges

- ➔ Counter **misinformation** campaigns, deception, and polarization regarding the peace process, to be achieved by increasing efforts using innovative communication processes.
- ➔ **Persuade** those apathetic or opposed to peace to commit and engage in the process.
- ➔ Overcome **inertia**, centralization, institutional bureaucracy and social **polarization**, using creative methods and activities and promoting the participation of new actors.



Education challenges

- ➔ Systematically include **peace research** and reflection in schools and universities and ensure participation of educational institutions
- ➔ Concentrate and connect currently **dispersed and isolated training activities** for coexistence and peace
- ➔ Overcome structural **inequality** in schools and seize the opportunity to overcome **marginalization** and **poverty**
- ➔ Eradicate **illiteracy**, a clear violation of the right to education that serves as a barrier to integration into economic, political and cultural life
- ➔ Increase **access to education** and ensure that youth stay in school
- ➔ Expand reflection on the results of education and support **the potential of youth** to help promote peace and break the cycle of violence

SOURCES

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The **Migration and Childhood Program** of the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** is working to assist the Government of Colombia in preventing the involvement of children and adolescents in diverse forms of violence. This includes their recruitment and use by illegal armed groups as well as criminal groups, which may proliferate in a post-conflict setting. As part of these efforts, IOM is working to develop and implement a peace pedagogy strategy and approach to promote reconciliation, transitional justice, and a culture of peace.

For further information:

Juan Manuel Luna, Program Coordinator

jluna@iom.int