Chapter 24
Collaborative Peace Education in Contexts of Sociopolitical Violence

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents collaborative peace education as a perspective to the development of capacities for conflict transformation in countries that have experienced socio-political violence. For this, it takes the Colombian violence as a context to integrate principles of peace education, conflicts transformation, social constructionism, and collaborative practices in order to establish working premises and ideas for scenarios where strengthening a culture of peace is required. From the revision of these concepts, the authors propose four principles that support the collaborative peace education, some contents that can be developed in an initiative of this type and relevant ideas to choose the format to be used in a collaborative peace education program.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the multiplicity of theories, conceptions, goals and methodologies that exist in peace education, the central axe of all such programs is violence reduction. However in countries experiencing sociopolitical violence, moving beyond the violence to a culture of peace requires a relational and collaborative construction that allows people to look at each other in common humanity and dignity, as joint partakers in this world. It is by being able to see a human being in the other that it is possible to build a space for peace, and with this peace, growing future generations who can give birth to a new more peaceful world.

This chapter discusses collaborative practices in peace education for countries that recently were, or still are, experiencing an intractable conflict (Bar- Tal 2013). A number of collaborative principles are explored in order to examine how these ideas can help in peacebuilding, both in the classroom and in daily life. In addition, certain topics are presented, that in our experience as peace researchers and educators involved in Colombia's armed conflict, have proved to be indispensable for fostering a culture of peace.

The proposed principles assume a constructionist paradigm which, according to Gergen (2001), implies a clear awareness that meaning is collectively constructed and hence a plurality of ideas about truth are prioritized. Likewise, there are not absolute realities but multiple perspectives and comprehensions of reality. From this perspective, language has a central place because it is suggested that rather than representing reality, language constitutes it.

Constructionism, as a way of conceiving social phenomena, integrates socio-cultural and individual aspects by focusing on the relationship that exists between members in a common context, and by interrogating how realities constructed using language. This allows us to have an epistemological framework that locates peace education in a relational and contextualized nexus. This is the theoretical and practical framework that guides the pedagogical practices, discussed below, to promote a culture of peace.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first part provides *Context: Armed Conflict and Socio-Political Violence in Colombia* and it aims to present the general framework regarding the consequences of sociopolitical violence in people's commonplace interactions. The second part, *Collaborative Peace Education,* presents fundamental premises that define peace education from a constructionist and collaborative stance. Third, *Conflict Transformation: The Heart of Collaborative Peace Education* expands on conflict transformation as one of the building blocks in collaborative peace education. Fourth, *The Architecture for Collaborative Peace Education* defines diverse principles and topics used in fieldwork with the population who have been immersed in a context of sociopolitical violence.

Context: Armed Conflict and Sociopolitical Violence in Colombia

In order to build stable peace scenarios, it is necessary to comprehend multiple levels and various onsets of violence in order to find ways to reduce, even prevent, their occurrence. As for the term violence, we understand it as an expression of power in which harm is brought upon a certain party. Following Galtung (2003) violence is of three types, that is, direct, structural violence and cultural. Direct violence is the visible component commonly represented in accounts of physical violence. Structural violence is an invisible element related to imbalance of relations of economic, political and social power, which enables the emergence, and upkeep of direct violence. Finally, cultural violence involves symbols, values, relationships and meanings that validate and actualize direct and structural violence. Adding to Galtung's typology of violence is another categorization developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) discusses three sub-types: self-inflicted violence (suicidal conduct and self-inflicted harm with no suicidal purpose), interpersonal violence (referring to domestic violence and other mistreatments inflicted by a person within the near community), and collective violence (related to political, social and economic violence) (Ministry of Health & Colciencias, 2015).

To correctly comprehend the context of violence and peacebuilding from which this proposal originates, it is important to consider some concepts related to armed violence, which is the greatest expression of collective violence in which direct, structural and cultural violence converge. Uppsala University's The department of peace and conflict research posits different expressions of armed violence, one of which is,

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